

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**DATE: May 6, 2015, 2015**

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



The May Artifact of the Month at the Sheldon Jackson Museum is mask made by artist Drew Michael (Inupiaq and Yup'ik) (SJ.2013.8.1). This mask was purchased in 2013 with generous support of the Rasmuson Art Acquisition Fund. Embellished with brass, silver tacks, feathers, wire, and nylon fringe, this mask, like many of Michael's masks, is a blend of traditional and nontraditional materials.

The mask is entitled, "Dark Friend". Michael said of the mask, "Dark Friend" is the Raven who carries out trickster plans. This design was inspired by my need to distort and contort the typical make up of a mask form. I wanted to create two faces in one and manipulate the perspective view of a face." The face is scorched around the eyes and outer edge - a reference to the Yup'ik tradition of burning masks post-ceremonial use.

Drew Michael was born in Bethel and adopted by a Caucasian family living in Eagle River, Alaska when he was an infant. When he was a teenager, with the support of his father, he began taking a class with Anchorage artist Joe Senugeluk who taught him about forms and tools and encouraged him to pursue a career in mask making and explore and embrace his Alaska Native heritage and identity. Since then, Michael has studied under Athabascan carver Kathleen Carlo Kendall, developed a style of his own, and interested collectors in the state and beyond. Today, he is based in Anchorage.

Michael has had his work exhibited across the state, including the following venues: Anchorage Museum, the Blue Hollomon Gallery, OutNorth, the Bellevue Art Museum, Anchorage Performing Arts Center, Alaska Native Heritage Center, Pratt Museum, Anchorage Performing Art Center, Alaska Native Arts Foundation, and had solo exhibitions at the Homer Bunnell Street Gallery and Alaska State Museum. He has won awards from the Alaska Native Fund and Rasmuson Foundation. From late June until mid-July, Drew Michael will be an artist in residence at the Sheldon Jackson Museum. During his time in Sitka, he will teach a print making class and give a Residency Recap talk. He will also research the many Yup'ik masks in the museum's collection while he works on completing one mask during his residency.

Last year, Michael embarked on a project to create a series of oversized masks that form a series entitled Aggravated Organisms. The ten masks are abstract representations of the most prevalent and sensitive diseases with which Alaska Natives are confronted – HIV, diabetes, alcoholism, mental illness, rheumatoid arthritis, and fetal alcohol syndrome are among the difficult and in some ways, taboo, ailments addressed. He partnered with Alutiiq artist Liz Ellis who painted the masks Drew carved. Ellis looked at images of cells afflicted by the diseases under a microscope for inspiration. The show has travelled around the state of Alaska and appeared at many medical centers and both artists hope the work will "spark conversations often left unsaid in Alaska."

Not afraid to take risks and think outside the box, this year, Michael began working on a series of masks he describes as "Alaska meets Africa." His goal is to look at the issues related to the masks from Africa and compare the stories and uses of material to that of Alaska native cultures like the Yupik and Inupiaq. He is particularly interested in the connections of the spiritual worlds between and across the cultures.

The Sheldon Jackson Museum is home to over one hundred Yup'ik masks, and a variety of other Yup'ik material including twined grass bags, baskets, and socks, bird bolas, hunting spears, needle cases, skin scrapers, masks, and much more. The Sheldon Jackson Museum Artifact of the Month will be on exhibit at the museum until May 31<sup>st</sup>. Winter hours at the Sheldon Jackson Museum are 10am to 4pm, Tuesday through Saturday until May 10<sup>th</sup> when summer hours begin. 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 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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