



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Decolonizing Alaska

May 5, 2017 – Oct. 14, 2017

Opening Reception: Friday, May 5, 4:30 – 6:30 at the museum

Panel discussion to follow at 6:30 pm in the APK Lecture Hall

As the world's attention shifts to the shrinking polar ice cap and the future of our planet, Alaska's place in the world has moved from the fringe to the center. Concerns about climate change and cultural survival resulting from colonization have pushed Alaska to the forefront of global conversations. *Decolonizing Alaska* is a multi-media visual art exhibit that explores how 30 diverse contemporary Alaskan artists grapple with these issues and present new possibilities for cultural sustainability. Artists create and express resilience and adaptation through a confluence of indigenous, global, traditional and contemporary concepts, technologies and media.

A panel discussion with the exhibit curator, Asia Freeman, and artists Joel Isaak, Rika Mouw, Ricky Tagaban, Michael Walsh, and Crystal Worl will follow the opening reception at 6:30pm in the APK Lecture Hall.

Decolonizing Alaska Artists:

Lena Amason-Berns
Annette Bellamy
Nancy Burnham
Sonya Kelliher-Combs
Michael Conti
Rachelle Dowdy
Annie Duffy
Nicholas Galanin
Sven Haakanson
Joel Isaak
Margo Klass
Rebecca Lyon
Linda Infante Lyons
Da-Ka-Xeen Mehner
Drew Michael
Rika Mouw

Holly Mititquq Nordlum
Sheryl Maree Reilly
Teri Rofkar
Ryan Romer
Gretchen Sagan
Ben Schleifman
Melissa Shaginoff
Susie Silook
Ricky Tagaban
Ray Troll
Donald Varnell
Michael Walsh
Kes Woodward
Crystal Worl
Sheila Wyne

Decolonizing Alaska is sponsored by Bunnell Street Arts Center, curated by Asia Freeman and supported in part by grants from ArtWorks, The CIRI Foundation, and the Rasmuson Foundation with additional support from the exhibit venues and the Rasmuson Foundation through the Harper Arts Touring Fund, administered, under contract, by the Alaska State Council on the Arts.



Why is this exhibit important?

“This show, *Decolonizing Alaska* recognizes that Alaska Native artists, or any artists in Alaska, must go back to value of art, in the meaningful sense to the art maker. We’re no longer making just ivory seals and totem pole models. We want to be recognized as artists. We don’t want to be labeled as souvenir artists, which has been going on as long as colonization...We don’t have to be defined by outsiders...When Alaska was colonized by pioneers, outsiders tried to change us to American ways of thinking and being. We were still functioning as people of the land. Along the way, Alaska Native art, as we know it, became art of their choice, not necessarily ours. It became commercialized, for example, and sometimes not meaningful to us, except for meager pay in return. And then we said goodbye to the meaningful art of our ancestors. We no longer had that value of hunting or relationships with hunted and what we wanted. We became producers of remnants of our art form.” – Ron Senungetuk, 2014

“Growing up on Kodiak Island, I wasn’t exposed to the language, history and dance of my ancestors. Many Elders in our communities grew up only hearing of 'devil dancing' with masks, as it was called by the new religions that had been forced upon the Alutiiq people. We had a lot of catching up to do, to accept a new mask carving and Alutiiq dancing tradition. If our dancers were dancing our masks now what would they look like? My art explores this question and reflects what I see, marine and animal life, hunting and fishing, how we live and our local sense of pride.” – Lena Amason, 2016

“Culture cannot be contained as it unfolds. My art enters this stream at many different points, looking backwards, looking forwards, generating its own sound and motion. I am inspired by generations of Tlingit and Unangax creativity and contribute to this wealthy conversation through active curiosity. There is no room in this exploration for the tired prescriptions of the ‘Indian Art World’ and its institutions. Through creating I assert my freedom.” – Nicolas Galanin, 2015

Speaking of her artwork in the show, Sheryl Maree Reily writes, “The Mantle series examines the earth's protective outer covering, and the dismantling of these surfaces... In a wave of new colonialism to the arctic, international corporations producing hydrocarbon energy have fueled a petroleum dependent economy and culture, with harmful consequences. Alaska's vegetative layer significantly affects global climate health. In this cycle of destruction global warming is compounded by development and wild fires, which remove protective tundra causing permafrost to melt, releasing methane, and contributing to rising temperatures. Warming allows invasive species to migrate north and colonize the arctic. Indigenous vegetation is relatively free of polluting contaminants or genetic modification, and holds vital DNA stores of nutrition and healing. Arctic vegetation literally and figuratively holds the earth together and it is in our own best interest to preserve and protect this resource.”

Winter hours at the museum are Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Discounted winter admission is \$5, with those age 18 and under admitted free. Summer hours at the museum are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Summer general admission is \$12, seniors (65 and up) is \$11, youth 18 and under are admitted free. An annual pass that allows unlimited visits to the Alaska State Museum and the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka is available for \$35. Assistance is available for visitors who have special needs. Please contact visitor services at 465-2901 before the visit.

For more information:

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