

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM SEPTEMBER ARTIFACT
OF THE MONTH**

The Sheldon Jackson Museum's September Artifact of the Month is a spruce root basket made by Teri Rofkar and entitled, "Little Tree Shadow Berry Basket" (2016-10-1). The basket was purchased directly from the artist with Rasmuson Art Acquisition Funds. A significant addition to the permanent collection, the basket was woven by Rofkar in the museum gallery and is the first piece by her to be acquired by the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

Rofkar created the September Artifact of the Month in the Sheldon Jackson Museum gallery in 2014 during her artist residency with inspiration from a 19th century basket on exhibit in a case near where she was weaving. A very similar pattern that appears on her basket can be seen in a lower design band on the older basket, though the latter is quite faded due to its age. The top most design is half of a "backbone" pattern, the middle band is "wild celery", and the bottom band has two rows of the "backbone" pattern.¹ Rofkar states that only on older baskets do you see geometric patterns below and above design bands and that she was honoring that tradition when she made this basket.



At the time of purchase, the basket was given to the museum with the following statement from the artist:

"A new spruce root basket to accompany the Old ones in the exhibit. The Museum collections around the world have beautiful elders to allow you insight into the ancient ways of the Tlingit. This little berry basket has held berries, and is an example of the continued practice of weaving among the Tlingit today. All of these baskets had light roots, when the weavers created them. I would like the visitors to be able to experience the weaving, rather than just interpret the past..."

On her website, Teri describes her work with these words:

"I am following the steps of my Ancestors, striving to recapture the woven arts of an indigenous people. The ancient ways of gathering spruce root, with respect for the tree's life and spirit, are a rich lesson in today's world. Traditional methods of gathering and weaving natural materials help me link past, present, and future. ...

Decades of weaving have opened my eyes to the pure science that is embedded in Tlingit Art. The arts and our oral history together bring knowledge of ten thousand years of research to life. My goal is to continue the research, broadening awareness for the generations to come."

¹ The "backbone" pattern is sometimes referred to as "hair seal's ribs."

Rofkar, in the spirit of tradition, collects and processes the spruce roots, grass, and maidenhair ferns for all of her basketry, a time consuming task that requires great skill. Spruce root is usually collected in the spring or early summer with the best roots being found near sandy shores. Digging sticks or deer horn are used to remove the root from below the earth's surface. After being pulled from the ground, the roots are roasted over coals of a fire until the bark begins to peel. Too much, too little or too dry heat ruins the quality of the fiber. The roots are then pulled through an eena, a split stick, to remove the bark. If too little pressure is placed in the jaws of the eena, the bark will not be properly removed; too much pressure destroys the outer surface sheen desired by the weaver. The roots are split down the middle, and if large, split a second and third time. The splitting created roots for two different functions – outside with luster used for the weft, and inside with a flat surface and low sheen for the warp.

Rofkar has been weaving Alaska Native baskets and ceremonial robes since 1986 and has been an artist demonstrator at the Sheldon Jackson Museum numerous times. The museum is pleased to welcome her back to the museum as Artist-in-Residence from August 30th until September 10th. She will be working in the gallery most days between 1:30pm and 3:30pm, making spruce root basketry, and weaving with mountain goat wool she spins. Rofkar will also give a talk and showcase some of her favorite baskets from collections storage on Saturday, September 10th at 2pm. The talk will be free and the public is invited to attend.

The September Artifact of the Month will be exhibited until September 30th. The museum is home to over two hundred and fifty Tlingit spruce root baskets. Many of the baskets, along with the September Artifact of the Month, can be seen Tuesday through Saturday between 9am and 5pm. General admission is \$5 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. Admission for seniors is \$4.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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