



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SHELDON JACKSON MUSEUM JULY ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH



The Sheldon Jackson Museum's July Artifact of the Month is a mask entitled *Let Us Have a Story*. The mask, by artist Kathleen Carlo (Koyukon Athabascan), is made of bass wood, pigments, buttit shells, human hair, commercial painted feathers, Mexican Milagros, and copper tacks. It was purchased with generous funding from the Rasmuson Art Acquisition Fund in June of 2015 and is the first work by the artist to be acquired by the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

Kathleen Carlo, one of Alaska's most prominent sculptors, is well-known for her surrealistic masks representing human beings, spirits and animals. She also makes carved panels reflective of her ancestral heritage. Her work often features ornamental embellishments of shell casings, found objects, bones, and commercial feathers. In a departure from traditional gender roles, she was one of the first Alaska Native women to carve wood – culturally considered men's work. She has also innovatively sought inspiration from other cultures including the Yup'ik and Alutiiq because her own people, with the exception of Athabascans in the Lower Yukon area, have not traditionally nor extensively used or made masks. Yup'ik influence is most notable in the distortion of her mask's humanoid faces and partial coronas of shell casings, feathers, and other objects – similar to the hoops surrounding many Yup'ik masks.

Born in Tanana and raised in Fairbanks, Carlo-Kendall was schooled in traditional Koyukon culture and trained in beadwork by her mother, Poldine Carlo. She developed an interest in woodcarving and entered the Native arts program at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, where Professor Ronald Senungetuk, the noted Inupiaq artist, became her mentor. She graduated in 1984 with Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, majoring in metalworking with an emphasis on woodcarving. Her subsequent career is devoted to exploring and combining these materials.

Since the late 1970s, the artist has shown her work extensively in solo and group shows, including "About Face: Self Portraits by Native Americans," "About Face: Self-Portraits by Native American, First Nations, and Inuit Artists" (Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian, 2005), and "Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation 2" (Museum of Arts & Design, 2006). Her work is included in numerous museums and public buildings in Alaska, as well as in the collection of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in Washington, D.C.

Let Us Tell a Story features a number of non-traditional objects that are hallmarks of Kathleen Carlo's style: bullet casings, Mexican milagros charms, and automobile inspection mirrors. Each of these elements is significant: the halo of mirrors is a tribute to the passing of fellow mask-maker Lawrence Beck (Yup'ik) who taught Carlo at a seminal two week workshop at the Institute of Alaska Native Arts and helped her on the path to her career. The milagros charms in the mask's mouth are traditional Mexican prayer charms: a parishioner would buy one in the form of a trouble or ailment in their lives and take it to church with them. For Carlo, her masks speak of these troubles and ailments, perhaps solving them through prayer, story or song. The addition of bullet casings--or buttit shells--signifies the importance of hunting for Carlo and many natives in Alaska. Raised on a subsistence diet of gathered and hunted foods--such as salmon, berries and moose meat, Carlo adds the shells to connote the human element in the more

spiritual world of the mask.

The title of this piece, *Let Us Have a Story* is taken from a passage in the diary of Father Jules Jette, a late 19th century priest who first codified the Koyukon dialect into a dictionary. One evening Jette and a number of Native men were at his cabin telling stories to each other. As the end of each story drew near the Koyukon men built up their excitement and would shout "Ani!"-- an expression of surprise and enthusiasm--and would call out, "Let's have another story, let us have a story!" Reading this passage, Carlo was inspired by this historic, peaceable scene, and created this mask to commemorate it.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum Artifact of the Month will be on exhibit at the museum until July 31st. Summer hours are 9am to 5pm daily. The museum is closed holidays year round. In the winter, 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. Summer general admission is \$5; \$4 for seniors; and free for those 18 and under or members of Friends of the Sheldon Jackson Museum or Alaska State Museum.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Henrikson, Steve. "Kathleen Carlo-Kendall." *American Indian Art Magazine* Winter 2010: 47. Print.

Rushing, Jackson W. III. "Of This Continent." *American Indian Art Magazine* Winter 2016: 67-76. Print.