The background is a complex, textured abstract painting in shades of blue, teal, and green. Overlaid on this are several hand-drawn lines in black and purple. A prominent black line forms a series of connected loops, resembling a stylized 'W' or a series of hills. Below it, a purple line forms a similar but more compact looped shape. To the right, another black line forms a single, elongated loop. The overall effect is one of layered, organic forms.

*Living Alaska:  
A Decade of  
Collecting  
Contemporary  
Art for Alaska  
Museums*

— A Program of Rasmuson Foundation —

Sven D. Haakanson Jr. and Amy F. Steffian, Editors



Erica Lord  
*Blood Quantum* ( $1/4 + 1/16 = 5/16$ ) detail  
2007  
digital print  
14" x 40"

Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center



*front cover*

Sonya Kelliher-Combs

*Blue Beaded Secret* (detail)

2006

acrylic polymer, glass bead, paper

24" x 24"

University of Alaska Museum of the North

*back cover*

Ken Lisbourne

*Summer Camp* (detail)

2005

watercolor on paper

15" x 19"

Alaska Native Heritage Center

*Living Alaska:  
A Decade of  
Collecting  
Contemporary  
Art for Alaska  
Museums*

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A Program of Rasmuson Foundation

Sven D. Haakanson Jr. and Amy F. Steffian, Editors

# FORWARD

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**R**asmuson Foundation established a commitment to arts and culture in Alaska at its first meeting in 1955. The very first grant the Foundation made was to help purchase a film projector for the teen club of the Presbyterian Church in Wasilla. That was 60 years ago, and today that tradition of support for arts and culture remains strong at the Foundation. Nearly \$3.5 million was committed to the arts by the Foundation in 2014 alone. The Art Acquisition Fund was formed in 2002 to accomplish two objectives: 1) provide museums with funds and technical support to grow their collections; and 2) support Alaska artists through purchases.

The genesis of the Art Acquisition program can be attributed to a few important people and circumstances, including our dear and much missed friend, Senator Ted Stevens. Nearly 15 years ago I visited with Uncle Ted in his Washington, D.C. office. I told him that the Rasmuson Foundation would soon be receiving the bulk of Elmer Rasmuson's estate. I asked him if he was aware of urgent needs in Alaska that, as Senate Appropriations Chairman, he was unable to address. Without missing a beat he said that many Alaska pilots were reaching retirement age and we needed a program to get young Alaskans into aviation. He also mentioned that he was consistently approached by Alaska museums requesting funds to acquire

artwork by Alaskan artists. No federal funds for such a purpose were available.

Support for individual artists in America was dwindling as the National Endowment for the Arts and state arts councils withdrew grant support for artists in the wake of the "culture wars" of the late 1990's. While the Foundation at that time did not have a program to directly support Alaska visual artists, the Art Acquisition Fund would be a way to indirectly support the purchase of their work. At the same time, the foundation was setting up its first office in midtown Anchorage. We had many blank walls to fill. What if we provided funding to museums to acquire artwork, and used the Foundation office to showcase our most talented artists through a rotating exhibit of works on loan? That's how the Art Acquisition program was established.

Artists help us examine the human condition which is demonstrated through creative expression in the form of visual and performing arts, cultural traditions, literary arts, and media. Artists help interpret complex phenomena, or simply convey the great beauty that surrounds us in our natural world. For all of these things, and much more, we have embarked on a project that we are referring to as a "Ten Year Retrospective of Arts and Culture in Alaska." This has evolved into two major projects that will launch in

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*Artists help us examine the human condition which is demonstrated through creative expression in the form of visual and performing arts, cultural traditions, literary arts, and media. Artists help interpret complex phenomena, or simply convey the great beauty that surrounds us in our natural world.*

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2015-16, including this project: *Living Alaska* – that focuses on contemporary art collected by Alaska museums over a decade. A touring exhibition will feature a selection of works from this collection throughout the state. The works curated by Dr. Sven Hakaanson for this exhibition are diverse in perspective and medium and I believe are a wonderful example of what’s included in these collections.

I also want to express our appreciation for our key partner with the Art Acquisition Program—Museums Alaska. From the beginning, Museums Alaska came to the table to engage museums and cultural centers with this program. Program coordinator Michael Hawfield was instrumental in guiding the museums through the creation of collections policies where none existed. We also appreciate the staff of the State Museum who provide critical resources and technical assistance to museums who are growing permanent collections. They’ve been an invaluable

resource that has helped guide this program. Finally, it would be important to mention the great passion and skill that our former colleague Helen Howarth brought to fully implement this program. Jayson Smart has since advanced our work in this area through refinements to the program to provide new funding for managing the collections that museums have been growing over this time period. These changes help adapt the program to meet ongoing needs around collecting work. For all of these things, we are so appreciative.

Our hope is that museum patrons who have the opportunity to see this touring exhibit will be impressed and, perhaps, moved by what they see in the art represented. We hope this program has made a difference for artists and museums in the state, and that we are further along in creating an important and invaluable permanent collection of contemporary artwork for Alaskans.

—Diane Kaplan, President and CEO  
Rasmuson Foundation





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# INTRODUCTION

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In 2002, Alaska's Rasmuson Foundation created an Art Acquisition Fund. Through the fund, grants to Alaskan museums would provide annual support for the purchase of recent works by living Alaskan artists. In its first ten years, the fund distributed nearly \$2,000,000. This included 173 grants to 33 museums for the purchase of works by 436 artists. The results were extraordinary. For museums, the initiative represented a fundamental change in collecting practices. When the program began, only Alaska's largest museums had money to pursue their collecting plans. There was no source of funding that allowed most institutions to self select and preserve works important to their missions. Today, the fund has helped to establish sizable collections in institutions across the state and allowed repositories of all sizes to purposefully purchase works of visual art. In short, the fund has fundamentally changed the way Alaskan arts are preserved and shared. And these works are not just aesthetically inspiring. They are a part of the state's history, a record of Alaska today for future generations.

This traveling exhibit celebrates the Art Acquisition Fund's first decade. Commissioned by the Rasmuson Foundation, it is a retrospective, a selection of works purchased with foundation assistance. To create the exhibit, curator

Sven Haakanson invited museums across Alaska to suggest pieces and searched the Foundation's on line gallery ([www.rasmuson.org](http://www.rasmuson.org)). Selecting just twenty-five pieces was not an easy task. With nearly 1,100 works, there was a stunning array of candidates. In reviewing the field, three broad themes emerged. A large portion of the artwork explores Alaska's natural environment, its landscapes, animals, materials, and issues that surround them. Another group of pieces reflects the perpetuation of Alaska Native traditions. Artists examine, reinterpret, and celebrate cultural practices, fusing customary and new media to express their twenty-first century identities. A third group of works documents the contemporary Alaskan experience, using visual art to study subjects like politics, employment, and modern material culture. The exhibit represents each of these themes with selections from a sample of the museums and artists who have benefited from the Art Acquisition Fund. Twelve institutions shared the work of twenty-five artists. The result is a show with a broad, contemporary, Alaskan feel. Portraits of glaciers and rubber boots, items made with fish skin, a ceramic mask and a moose hide cell phone case highlight the great natural and cultural diversity of Alaska and artists' efforts to tell her story. At each exhibit venue, this story will be a little different. With support from the Foundation, six museums

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will host the show and pair it with art purchased for their own collections.

Another goal of the retrospective project is to record the history of the fund and its impacts on Alaska's collecting institutions. The rare opportunity to build collections of contemporary art has had both predictable and unexpected results. While immersing their audiences in a new abundance of visual works, museum professionals are participating in a dialog about the nature of art and its care. In this exhibit guide, Michael Hawfield describes the history of the fund. He examines both its creation and the discussions that shaped the distribution of grant funds to institutions spanning the Alaskan continuum, from large urban museums to small community repositories. Scott Carrlee explores the fund's impact on museum practice, from the preservation of contemporary works with novel combinations of material to the documentation of artists' directions for the display and conservation of their work. Both essays illustrate how the Art Acquisition Fund has fueled not only Alaskan artists, but the professional practices of museums and cultural centers.

This project was made possible by the generous support of many organizations and individuals. We acknowledge the Rasmuson Foundation, the Anchorage

Museum at Rasmuson Center, the University of Washington's Burke Museum, Museums Alaska, the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, and all the cultural institutions that shared artwork for the exhibit and its guide. Diane Kaplan, Jayson Smart, Kelsey Potdevin, Celeste Colegrove, Heather Beggs, Bianca Carpeneti, Julie Decker, Monica Shah, Angela Demma, Maria McWilliams, Ryan Kenny, Jane Rabadi, Alisha Drabek, Michael Hawfield, and Scott Carrlee were especially helpful in developing these resources and we extend our sincere thanks for their professional assistance.

—Sven D. Haakanson Jr.  
Exhibit Curator  
Editor

—Amy F. Steffian  
Editor



ARTWORK INSPIRED  
BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT



## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT



Rochelle Adams  
*Beaded Cell Phone Cover*  
2007  
smoked moose hide, dentalia shells, seed beads, felt  
27" x 37" x 2"

University of Alaska Museum of the North

## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT

14



Gail Baker  
*Spruce Bark Beetles on the Move*  
2007  
acrylic paint, oil pastel, collage paper on wood  
8" x 8" x 2"

Pratt Museum



ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT



Hal Gage  
*Ice Boulder, Kenai Peninsula*  
2004  
split-toned silver gelatin print photo  
9" x 9"

Pratt Museum

## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT

16



Carla Klinker Cope  
*Xtra Tuff/Stacked Up*  
2013  
acrylic  
18" x 24"

Pratt Museum

## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT



Gail Niebrugge

*Musk Ox*

2001

pen and ink on crescent rag board

8.75" x 16.25"

Palmer Museum of History and Art

## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT

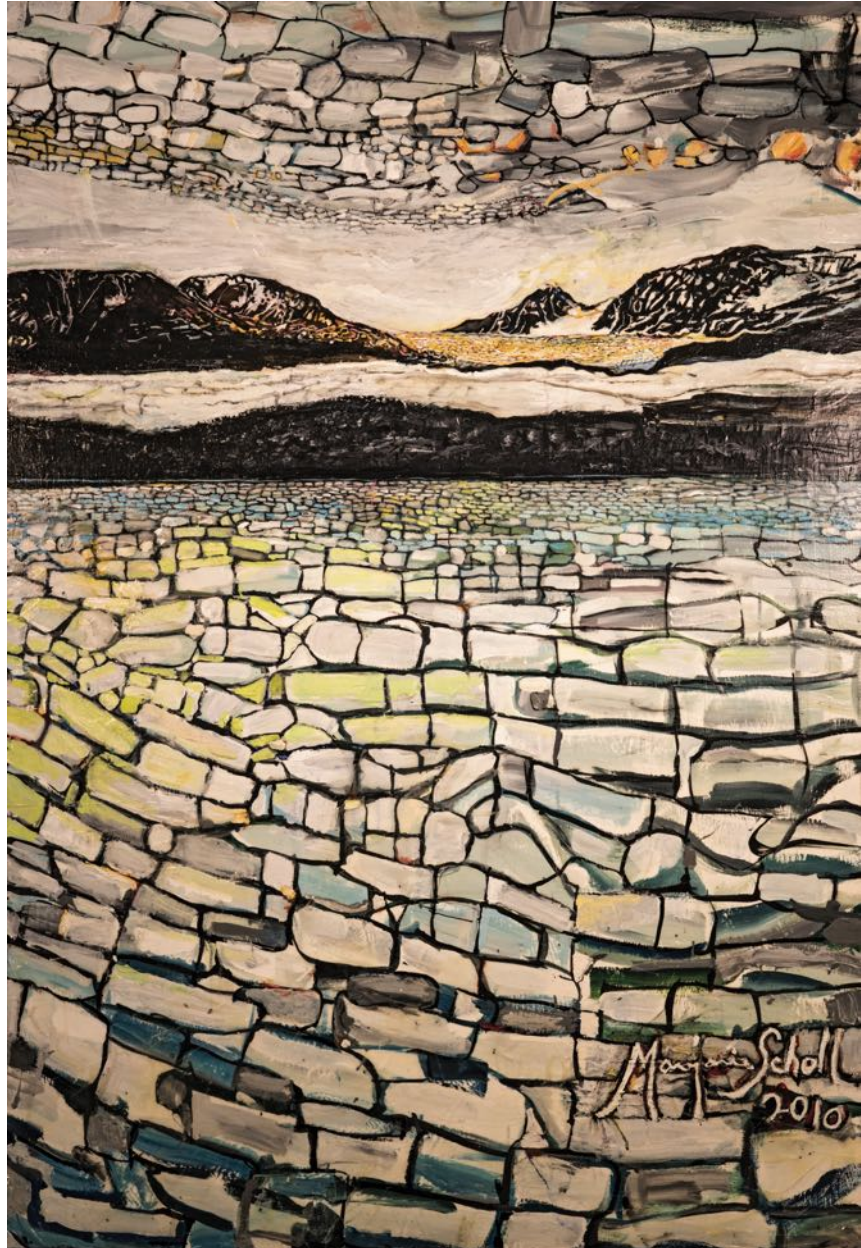
18



Terry Pyles  
*European Starling  
Pestilence*  
2008  
acrylic on canvas  
11" x 8"

Ketchikan Museums

## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT



Marjorie Scholl  
Swift Creek  
2010  
acrylic on canvas  
47" x 69"

Pratt Museum

## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT

20



Ron Senungetuk  
*Aurora Borealis I, II, III*  
2006  
silver maple and oil stain  
22" x 56.75"

Pratt Museum

ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT



## ARTWORK INSPIRED BY ALASKA'S ENVIRONMENT

22



Sara Tabbert  
*Specimen*  
2007  
painted wood  
113 cm x 22 cm x 4.2 cm

Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center





# BUILDING THE RASMUSON ART ACQUISITION FUND

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**F**rom its inception in 2002, the Art Acquisition Program presented exciting opportunities. Program funding would bolster a flagging art market and thereby help both established and emerging Alaskan artists stay in Alaska to do their work. An acquisition fund would also help cultural institutions acquire artwork at a time when acquisition funds were virtually non-existent, and encourage them to review and revise procedures, policies, and strategic planning for acquisitions, collections management, and exhibitions. New, vigorous long-term relations between practicing artists and museums would become possible, and an online catalog of purchased artwork would provide an invaluable record of artistic life in Alaska and the vitality of Alaska's museums and culture centers.

The Rasmuson Foundation approached Museums Alaska, a statewide nonprofit that serves Alaska's collecting institutions about administering this new grant program with approximately \$210,000 per year to support acquisitions. The Museums Alaska board of directors endorsed the initiative in June 2002.

Foundation and Museums Alaska staff worked out the basic guidelines for funding: all non-profit museums and Alaska Native

culture centers were eligible, as long as they had board-approved corporate documents, collections policies, a history of collecting artwork, and the capacity to care for the pieces purchased.

The Art Acquisition Fund was launched on March 20, 2003 with an administrative services agreement between the Rasmuson Foundation and Museums Alaska. In accordance with program plans, Museums Alaska retained me, former director of the Pratt Museum and president of Museums Alaska, to administer the program. I began by preparing publicity, guidelines, criteria, and application forms. Announcements of the project first appeared in Museums Alaska's newsletter, *Network*, in March 2003, and an advisory committee representing large and small museums in the state met to settle guidelines and criteria. The committee included representatives from the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, the Pratt Museum, the University of Alaska Museum, the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, the Alaska State Museum, Ketchikan Museums, and the Alaska Heritage Museum.

Several general principles emerged from the advisory committee's earlier discussions. Foremost of these was that the selection

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of art would be entirely up to the applicant museums and culture centers. Secondly, the committee adopted a number of rules for the funding process. Most notably they established a system of funding “caps” in order to ensure a reasonable distribution of funds among applicants of varying size and mission.

Once these measures were adopted, the committee established the basic guidelines for the program. The consensus was to keep the process simple and focused on established best practices for museums. Of special importance, applicants were required to connect their purchase requests to approved collections and planning documents.

With all this, the Art Acquisition Fund is intended (1) to support living established Alaska resident artists through museum purchases of current work (2) to enhance the permanent art collections of Alaskan museums and cultural centers, (3) to encourage Alaskan museums to develop formal collections policies, and (4) to enhance exposure of Alaskan artists by providing a regular venue for contemporary Alaskan art in the Foundation offices in Anchorage. From this inception, the program was a

success. It was well received by museums and artists across Alaska. In the program’s first year, the fund awarded \$200,000 to 11 museums, supporting 41 artists with the purchase of 48 works of art. Walter Van Horn, curator of the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, noted that, “the Art Acquisition Fund has caused the museum to become an active collector, whereas previously it had been largely passive, and has enabled the museum to assess its contemporary collections, identify gaps, establish new relationships with artists and refine its policies.”

The following year, panelists at a program review reported that the Art Acquisition Fund had rejuvenated and re-invigorated the acquisition process for large and small museums alike and that the artist community in Alaska was excited and encouraged by the new dynamics for supporting contemporary artwork in the state’s museum community. Smaller museums, which generally have very limited resources for purchasing artwork, had been helped especially, according to several panel members. The large institutions also reported that the program allowed them to make significant progress in achieving collecting goals. Even galleries, which often serve as agents for contemporary artists, felt

the impact of the program, by enhancing the overall world of contemporary Alaskan art and its contact with the general public. Thanks to the availability of acquisition resources, new Alaska Native cultural centers became engaged and began developing professional policies for their collections.

Two years later, Barry McWayne, Curator of Fine Arts at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, himself an artist, reported that, “the art market in Fairbanks in winter had been rejuvenated by this program, enabling galleries to continue to sell Alaska artists’ works, thanks to the new ability of museums to purchase throughout the year.” Other museums also testified to the growth not only in collections, but also in their relationships with both new and established artists.

For the next two years, through 2005, the advisory panel met in late winter to review and assess the program. In the succeeding years, Rasmuson Foundation renewed the grant for three-year periods, continuing to provide \$200,000 per year and increasing the amount to \$215,000 in 2008.

### **The Workshops (2005, 2006, and 2007)**

Throughout the first two years of the initiative, Museums Alaska tracked how well various aspects of the process worked. As a result, many questions about the mechanics of the program led to refinements of the application guidelines. These included the timing of award payments, further details about qualifying institutions and artwork, the process of loaning purchased works to the Foundation, and requirements for reporting purchases.

Two complex issues arose that required input from a broader group of advisors: (1) what constituted “contemporary

Alaskan art”, and (2) how to distinguish contemporary Alaska Native art deeply rooted in traditional forms and materials from reproductions or handicrafts. Museums Alaska and the Rasmuson Foundation agreed to organize workshops to address these topics. The first was a day-long “Seminar on Collecting Contemporary Alaska Art,” held in 2005. Topics presented ranged from “What to look for in contemporary Alaska art” and “Developing collections of local and regional contemporary art,” to “Collecting contemporary Alaska Native art.” Twenty directors and curators from across the state attended presentations and discussions. According to reports on the workshop, as a result of the lively discussions on the scope of contemporary art in Alaska, museums refined the decisions of collections committees and improved the quality of applications.

The second workshop, held in 2006, addressed the other major topic: “Contemporary Alaska Native Art.” Participants engaged in sessions devoted to collecting Alaska Native art and developing collections plans. Among the most important discussions held at the workshop arose from presentations that centered on the unique world of village-based artists and on rural artists who work beyond the usual urban art outlets. Very important conversations also focused on Alaska Native artwork that use traditional materials and are inspired by traditional forms or stories.

The third workshop was in 2007. The topic for this gathering was “Planning for Contemporary Alaska Art Objects: Gallery, Exhibition, Conservation, and Storage.” Again, leading artists and museum staff engaged in wide-ranging discussions on special challenges of storing, registering, and exhibiting artwork. The newly refurbished University of Alaska Museum of the North provided many helpful on-site

examples and practical solutions and several participating institutions used the experience to revise practices and plan for new facilities.

### The Art Acquisition Fund, 2010–2014

Although the workshops came to an end in 2008, participants frequently shared their experiences and new practices at the annual meetings of Museums Alaska. Conference sessions like “developing practical collections plans and policies” and “copyrights and contemporary art in collections” reflected the growth in professional practice. The Art Acquisition Fund continued to move along without major changes until 2010, when staff transitions occurred at Rasmuson Foundation. That seemed a good time to assess the program to ensure it was meeting the needs of all its constituents. Accordingly, the program was suspended in 2011 so several studies, including intensive surveys and interviews with artists and museums, as well as Alaska culture centers, could be completed.

The program was launched again in 2012 with several new elements in place. The surveys and studies revealed that the most troublesome feature of the original program was the process of establishing funding caps. To some it appeared too arbitrary, or at worst, irrational, being based mainly on a percentage of an organization’s operating budget. Also, museums expressed some frustration with both the ceiling purchase price of \$10,000 placed on any single work of art and with the restrictions placed on commissioned works of art.

To address the issue of funding caps, it was decided that there should be no limits in the old sense, but rather a uniform ceiling of \$35,000 across the board, no matter the

size of the institution, and no maximum for a single work of art other than the overall institutional ceiling. To control a potential budget shortfall issue, two application deadlines per year were set up and all applications were to be held until each deadline was reached before funding was awarded. In this way the program administrator could monitor better the demands on the fund. With these new procedures in place, as well as new guidelines concerning authentication of Alaska Native artwork, the use of prohibited archaeological and paleontological materials, and stronger exhibition policies, the Art Acquisition Fund continued in 2013 and 2014 awarding annual amounts of \$265,000.

In 2013 the program celebrated its tenth anniversary at the annual Museums Alaska conference, held in Haines. In its first decade, the program served 33 museums and culture centers and 436 artists, through the purchase of 1,096 works of Alaskan art, with awards totaling nearly two million dollars.

—Michael Hawfield

Associate Professor of History and Political Science, Kenai Peninsula College, University of Alaska Anchorage

Former Museums Alaska President and Administrator of the Rasumson Art Acquisition Fund





# ALASKA NATIVE ART

## ALASKA NATIVE ART

32



Audrey Armstrong

*Wife's Bowl*

2008

silver salmon skin, dentalia shells, glass  
beads, abalone beads, simulated sinew  
11" x 6.75"

University of Alaska Museum of the North

ALASKA NATIVE ART



Coral Chernoff

*Seal Gut Bag*

2014

seal intestine, silver salmon skin, ptarmigan  
feathers, embroidery floss, sinew

7" x 9.5"

Alutiiq Museum & Archaeological Repository

## ALASKA NATIVE ART

34



Nicholas Galanin  
*S'igeika'awu: Ghost*  
2009  
ceramic, hair  
10" x 8" x 3"

Anchorage Museum  
at Rasmuson Center

ALASKA NATIVE ART



SUMMER CAMP!  
QALOKYIK!

Ken Lisbourne  
Pt. Hope, Alaska  
Tigipap - 2006  
Ooyahtoon!

Ken Lisbourne  
*Summer Camp*  
2005  
watercolor on paper  
15" x 19"

Alaska Native Heritage Center

## ALASKA NATIVE ART

36



Erica Lord  
*Blood Quantum (1/4 + 1/16 = 5/16)*  
2007  
digital print  
14" x 40"

Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center

ALASKA NATIVE ART



## ALASKA NATIVE ART

38



Susie Silook  
*Old Bering Sea Woman*  
2004  
whalebone  
20.25" x 10.25" x 6.4"

Anchorage Museum at  
Rasmuson Center



ALASKA NATIVE ART

Donald Varnell  
*Logic Board*  
2006  
acrylic paint on red cedar panel  
32" x 58"

University of Alaska Museum  
of the North



# THE IMPACT OF THE RASMUSON ART ACQUISITION FUND ON ALASKAN MUSEUMS

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I remember exactly when I first heard of the Rasmuson Foundation's plan to start the Art Acquisition Fund. I was sitting in the audience at the annual meeting of Museums Alaska, in Fairbanks, in the fall of 2002. Museums Alaska meetings are akin to the yearly salmon return, only in this case, museum professionals gather to "spawn" new ideas to help their museums thrive. Like salmon, museums need a favorable environment to survive. Thriving for museums includes growing their collections in order to succeed at their missions and engage their communities. However, Alaskan museums had not been actively growing their collections much since the oil boom years, which tapered off in the 1980s. At the dawn of the new century, museums were swimming against a harsh economic current. By the time the Art Acquisition Fund was announced, most Alaskan museums were not actively collecting contemporary Alaskan art. It may not have been clear at that time what a significant impact the Art Acquisition Fund would have over the coming decade, but that impact is clearly visible today.

The impact of the Art Acquisition Fund gets to the core mission of museums. What sets museums apart from other worthwhile public service organizations like libraries and hospitals is that museums collect and

care for things in perpetuity. These things, often artworks, help us remember and tell our stories. They can speak to our identity or challenge our perceptions, inspire us to action or stop us in our tracks with a sense of awe. The mission of the Rasmuson Foundation is, "to promote a better life for Alaskans." Fortunately, the Foundation recognizes that, like libraries and hospitals, art is also something that promotes a better life for Alaskans. When our museums cannot collect contemporary art made by living artists, communities have fewer opportunities for the kind of open dialog on contemporary social, cultural, and political issues that art can foster. After all, who is pushing boundaries and challenging social concepts if not contemporary artists? Three key relationships reveal the reach of the Art Acquisition Fund: museums to artists, museums to community, and museums to museums.

The museum can be "a safe place for dangerous ideas" as Elaine Gurian, a great museum thinker, told us during her Keynote address at the 2007 Museums Alaska conference in Homer. The museum is not the only venue for contemporary art, but in small Alaskan communities it is an important one, especially for young and new artists. The museum also plays an important

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role in elevating the stature of the artists within a community. Artists leverage the trust and reputation for honesty the public holds in regard to museums. Without this opportunity, it becomes harder for artists to make a living being artists. Putting on a solo artist show is expensive both for the artist and the museum and there might be very little financial return on the investment. Before the Art Acquisition Fund, only a small number of Alaskan museums collected works that were displayed during a solo show in their own galleries. Now it is common practice, and the artist gains a measure of prestige from having their works collected by the museums where they have shown. This is what the Art Acquisition Fund is about. The program helps artists sell their work and helps museums collect contemporary Alaskan art, in a relationship that elevates both and benefits all Alaskans.

Today, after a decade of collecting contemporary art through the Art Acquisition Fund, hundreds of living Alaskan artists are represented in dozens of Alaskan museums. Yet the real impact for museums in Alaska goes beyond the numbers. Key evidence can be found in the ways museums interact with their communities. Are they showing more fine art? Are they tying the past to the present by connecting these

contemporary artworks to other parts of their collections? Are they creating programming related to artwork collected through the initiative? I think the evidence points to a resounding, “Yes!” in each case.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, the oldest museum in Alaska, is an excellent example of program impact. Reverend Sheldon Jackson began this collection in the 1880s and it is internationally recognized as one of the world’s premier collections of Alaska Native artifacts. The museum is nestled in the campus of the former Sheldon Jackson College, long a site of Rasmuson Foundation investment both during its time as a college and today, during its renaissance as a nexus for community collaboration. Until recently the Sheldon Jackson Museum collection was more or less static with objects that pre-dated Alaskan statehood in 1959. To some, especially those in the Alaska Native community, this overemphasized the past at the expense of the present. To others this implicit assumption was often invisible. Many visitors were accustomed to seeing mainly historical Native objects on display in museums, without considering the continuity, resilience, and innovative contemporary growth of these traditions. This changed as a result of the Art Acquisition Fund. The Sheldon Jackson

Museum now has a growing collection of contemporary works that complements and connects to the traditional works in its historic collection. Today, the entire collection is more dynamic, with a richness that helps contextualize it to the public. The contemporary work also adds an important element of cooperation and collaboration with Native communities and brings their voice into the museum, particularly during a popular, annual, artist demonstrator program. The thriving Sitka Fine Arts camp on the Sheldon Jackson campus draws students from across Alaska, and these young people draw inspiration and pride from the full range of Native material culture presented at the Museum.

Another important impact of the Art Acquisition Fund is the enhanced relationship between museum and visitor. Contemporary art has put contemporary issues and identities of Alaskans in front of museum audiences, side by side with the historical narratives museums already share so well. Tommy Joseph's Rainforest Warriors exhibit, which showed at the Alaska State Museum in 2013, is a good example. Joseph showed his contemporary artworks alongside traditional Tlingit armor. A meaningful quote by the artist greeted the visitors to the gallery. "This art is not a dead art form. It continues to evolve the way it always has." A major piece from this show was collected by the Alaska State Museum through the Art Acquisition Fund.

Contemporary art gives individual artists an opportunity to demonstrate connections to their heritage but also to assert new identities and explore the forces of change that shape today's communities large and small. Visual statements can challenge stereotypes and assumptions for locals and visitors alike, because above all our Alaskan museums project the message, "This is who we are. This is what matters to us." Communities can enter into a dialog in person or through social media about the nature of art. What counts as contemporary? What counts as art? What are replicas? What about models? Where is the line between art and craft? Is there a line? Contemplating these bigger ideas connects Alaskans to their heritage, their sense of place, and especially to each other.

Inside the museum, the Art Acquisition Fund is also opening up the dialog between artist and museum. Contemporary art is often made of different materials than the traditional art and artifacts museums collect. Plastics, paints, adhesives, and coatings have changed considerably over time. Combining many different materials in innovative and experimental ways is part of the practice of many artists. Properly caring for collections of contemporary art requires more up-front information than collections of utilitarian or historical objects. Historical objects were made with specific purposes in mind and the characteristics of the materials are, more often than not, better understood. Some of this information is part of the fund's application process while other information needs to be collected from the artist while the opportunity still exists. Some artist materials might be traditionally used and proven to have good longevity, but others are modern, synthetic, or used in novel combinations. Sometimes museums do not know how these materials will deteriorate or change in appearance over time. To compound the issue, artists often innovate and use traditional materials in a non-traditional way, or practice traditional techniques with new materials. Sonya Kelliher-Combs comes to mind for her combination of materials such as plastic, walrus stomach, hair, and graphite. Kat Tomka uses Scotch tape. How about Fran Reed's combination of salmon skin, hog gut, bamboo, and plastic? Rachelle Dowdy has combined latex and fiberglass impregnated concrete. Sheila Wyne's work often combines found industrial objects with natural materials like bones and wasp nests. Important questions need to be asked for the curatorial record while the information from the artist is still available. Why has the artist chosen these particular materials to convey their message? Does the artist like the behavior of the material to achieve a certain visual effect, or does the essence of the material carry a meaning from its own origins? How will these materials age and change over time, and what (if any) measures should be taken to restore the material if it deteriorates or is damaged?

How to exhibit artwork, once exclusively the realm of exhibits curators, is now part of the dialog between artist

and museum as well. The method for displaying conventional works, such as paintings, is usually obvious. However, the display of three-dimensional art can be more challenging, especially works with multiple parts or that are kinetic (have movement). Future exhibition of contemporary works that incorporate electronic media such as neon lights, projection screens, or recorded sound will have to anticipate a time with the display mode is obsolete. Special lighting conditions, display requirements, and preservation concerns can impact the appearance and interpretation of contemporary artworks. Proper presentation requires information from the artist.

As a result of the Art Acquisition Fund and the volume of challenging media brought into collections, there is an important dialog began between museum staff members and contemporary artists. A session at the 2014 Museums Alaska conference in Seward explored how museums might share the information they learn from artists. Such discussions between the creators and preservers of artwork are beginning to collect information in a systematic way and will impact the care of Alaskan art for years to come.

The Art Acquisition Fund brought to the fore concerns and awareness about proper care of contemporary art collections for museums. The Rasmuson Foundation learned of these new discussions and responded. In 2013, the Foundation started a similar grant program called the Collections Management Fund to provide resources for improvements to collections care, upgrades to storage, and access to conservators for consultations

and treatments. Now Alaskan museums not only have the funds to collect contemporary Alaskan art but additional support to care for their collections for future generations.

The Art Acquisition Fund is part of a healthy process that is making Alaskan museums stronger. For decades museums thought it was enough to collect and protect in order to meet their mission. The new paradigm for museums is to project and connect. Objects are important because objects are important to people. As Stephen Weil, an important museum scholar once said, museums should transform from “being about something to being for somebody.”<sup>1</sup> The Art Acquisition Fund has done this for Alaskan museums. By increasing the collecting of the present, it has helped museums foster an attitude of the present. An attitude that is about “somebody”: the living artist, the community, the visitor. It has revitalized collecting, improved collections care, and opened up dialogs between museums and people. The Art Acquisition Fund has increased awareness of the museum towards its community and the thoughtful people living there. At the same time it has increased community awareness for museums and the inspirational stories they keep. Who would have thought that a simple idea of spreading a little art around, like stocking a pond, could spawn so much vitality?

—Scott Carrlee  
Curator of Museum Services, Alaska State  
Museum, Juneau

<sup>1</sup> Weil, Stephen E. “From being about something to being for somebody: The ongoing transformation of the American museum.” *Daedalus* (1999): 229-258.







# CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

## CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

48



Joel Bennett  
*Kaktovik Whaling*  
2001  
ink jet print  
10.5" x 18"

Alaska State Museum

## CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

Beverly Cover  
*Twister*  
2007  
toned silver gelatin print  
11" x 14"

Alaska State Museum



CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

50



Garry C. Kaulitz  
*Shelter*  
2007  
mono print, silkscreen, pastel  
28.5" x 21.5"

Alaska State Museum

## CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART



Sonya Kelliher-Combs  
*Blue Beaded Secret*  
2006  
acrylic polymer, glass bead, paper  
24" x 24"

University of Alaska Museum of the North

CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

52



Rebecca Lyon  
*Plastic Death*  
2007  
mixed media  
45" x 22" x 11.25"

Pratt Museum

## CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

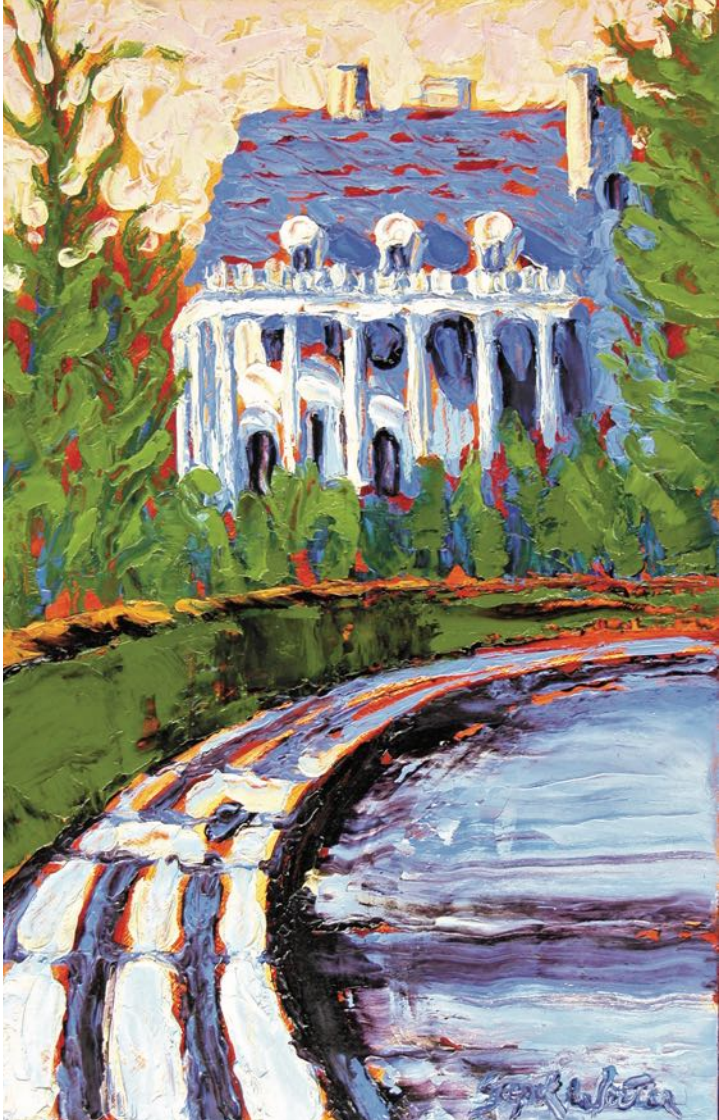


Clarissa Rizal  
*Friends*  
2010  
acrylic on canvas  
24" x 21"

Sealaska Heritage Institute

CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

54



Devita Stipek Writer  
*Governor's Mansion*  
2006  
oil on canvas  
16.5" x 11.5"

Juneau Douglas City Museum



## CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

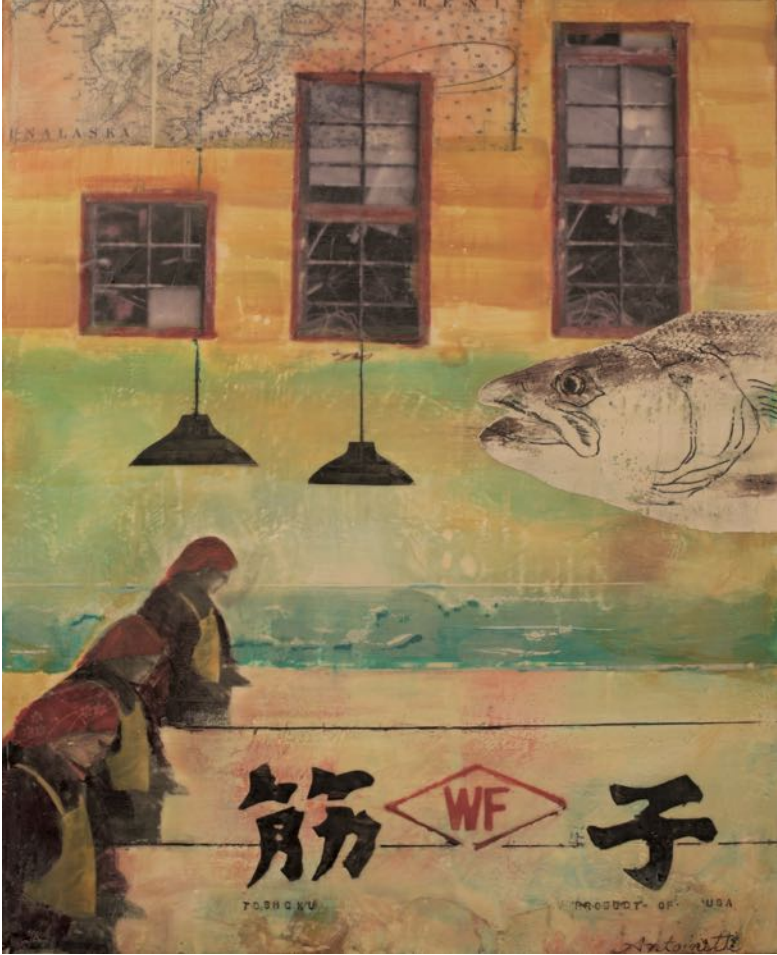


John Svenson  
*High and Dry*  
2005  
watercolor on paper  
22" x 30"

Sheldon Museum

CONTEMPORARY ALASKAN ART

56



Antoinette Walker  
*Roe Girls*  
2008  
encaustic and multimedia  
16" x 20"

Baranov Museum



## MUSEUMS SUPPORTED 2003 – 2013

58

Alaska Native Heritage Center, Anchorage  
Alaska Aviation Museum, Anchorage  
Alaska Museum of Science and Nature, Anchorage  
Alaska State Museum, Juneau  
Alaska Veterans Museum, Anchorage  
Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, Kodiak  
American Bald Eagle Foundation, Haines  
Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage  
Baranov Museum, Kodiak  
Beringia Center of Culture and Science, Nome  
Clausen Memorial Museum, Petersburg  
Cordova Historical Museum, Cordova  
Ilanka Cultural Center, Cordova  
Jilkaat Kwaan Cultural Heritage Center, Klukwan  
Juneau-Douglas City Museum, Juneau  
Kenai Visitors & Cultural Center, Kenai  
Ketchikan Museums, Ketchikan  
McCarthy-Kennicott Historical Museum, McCarthy  
Morris Thompson Cultural and Visitor Center, Fairbanks  
Museum of the Aleutians, Unalaska  
Palmer Museum of History and Art, Palmer  
Pratt Museum, Homer  
Samuel Fox Museum, Dillingham  
Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center, Sitka  
Sealaska Heritage Institute, Juneau  
Seldovia Museum and Visitors Center, Seldovia  
Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka  
Sheldon Museum and Cultural Center, Haines  
Skagway Museum and Archive, Skagway  
University of Alaska Museum of the North, Fairbanks  
Valdez Museum & Historical Archive, Valdez  
Wrangell Museum, Wrangell  
Yupiiit Piciryarait Cultural Center, Bethel

## ARTISTS SUPPORTED 2003 – 2013

Works by the artists listed below can be seen on the Rasmuson Foundation's website. Please visit the on line gallery at [www.rasmuson.org](http://www.rasmuson.org) to browse artwork purchased through the Art Acquisition Fund.

Aakatchaq // Ayap'un Jack Abraham // Margaret Abraham // Andrew Abyo  
Melinda Abyo // Rochelle Adams // James Adcox // Larry Ahvakana // Dixie Alexander  
Selina Alexander // Alvin Eli Amason // Lena Snow Amason // Celia Carl Anderson  
Michael Anderson // Helen D. Andersson // Cecilia Andrews // Clifford Apatiki  
Lydia Apatiki // Audrey Armstrong // Glenn Aronwits // Phillip Arrow // Earl Atchak  
Jannah Sexton Atkins // Anne Aube // Johnny Avatock // Sylvester Ayek  
Annabella Baker // Gail Baker // Lisa Ballard // Constance Baltuck  
Michael Lee Beasley // Richard Beasley // Sarah Beaty // Marian Beck // Karl Becker  
James Behlke // Annette Bellamy // Joel Bennett // Vivian Benson // Byron Birdsall  
Duane Bosch // Kate Boyan // Susan Bremner // Bill Brody // Carol Crump Bryner  
Sharon Ingram Bullock // Milo Burcham // Nancy Burnham // Miriam Cameron  
Agnes Carl // Kathleen Carlo-Kendall // Patricia Carlson // Barbara Craver  
Donna Catotti // Archie Cavanaugh, Jr. // Phillip Charette // Lena Charley  
Della Cheney // Cleo Chernoff // Coral Chernoff // Gene Chilton // Susan Christensen  
Delores Churchill // Rick Clair // Carol Clifton // Kerry Cohen // Sarah Cohen  
Alex Duff Combs // Gerald Conaway // Susan Condon // Michael Conti  
Carla Klinker Cope // Don Cornelius // Beverly Cover // Jay Crondahl // Wendy Croskrey  
Gloria Cunningham // Charles R. Cupp // Graham Dane // Mark Daughetee  
Don Decker // Julie Decker // Ken Decker // Eric Deeter // John R. DeLapp  
Michael Dengali // Raymond T. Dennis, Jr. // Mary Jane Derendoff // Daniel DeRoux  
Ken DeRoux // Scott Dickerson // Paula Dickie // Lilian Dillon // Evelyn Douglas  
Rachelle Dowdy // Mary Downs // Alisha Drabek // Sandee Drabek // Michael Drew  
Annie Duffy // Paul Dungan // Ashley DuRoss // Raymond Dutchman // Perry Eaton  
Anna Brown Ehlers // Robert Ekstrom // Paul Eneboe // Susie Bevins Ericson  
Corinna Evans // Rich Evans // James Evenson // Thor Evenson // Susan Farnham  
Mark Fejes // Beth Flor // Roberta Floyd // Maura Flynn // Warren Flynn // Jim Fowler  
Robert Fox // Mary Ellen Frank // Teresa Frank // Karin Franzen // Asia Freeman  
Karla Freeman // Dan Fruits // Caleah Gadd // Hal Gage // Nicholas Galanin  
Paul Gardinier // Patrick Garley // Carol Gelvin-Reymiler // Shgen Doo Tan George  
Cori Giacomazzi // George Gianakopoulos // Sandra Gillespie // Douglas Girard

Sarah Glaves // Jo Going // Rob Goldberg // Trevor Gong // Mariano Gonzales  
 Steve Gordon // Lu Grauel // Lisa Gray // Stephen Gray // Charity Green  
 Tresham Greg // Donald Gregory // Eve Griffin // David Groat // Sven Haakanson, Jr.  
 John Hagen // Wolfgang Hagmuller // Clara Haley // Diane Hall // Heather Hanak  
 Salty Hanes // Eli Hanlon // Catherine Hanson // Brandon S. Hauser // James Havens  
 William Heath // James Heaton // Jesse Hedden // Denise Heimel // Matthew Helgesen  
 Patrice Helmar // John Hemle, Jr. // Mary Ida Henrikson // Ted Herlinger  
 Carol Hilgeman // Madara Hill // Robert Davis Hoffman // Edward Hofseth  
 Gina Holloman // Marilyn Holmes // Esther Euimu Hong // Lily Hope and Clarissa Rizal  
 Greg Horner // Lani Hotch // Jack Hudson // John Hudson // Raymond Hudson  
 Ben Huff // Brad Hughes // Margaret Hugi-Lewis // John Hume // John Hyde  
 Mitsuko Ikeno // Douglas Inga // Ahna Iredale // Joel Isaak // Edna Jackson  
 Mike Jackson // Nathan Jackson // Norman G. Jackson // Maygen Jannetta  
 Chris Jenness // Helm Johnson // Joseph Johnson // Matt Johnson // Pauline Johnson  
 Ella Johnson-Bentley // Tommy Joseph // Rachel Juzeler // Richard Kacsur  
 Louise Kadinger // John Kailukiak // Rose A. Kanrilak // Lorraine Kasko  
 Garry C. Kaulitz // Sonya Kelliher-Combs // Debi Knight Kennedy // Denis Keogh  
 Atz Kilcher // Mike King // Jen-Ann Kirchmeier // Margo Klass // Michael Klensch  
 Don Kompkoff // Susan Kraft // Madeleine Krol // Virginia Lacy // LaRita Laktonen  
 Bonnie Landis // Jonella Larson // Eric Larson // Marilyn Leahy // Gigi Lemieux  
 Jean Lester // Darlene Lind // Peter Lind, Jr. // Peter Lind, Sr. // Anne Lingener-Reece  
 Ken Lisbourne // Petra Lisiecki // Mary Jane Litchard // Lydia Lohse // Francine Long  
 Erica Lord // Deb Lowney // Monica Jenicek Lyall // Rebecca Lyon // Linda Infante Lyons  
 Terry MacDonald // Karel Machalek // Jacqueline Madsen // Micah Malcolm  
 Kathryn C. Mallory // Marvin Mangus // Jackie Manning // Charles Mason  
 Janelle Matz // Leslie Matz // Puanani Mauna // Sherri McDonald // Pat McGuire  
 John McIntyre // Hugh McPeck // Barry McWayne // Da-ka-xeen Mehner  
 Rebecca Meissner // Carolyn Diane Melms // Drew Michael // Erica Miller // J. Miller  
 Robby Mohatt // Don Mohr // David Mollett // Douglas Morris // Rika Mouw  
 Mavis Muller // Rachel Mulvihill // Rie Munoz // Alan R. Munro // Michael E. Murray  
 D. Scott Nacke // Lynn Marie Naden // Michael Nakoneczny // Ree Nancarow  
 Ross Nannauck III // Amelia Nash // Bobby Nashookpuk // Alfred Naumoff, Jr.  
 Roberta Naumoff // Andrea Nelson // Bruce Nelson // Gail Niebrugge // Bill Noe  
 Susan Ogle // Richard Olanna // Art Oomittuk // Othniel Art Oomittuk, Jr.  
 Tracy Opheim // James M. Orvik // Adam Ottavi-Schiesl // Ursula Paniyak  
 June Simeonoff Pardue // Kay Field Parker // Alan Parks // Igor Pasternak // Jeff Patrick  
 Ben Paul // Linda Payne // Paula Payne // Hugh Pelkey // Elizabeth Petersen  
 Jolene Petticrew // Tami Phelps // Alexandra Phillips // Joyce Phillips // Rika Pitka  
 Ginger Placeres // Jerri Plaster // Jake Pogrebinsky // Gary T. Postlethwait // Carla Potter

Alf Pryor // Terry Pyles // Nancy Radtke // Anna Kingman Ramsburgh  
Paula Rasmus-Dede // Judy Redfox // Rosemary Redmond // Fran Reed // Pia Reilly  
Sheryl Maree Reily // Amy Reiland-Speer // Tim Remick // Clarissa Rizal // Teresa Rofkar  
Ryan Romer // David Rosenthal // David Rubin // Duke Russell // Martha Sam  
Lena Sanford // Sherri Sather // Susan Schapira // Bruce Schindler // Tamara Schmidt  
Shelley Schneider // Marjorie Scholl // Linda Schrack (Skil Jáadei) // Wanda Seamster  
Paul Seibel // Sonya Selanoff // Gloria Selby // Ron Senungetuk // Turid Senungetuk  
Shaadoo'tlaa // Susan Share // Florence Marks Sheakley // Maria Shell // Todd Sherman  
Tim Shields // Susie Silook // Helen June Simeonoff // Speridon Simeonoff  
Glen Simpson // Preston Singletary // Mark Sixbey // Arlene Skinner // Marie Skonberg  
Delores Sloan // Kathy Smith // Kevin Smith // Wendy Smith-Wood // Frank Soos  
Ruth Sorensen // Rebecca Starry // John Stoll // Sandy Stolle // Michelle Suchland  
Sheary Cough Suiter // Jean Rene Sunder // Gertrude Svarny // John Svenson  
Sharon Svenson // Maya Swindford // Alena Hope Syverson // Laresa Syverson  
Sara Tabbert // Jane Terzis // Tim Thomas // Tarri Thurman // Shirley Timmreck  
Kat Tomka // Ray Troll // Fred Trout // Sally Troxell // Robert Tucker // Moses Tulim  
Roxanne Turner // Maria Turnpaugh // Toby Tyler // Mazie Van Den Broek  
Jon Van Zyle // Leo Vait // Donald Varnell // Averyl Veliz // Joe Viechnicki  
Rebecca Voris // Antoinette Walker // David Walker // Harold Nels Wallin  
Mike Wassilie // Moses Wassilie // Ray Watkins // Rod Weagant // Michael Webber  
Mark Wedekind // Bessie White // Carol Wilbur // Diane Douglas Willard  
Lalla Williams // Donna Willoya // Ann-Margaret Wimmerstedt // Judy Winn  
Dennis Witmer // Mark Witteveen // Sandy Wolf // David Woodie // Kesler Woodward  
Kate Salisbury Wool // Devita Stipek Writer // Sheila Wyne // Douglas Yates  
Alice Young // Catherine Young // Joe Young // TJ Young // Aleda Yourdon  
Evon Zerbetz // Vladimir Zhikhartsev

# EXHIBIT VENUES



[Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, Anchorage](#)  
November 2015 – February 2016

[Pratt Museum, Homer](#)  
February 2016 – April 2016

[Alaska State Library, Archives, and Museum, Juneau](#)  
May 2016 – September 2016

[University of Alaska Museum of the North, Fairbanks](#)  
October 2016 – December 2016

[Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository, Kodiak](#)  
January 2017 – March 2017

[Museum of the Aleutians, Unalaska](#)  
April 2017 – June 2017


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Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center  
625 C Street  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
<http://www.anchoragemuseum.org>



Funded by the Rasmuson Foundation, 2015  
[www.rasmuson.org](http://www.rasmuson.org)

A close-up photograph of a person's forearm against a black background. The skin is light-toned and has a tattoo of a mathematical equation. The equation is written in a dark, slightly irregular ink. The equation is  $1/4 + 1/16 = 5/16$ . The numbers are written in a simple, sans-serif style. The plus and equals signs are also simple. The overall appearance is that of a hand-drawn or tattooed equation.
$$1/4 + 1/16 = 5/16$$

Erica Lord  
*Blood Quantum* ( $1/4 + 1/16 = 5/16$ ) detail  
2007  
digital print  
14" x 40"

Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center

