

Bulletin

ALASKA STATE MUSEUM, JUNEAU • SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM, SITKA

ALASKA
STATE
MUSEUMS

Museums offer collections database via Internet

People across Alaska and throughout the world can now search through the collections of objects from both the Alaska State Museum in Juneau and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka with a few simple clicks of their computer mouse.

An online database of the museums' collections is now available to the public in a user-friendly format by going to www.museums.state.ak.us and following the links. The database features the entire combined collections, with approximately 32,000 objects, of which over 5,000 have digital images. Additional photos will be added frequently.

Museum Registrar Donna Baron, who oversaw the project, said, "there is a trend for museums to make their collections available online. I think this one stands out for its comprehensiveness and ease of use." Baron said students, teachers, artists, researchers and museums are likely users of the database.

"If you're an artist working at your home or studio, you can browse the collection by object type," Baron said. "For example, you could find all the carved horn spoons or watercolor paintings or beaded shirts or quilts. If you're a student researching a paper,

you can search by topic, such as the Klondike Gold Rush."

The online collections database represents years of work cataloging artifacts, a painstaking process originally done on index cards. Museum personnel began entering the catalog into a computerized database starting in the 1980s. This latest phase



A small sample of the more than 32,000 museum objects now available online.

of providing a searchable online database for the public began six months ago with financial support from the Friends of the Alaska State Museum. Computer programmer Eric Torgerson of Juneau designed and perfected the project as an independent contractor.

"I'm sure the founders of the Territorial Museum back in 1900 could not dream of how the collection would be shared with everyone in this way," Baron said.

The broad mandate of the state museums is to collect, preserve and interpret Alaska's human and natural history. The collections include Alaska Native material, historic artifacts, works of art, and natural history specimens. Alaska Native material is the dominant part of the collection and includes objects from

Alaskan Eskimo, Athabascan, Aleut, and Northwest Coast groups. Items from daily life as well as ceremonial objects are well represented. The collection of Northwest Coast and Eskimo baskets is among the most comprehensive in existence, and includes fragments of three recently discovered Northwest Coast baskets which have been dated to 5,000 years before the present, the oldest ever recovered in Alaska.

The historical collection includes both the Russian colonial era (early 19th century) and the American period (1867

to present). Objects from the American period highlight exploration, transportation, commerce, domestic culture, and government.

The fine art collection consists of around 2,000 paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, and sculptures. A watercolor by William Ellis made during Captain Cook's exploration of Alaska in 1778 represents the museums' earliest original image of Alaska.

continued on page 2

Museum Seeks Visual Artists

The natural history collection is comprised of minerals, seashells, skeletons, fossils, and mounted animals and birds. A valuable herbarium in collection storage includes over 6,000 mounted plant specimens and is used for research.

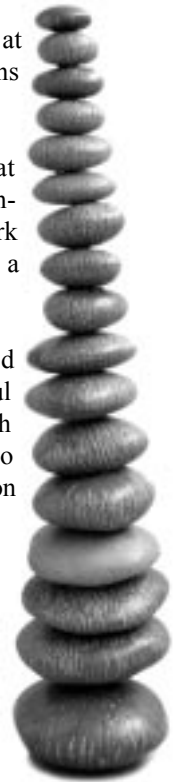
In 1887 the Reverend Dr. Sheldon Jackson donated the first artifacts to the museum in Sitka established in his name. In 1984 the State of Alaska purchased the museum and collection from Sheldon Jackson College and decided to focus the scope of this collection on Alaska Native materials. At present the museum has more than 5,000 objects from the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Aleut, Alutiiq, Yup'ik, Inupiat and Athabascan peoples of Alaska, as well as a small number of historical items.

Alaskan visual artists aspiring to see their work in a solo exhibition at the Alaska State Museum should consider applying now. Applications are due Oct. 8.

Submission guidelines and an application are available online at www.museums.state.ak.us. Interested artists should submit 10 high-quality slides depicting examples of their artwork. No original artwork will be accepted for review purposes. Artists should also submit a proposal detailing the type of work to be included in the exhibition.

A committee will review applications and make selections based primarily on the quality of the artwork as shown in the slides. Successful applicants, whose work will be exhibited for approximately one month during the 2005 - 2006 seasons, will be announced Oct. 15. Solo exhibitions are open to original work in any media. For more information call Mark Daughhete at 465-4819.

Tall Ash Stack, a ceramic sculpture by 2004 solo exhibition artist Sarah Beaty of Fort Yukon.



FY2005 Grants-in-Aid Awards Announced

Museums around the state will be performing some needed improvements following the distribution of this year's Grants-in-Aid. In July, the Alaska State Museum announced the awarding of grants to 19 institutions for projects that will upgrade collection storage and exhibitions, as well as address other museum improvements.

Out of 23 applicants who were seeking a total of more than \$162,000, 19 were selected for grants totaling \$105,232. Some of the recipients will receive partial funding of their requests.

Those receiving grants are:

- Alutiiq Museum, Kodiak, \$2,441 to implement and test a new disaster plan;
- Clausen Memorial Museum, Petersburg, \$2,694 for the purchase of archival materials for photo storage;
- Copper Valley Historical Society, \$3,350 for inventory and collection recordkeeping;
- Eagle Historical Society & Museums, \$3,078 for exhibit upgrades to Yukon riverboats;
- Hammer Museum, Haines, \$3,983 for Web site & collection cataloging;
- The Imaginarium, Anchorage, \$9,000 to design and build 9 hands-on science education carts;
- Juneau-Douglas City Museum, \$10,000 for mounts and casework for exhibit of a rare fish trap;

- Kenai Convention & Visitors Bureau, \$9,000 for facility assessment and exhibit evaluation;
- Ketchikan Museums –Totem Heritage Center, \$6,090 for exhibit case fabrication;
- Kodiak Historical Society–Baranov Museum, \$4,000 for conservation supplies and exhibit case;
- Museums Alaska, \$9,983 for professional conference and travel scholarships;
- Pratt Museum, Homer, \$10,000 for documentation and preservation of archaeological collections;
- Skagway Museum & Archives, \$1,813 for a storage cabinet for multimedia materials;
- Valdez Museum and Historical Library, \$10,000 for environmental controls for collections storage; and
- Yupiit Picirayarait Museum, Bethel, \$8,800 to purchase and ship storage cabinets.

Four museums received grants to support Museum Assessment Surveys under a program sponsored by the American Association of Museums:

- Palmer Visitor Center Museum- fee for service MAP 2 \$3,000
- Alaska Native Heritage Center- fee for service MAP 1 \$3,000
- Wasilla-Knik Historical Society, Knik Museum- fee for service MAP 1 \$3,000
- SE Alaska Indian Cultural Center, Sitka MAP 2 \$2,000

Alaska Positive Exhibition Touring the State

Alaska Positive 2004, the biennial statewide photographic art exhibition organized by the State Museum, is currently touring Alaska. The exhibition opened in Juneau last February and was juried by Michelle Dunn Marsh from the Aperture Foundation, publishers of books on photography

Juneau filmmaker Joel Bennett took top honors at *Alaska Positive 2004* with a portrait of four men entitled “Kaktovik Whaling Tool Sharpeners.” Bennett won the coveted Juror’s Choice Award among 276 photographs submitted by 81 different photographers from around the state. The Friends of the Alaska State Museum sponsored the awards.

Dunn Marsh said Bennett’s photo immediately captured her attention. “The light was stunning; the composition was really strong. There was a lot of motion, but a stillness and a focus,” she said. “It was like watching a whole movie within this one frame.”

Dunn Marsh is a book designer who has worked with numerous publications of the Aperture Foundation, considered the premiere publisher of fine photography books in the United States. Marsh said she didn’t know during judging that Bennett is a filmmaker. “When I found that out, it didn’t surprise me one iota,” she said.

Bennett, who often shoots still photography for stock imaging companies or to accompany various film projects he’s working on, said the shot was fortuitous. He was in Kaktovik primarily to film polar bears. While there,

Tour Schedule	
Dorothy Page Museum, Wasilla through September 30, 2004	Ketchikan Historical Museum, Ketchikan January 14 – February 14, 2005
Sheldon Jackson Museum, Sitka October 16 – November 20, 2004	Anchorage Museum of History and Art, Anchorage March 6 – March 27, 2005
Skagway Museum and Archives, Skagway December 2004	Fairbanks Arts Association, Bear Gallery, Fairbanks May 6 – May 28, 2005

the villagers happened to bring in a whale the eve of the September 11 terrorist attacks. As the men prepared their tools for processing the whale, others brought shop lights down to the beach to illuminate the all-night work of

Barry McWayne for “Bas Relief,” a carbon pigment print; and Charles Mason, another Fairbanks photographer, for his silver print, “Labor Day Parade, Fairbanks, Alaska.” Honorable mentions went to Susan Condon of Anchorage and Sherri Schleite of Ester, near Fairbanks.



Kaktovik Whaling Tool Sharpeners by Joel Bennett of Juneau. *Alaska Positive 2004* Juror’s Choice Award winner.

butchering. Bennett said he isn’t even sure what types of lights were used, but he saw the beauty of the scene unfold before him.

This year’s exhibition features 45 photographs by 33 photographers from around the state. Dunn Marsh said the overall quality of the work submitted was “quite good” and showed a range of subjects.

“I think the idea of this exhibit—that it focuses on regional work—is really important,” Dunn Marsh said. “It’s a real testament to the museum’s commitment to the artists in this state.”

For 34 years *Alaska Positive* has encouraged photography as an art form in Alaska. The biennial exhibition has drawn numerous entrants and high caliber jurors over the years.

"I myself continue to dream of particular photographs."

Michelle Dunn Marsh
Juror, Alaska Positive 2004

In addition to the top honor, three Recognition Awards were given to: Anchorage photographer Beverly Cover for her toned silver print entitled “Still Water #1”; Fairbanks photographer

Jurors lecture on photography at the museum and often travel to other venues in the state to lecture, as well.

MUSEUM ASSISTS WITH BETHEL CONSERVATION PROJECT

A graduate student from Buffalo State College assisted with artifact conservation at the Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center and Museum in Bethel this summer, thanks to a conservation internship program coordinated by the Alaska State Museum.

The state museum established the program in 2002 to help preserve cultural objects across the state and to provide students with hands-on conservation opportunities. This particular project was prompted by a request from the Bethel museum director, Joan Hamilton, who said her most urgent need is for storage improvements.

“While proper artifact storage might not be the flashiest aspect of a museum, it’s a fundamental building block behind

quality museum practices,” said Alaska State Museum Conservator Scott Carrlee.

“Everybody thinks of a museum as exhibits, but really, you can’t have exhibits unless artifacts and objects are in good condition,” Carrlee added, “and they won’t be in good condition unless they’ve been stored properly.”

Dana Senge, a graduate student from Buffalo State’s museum conservation program, worked closely with local student volunteers, teaching the basics of what is known in museum circles as preventive conservation. Preventive conservation controls the environment surrounding an artifact—such as light, humidity and temperature—to minimize damage to the piece.

A grant from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation of New York, which supports research and education in the arts, helped with Senge’s living expenses in Bethel this summer. Her internship at the Bethel museum began in early June and lasted until early August.

The Friends of the Alaska State Museum also contributed to the project, through its Ethel Montgomery Fund. The Friends enabled a student intern from Bethel to work with Senge. The Ethel Montgomery Fund was established to assist Native students studying in a museum-related field. Ethel Montgomery was a supporter and docent at the Alaska State Museum for more than 30 years.

For more information about the conservation intern program, call Scott Carrlee at 465-4806

ALASKA STATE MUSEUMS Bulletin

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