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## Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: **June 21, 2010**

### **Native Artist Demonstrators provide opportunity to witness the artistic process up-close**

Summer is a great time to visit the Sheldon Jackson Museum, as the Native Artist Demonstrators Program provides an opportunity for locals and visitors alike to see and meet, in person, some of the artists whose skills and reputations are shaping the image of traditional Alaskan culture for the rest of the world and for the future.

The program is in full swing with five different artists set to show their skills during July, with an expanded schedule that includes some weekends. Sponsored by the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum and supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the program brings artists from all across Alaska to Sitka to demonstrate their particular art or craft for museum visitors.

Haida carver Donald Varnell, who has been working at the museum since mid-June, will continue demonstrating through July 9. Varnell has been working on "t-shirt" which is actually two panels 4'x7' that will be pegged together that have the shape of a t-shirt. Using traditional formline design, Varnell is creating a visually exciting intermingling of form and color. A young carver known for his highly contemporary work, which often breaks from tradition, Varnell apprenticed with carvers Reggie Davidson and Nathan Jackson. He also studied under Alutiiq artist Alvin Amason at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This is his second summer with the demonstrators program. Varnell will be at the museum weekdays from 1 to 5 p.m. through Friday, July 9.

Cass Pook of Sitka is known for her traditional Tlingit beadwork and basketry and has demonstrated at the museum in past summers. She will be sharing her skills on Sundays: July 11 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., July 18 from 9 a.m. to noon, and July 25 from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. She will also be at the museum on Saturday, July 17, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Pook is a member of the Eagle Clan and Killer Whale House. She trained with her grandmother, Annie Jacobs, and with Esther Littlefield. She has taught beading to students at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall and has demonstrated at the Southeast Alaska Indian Cultural Center.

Allie High is a mask maker with Tsimshian, Haida and Aleut heritage. Her family is from Metlakatla, Alaska, and Masset, British Columbia. She resided in Wrangell for many years but currently lives and works as an art teacher in Anchorage. She will be at the museum the week of July 12 to 16 from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. each day.

Ms. High apprenticed with Tsimshian master carver Jack Hudson beginning in 1984. Classes with Nathan Jackson, Marvin Oliver, Bill Holm, Delores Churchill and Steve Brown also inform her work. She is particularly drawn to carving the subtleties of women's faces.

High holds a master's degree from the University of Texas and a bachelor's degree in art education from the University of Oregon. Her work is in the collections of Alaska Airlines, the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, the United States Department of Agriculture, Alaska State Parks and many others.

The following week sees the return of Margaret Gross-Hope, a Tlingit beader who now lives in Sitka, and who has demonstrated in past summers. She sews and beads octopus bags, tote bags, dance robes, raven dance shirts, moccasins and a variety of other traditional and contemporary apparel. She will be on hand on July 19 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., July 20, 21 and 22 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and July 23 from 1 to 5 p.m.

Gross-Hope said she began learning about her art at an early age by watching her grandmother, Mary James of Kake, make moccasins. Later, she sewed with her mother, Martha DeWitt of Wrangell. She was director at the Indian Cultural Center in Wrangell, where she also taught beading and button sewing. After moving to Sitka, she apprenticed with Esther Littlefield.

Yup'ik artist Mary Beans, a Yup'ik skin sewer and beader, will be at the museum. She makes a variety of items from sealskin and decorates them with beadwork. Beans was born in Bethel, on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, and currently lives in Sitka. She learned skin sewing from her mother and grandmother and has since learned beading from her daughter. She has a BA in education and has taught elementary school.

Beans will demonstrate from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on July 27, 28 and 29, and from 1 to 5 p.m. on the July 30. She will also be at the museum the first week of August.

Additional artist demonstrators are scheduled through September. Participating artists are chosen for their acknowledged skill in tradition-based Native arts and for their ability and willingness to discuss their work and their culture. The program helps visitors make a connection with Native art and culture and allows visitors to see that traditional art forms continue to be a part of Alaska Native life.

In addition to the grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, support for the demonstrators program comes from the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum, the Alaska State Museum, Alaska Airlines, Shee Atika Totem Square Inn, and donations from many individuals.

For more on the demonstrators program go to:

[http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon\\_jackson/sjnatedemos.html](http://www.museums.state.ak.us/sheldon_jackson/sjnatedemos.html), or contact the museum at 747-8981 for a complete listing of the 2010 Native Artist Demonstrators Program.

Summer hours at the museum are daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. with admission of \$4. Visitors 18 and younger and Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum are admitted free of charge. An annual pass, which also includes the Alaska State Museum in Juneau, is available for \$15.

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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[www.museums.state.ak.us](http://www.museums.state.ak.us)

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