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Press Release

SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM APRIL ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH



The Sheldon Jackson Museum's April Artifact of the Month is a gut skin bag recently given to the museum by the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum. The bag was purchased for the museum by the Friends from the Alutiiq artist, Coral Chernoff of Kodiak. The bag is made of sea lion intestine, dyed seal intestine, sea otter esophagus, and home tanned salmon skin dyed in a beautiful shade of pink. The intestine, esophagus and salmon skin are all sewn together with deer sinew.

Gut is a thin, transparent outer membrane and represents the connection between life on the land and life on the water. It is made of specialized tissue and is dense. Upon the death of an animal, the capillaries in the gut close up, making the material impermeable and resistant to decay. Because gut serves digestive activities, it is very tough and can withstand high pressure. Gut may be tanned or freeze dried and is sewn together with grass or sinew (animal tendon) or a combination

of the two. Both materials swell with moisture and render it waterproof. In contemporary times, cotton thread may be used.

Gut was used for a variety of applications including protection from the elements and for spiritual protection and ceremonies. The material was used to make a variety of things including parkas, waterproof linings for garments, containers, and among the Yupik, for windows in semi-subterranean houses, for death masks to protect the deceased from evil spirits, and by shamans for curing the sick.

The artist Coral Chernoff grew up on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana and on the Island of Kodiak in Alaska. She is an artist who studies and practices traditional arts with a focus on materials and processing these materials in the natural way her ancestors historically have. She is a fulltime artist who weaves, sews, and tans animal and fish skins and she is also a carver. Chernoff was an artist in residence at the Sheldon Jackson Museum in 2012 as part of a program funded by a grant from the Alaska Humanities Forum and with the support of the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian and the Friends of Sheldon Jackson Museum. While here, she focused on projecting involving the sewing of seal and bear intestines.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum is home to nearly fifty gut skin bags, wall pockets, pouches, mukluks, mittens, parkas and other garments, drums, and masks and baskets with gut skin embellishment. The majority of artifacts made with gut in the collection are Yup'ik or Inupiat which makes the addition of this beautiful bag to the permanent collection all the more significant. The April Artifact of the Month will be exhibited until April 30th and can be seen Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm. The museum is closed Sundays, Mondays and 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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