

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM APRIL ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH



The April Artifact of the Month at the Sheldon Jackson Museum is doll made by artist Ursula Paniyak (Cup'ik) (SJ.2014.7.2). This doll was generously donated to the museum in 2014 by Jerrick Fulkerson and formerly belonged to his grandmother, Ellen Hope Hays, an accomplished Tlingit activist, community leader, and cultural educator who was the first indigenous superintendent of Sitka National Historical Park.

The Paniyaks are a renowned doll-making family. Ursula, Ursula's mother, Rosalie, and her daughter, Janice, have enjoyed great success and notoriety for their work. They have inspired other doll makers in the Yup'ik region of Alaska including Natalia Nayamin, Monica Friday, Anna Martins, Rose Kanrilak and other women, especially in the villages of Chevak and Hooper Bay. The Chevak-style dolls with twisted leather faces made famous by the Paniyaks were once referred to as "the uglies", but are today appreciated by collectors and museums across Alaska and beyond.

As illustrated by the April Artifact of the Month, Paniyak dolls are brimming with character, have expressive seal skin faces, and wear colorful, creative outfits. This doll has an applique nose stitched on with beige commercial thread and beaded facial features. Both of her wide-open seed bead eyes are comprised of a single black bead set among white beads with a spray of black, hand-stitched eyelashes. Twelve white seed beads form her charmingly awkward grin. She is wearing a seal skin bag over her right shoulder, seal skin mittens, spotted seal skin boots, dark blue denim jeans, and a short, straight-hemmed, red calico kuspuk with a white, blue, yellow, and green floral pattern. A hood with a white fur ruff of arctic hare surrounds her slightly tilted head. On her left arm is a paper tag that was likely on it when the doll first sold in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It reads, "Aut 1277/ \$60.50/ Ursula Paniyak."

For over a thousand years, Alaska Natives have been making human figurines with a plethora of materials and in a variety of styles. The earliest dolls are made of stone, bone, ivory, rodent claws. Furs, hides, and skins are common elements of doll clothing, and after the arrival of Euroamericans trade cloth, commercial thread, beads, and a host of other materials were made accessible and incorporated into the art form.

While children played with figurines, often referred to as dolls, some human figurines had uses in everyday and ceremonial life and thus, the term doll, the only common English language collective word for human miniatures,<sup>1</sup> can be "woefully inadequate to convey the widespread uses of human figurines in Alaska Native cultures." In some instances, dolls had educational purposes or were used as charms or religious icons. In ancient times, some figurines were used as amulets to promote fertility or foretell the location

of game. While dolls have been and continue to be made as playthings, especially for Yup'ik girls, they are also made for what Fair describes as ""points of reference for remembering myths and folktales."

In *Not Just a Pretty Face: Dolls and Human Figurines in Alaska Native Cultures* Angela Linn and Molly Lee describe the modern Alaska Native doll making era as being concurrent with the arrival of Christian missionaries beginning in 1890 and their introduction of Western made dolls; the rise of the Native-made doll as a popular souvenir item for Euroamerican visitors starting in the mid-1800s; and the end of World War II. All of these events had a profound impact on Alaska Native ways of life and, they argue, influenced to some extent why dolls were made, how they were made, and their aesthetic.

In *Alaska Native Art: Tradition, Innovation, Continuity*, Susan Fair identifies nine main types of modern dolls based on stylistic differences. They include whalebone dolls, representational portrait-style Inupiat figurines with wooden faces, simpler Yup'ik wood-faced dolls, Shishmaref-area reindeer horn dolls, ivory-faced dolls with mask-style faces (often packing babies), dolls with ivory heads, coiled grass basketry dolls, simple leather-faced dolls with stitched or painted features, and activity dolls. Fair states that Cup'ik dolls from Chevak are distinctive enough to form a tenth type.

As is the case with Paniyak dolls, many of the dolls made contemporaneously are made by women and illustrate females, the exception being male figurines included in family sets. Women are not the only makers of dolls though as men and women do sometimes join together as couples, brother and sister teams or in larger extended family work units. In such instances women generally create the doll clothing and men carve the faces.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum is home to over fifty dolls, mostly Inupiat and Yup'ik, and a variety of doll accoutrements and clothing including coats, parkas, and boots. The Sheldon Jackson Museum Artifact of the Month will be on exhibit at the museum until April 30<sup>th</sup>. Winter hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum are 10am to 4pm, Tuesday through Saturday. The museum is closed holidays. General admission is \$3 and free for those 18 and under or members of either the Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum or Friends of the Alaska State Museum.

Fair, Susan. *Alaska Native Art: Tradition, Innovation, Continuity*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2006. Print

Linn, Angela and Molly Lee. "Dolls and Human Figurines in Alaska Native Cultures." *Not Just a Pretty Face: Dolls and Human Figurines in Alaska Native Cultures*. Ed. Molly Lee. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Museum, 1999. 3-47. Print

Schuldberg, Jane. "All I Had for Hair was Pink Yarn: A Survey of Doll Art from Alaska to Canada." *Inuit Quarterly*. Vol. 11. No. 3 (Fall 1996): 4-14. Web. 14 March. 2015

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<sup>1</sup> See *Not Just a Pretty Face: Dolls and Human Figurines in Alaska Native Cultures*