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## Press Release

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **March 26, 2008**

### Reveling in ravens at museum

Do ravens show a preference for cheese puffs, potato chips or French fries? That is but one of the questions that is tackled in *RAUCOUS! Everything Raven*, a multi-faceted art and science exhibition opening April 4 at the Alaska State Museum in Juneau.

The show is the work of Ketchikan artist Evon Zerbetz and is the museum's major exhibition for the summer season. A special opening reception, with the artist in attendance, is scheduled for Friday, April 4, from 4:30 to 7 p.m., sponsored by The Friends of the Alaska State Museum. As part of the opening festivities, The Friends will host a Raven Activity Afternoon, for families with grade school children, at the museum on Saturday, April 5, from 12 to 3 p.m.

*RAUCOUS! Everything Raven* grew out of Zerbetz's involvement with the children's book *Ten Rowdy Ravens*, written by Susan Ewing and illustrated by Zerbetz in 2005. Twenty-six linocuts from *Ten Rowdy Ravens*, as well as other raven-based art and mixed media works by Zerbetz will be featured among the interactive and educational displays. Visitors can learn about the role ravens have played in folklore throughout the world and try their wings in a number of activities designed to have special appeal to both children and adults as well as art aficionados and the more scientifically inclined.

Saturday's family afternoon will start out with a guest artist read-aloud of "Ten Rowdy Ravens" at noon. Participants can then try numerous activity centers including: raven pennant block-printing, Raven Fact Art Cards, making raven headdresses, participating in a raven scavenger hunt, playing a Raven Cache board game, and hopefully the day will end with a 20-minute Raven Tale video.

"My initial interest in ravens started simply by observing the corvid pair that live in my neighborhood and nest each spring in the trees behind my house," Zerbetz said. "My house is essentially in their fly-way and I watch as they bring sticks to rebuild their nests and engage in regular battles with the eagles that nest down the road. Much of my imagery is inspired as I satisfy my curiosity researching the questions that come up from my observations and other people's stories."

Zerbetz drew on both anecdotal and factual information to design a variety of colorful and whimsical elements for the exhibit, such as a giant raven board game that invites players to "start anywhere" to embark on the paced activity. "Cache" cards are collected for points, while "Kaw" cards provide a "trickster" element to add twists to the game.

Ravens' food habits are examined on a wall which features a photo essay about an experiment that attempts to answer the question posed at the beginning of this article. A reading roost provides a cozy, comic-book style painted couch and table where one may browse a variety of books and publications about ravens.

Ravens are known to like shiny things, so visitors may find a variety of "treasures" cached throughout the exhibit in a kind of on-going scavenger hunt. They can also examine a giant raven's nest constructed of typical local materials. Raven Radio, broadcasting raven sounds and raven "news," provides a soundscape detailing weird but true raven escapades. A video element, the "Corvid Cam," provides raven images and portraits from many sources including a woman who researches ravens on Alaska's North Slope.

The appearance of ravens in lore and myth throughout the world is explored on a wall called Ten Famous Ravens which is framed by raven caryatids perched atop ionic columns. These raven stories come from such disparate places as Scandinavia, Greece and the Himalayas.

The character of Raven is a central figure in the cosmology of the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast, and so a number of examples showing raven motifs in Northwest Coast art from the museum's collection will be part of the exhibit. Another section of the show, NW Trickster Meets SW Trickster, compares the character of Coyote, a powerful figure in the mythology of the American Southwest, with Raven, a sort of counterpart in the Northwest.

Raven imagery has flown in and out of Zerbetz's artwork since she made her first block print with a carving knife on a piece of wood almost twenty years ago. Since then she has done a number of series of raven-inspired prints, culminating in the linocut illustrations for Ten Rowdy Ravens, published by Alaska Northwest Books in 2005. Her attention to detail has remained strong, and alert viewers will discover insects and hidden jokes layered in the colorful prints. Zerbetz has illustrated five other books for children: Lucky Hares and Itchy Bears (1996), Blueberry Shoe (1999), Whalemail (2001), Little Red Snapperhood (2003), and Aleutian Sparrow (2003).

As for what she hopes people experience in the exhibit: "Mostly, to inspire curiosity. But also, to think a little more like a scientist when observing wildlife, attempting to observe from the raven's viewpoint and keeping human values in check. This can be challenging at times due to the proximity and interchange between raven and human cultures."

RAUCOUS! Everything Raven will remain on view through October 18. Until May 4, hours at the museum are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, with \$3 admission. Beginning May 5, hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily, with \$5 admission. Visitors 18 and under are admitted free of charge. An annual pass that allows unlimited visits to the Alaska State Museum and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka is available for \$15. Assistance is available for visitors with special needs. Please contact Visitor Services at 465-2901 before the visit.

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