



U.S. Department of the Interior
INDIAN ARTS & CRAFTS BOARD

TAKE HOME A TREASURE FROM ALASKA - BUY AUTHENTIC ALASKA NATIVE ART

Whether you are in search of a treasured memory of your visit to Alaska, or you are an avid collector of Alaska Native art and craftwork (art), purchasing authentic Alaska Native art helps preserve and perpetuate Alaska Native culture and tradition while supporting Alaska Native artists and communities. When buying Alaska Native art, be an informed consumer.

ALASKA NATIVE ART

Alaska Native artists create unique and beautiful carvings, dolls, baskets, jewelry, and beadwork. They also produce prints, bentwood boxes, parkas and other clothing incorporating seal skin, otter pelts, caribou, moose, and other animal hides, as well as contemporary artwork that expresses the artist's cultural identity. Many of the natural materials used in Alaska Native art are gathered as part of traditional and customary subsistence and harvest practices.

Alaska Native carvings often portray animals, and people engaged in hunting activities, traditional dance, and ceremonial culture. These carvings are commonly made from walrus ivory, marine mammal bone, wood, and soapstone.

Alaska Native dolls reflect unique styles, and may depict traditional activities, such as berry picking, hunting, fishing, dancing, and basket weaving. Doll clothes and bodies may be made from a variety of materials, including cloth fabric, mammal fur and skin, fish skin, reindeer horn, and ivory.

Alaska Native baskets are woven in a myriad of styles and materials. Beach grass, birch bark, cedar bark, willow root, spruce root, and other materials from the Alaska landscape are transformed through Alaska Native weaving techniques into beautiful artwork. Some Alaska Native baskets incorporate baleen, ivory, fish skin, and seal gut.



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Alaska Native jewelry is frequently crafted from silver, copper, or gold and hand-engraved with traditional design motifs. Ivory, baleen, beadwork, moose hair, and porcupine quill are also used to craft a broad selection of beautiful Alaska Native jewelry.

MATERIALS

Ivory from Alaska is a popular medium used by Alaska Native carvers. Walrus ivory is normally white, but may darken through age or exposure to environmental factors and may have thin black lines that occur naturally. Mammoth and mastodon ivory may range in color from creamy white to mottled dark brown, depending on the mineral content of the surrounding soil deposit. Because of these natural variations in walrus, mammoth, and mastodon ivory, no two carvings have the same pattern of color. Ivory may also be etched with pictorial scenes to portray stories from the artist's traditional culture, used in jewelry, and incorporated into other Alaska Native artwork.

Marine mammal bone, from whales and other marine animals, is used to create Alaska Native carvings and masks. Bone items are lighter and more porous than ivory.

Baleen, a flexible material from the jaw of baleen whales, is used to weave baskets. Baleen baskets feature an ivory starter piece on the basket base and a carved ivory finial on the top of the basket lid. Baleen can also be adorned with engravings, incorporated as a decorative element in ivory carvings and jewelry, and used to make miniature ships and dioramas.

Fur and skin from a variety of animals are incorporated



into Alaska Native clothing and art. Seal, sea otter, arctic hare, wolverine, beaver, moose, or wolf hide are common materials found in clothing, art, and jewelry. Musk ox hair (qiviut) is woven and knitted into hats, mittens, sweaters, and other fine textiles. Fish skin is a versatile, waterproof material that is used in clothing, boots, mittens, jewelry, bags and other containers, and dolls.

Seal gut, which looks like wax paper and is white or slightly yellowed after being dried and sun-bleached, is sometimes used in parkas, dolls, and other art forms. Seal gut is sometimes dyed and woven into beach grass baskets.

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KNOW THE LAW

The Indian Arts and Crafts Act requires that art made after 1935 that is marketed as “Alaska Native,” “American Indian,” “Indian,” or “Native American,” or as the product of a particular Indian Tribe must be made by an enrolled member of a federally or officially

State-recognized Tribe or Alaska Native Corporation, or by an individual who has been certified as a non-member Indian artisan of the Tribe of their direct lineal descent.

For example, to display, offer for sale, or sell carvings as Tlingit carvings, the art must be made by a member of a Tlingit Tribe. Alternatively, a direct lineal descendant of a Tlingit Tribal member who is certified in writing as a non-member Indian artisan by the governing body of the particular Tlingit Tribe, village, or appropriate Alaska Native Corporation could sell their art as Tlingit.

Watch for qualifiers like “ancestry,” “descent,” and “heritage.” When used in connection with “Alaska Native,” “Indian,” or the name of a particular Indian Tribe, they may mean that the



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craftsperson is not enrolled in an Indian Tribe and is not a non-member Indian artist certified by a Tribe.

Under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), only Alaska Natives are permitted to create authentic Alaska Native art, handicrafts, and clothing from walrus ivory, baleen, whalebone, **sea otter fur** or other marine mammal materials taken after December 20, 1972. But anyone can buy, sell, and own authentic Alaska Native art, handicrafts, and clothing that incorporates or is made from marine mammal materials, if the materials are significantly altered from their natural state. Legally collected mammoth or mastodon ivory, which come from extinct pre-historic species, may be used by both Alaska Native and non-Alaska Native artists. For more information about the MMPA, contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service at 800-344-9453 or www.fws.gov.



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BUYING TIPS

Alaska Native arts and crafts are sold online and in person through tourist stores, gift shops, art galleries, museums, and cultural centers. Here are some tips to help you shop wisely:

- When purchasing Alaska Native art, choose a source with a good reputation, and request a written guarantee or written verification that it is an authentic Alaska Native-made product.
- Get a receipt that includes all the vital information about your purchase, including price, materials, maker, and maker's Alaska Native village or Tribe.
- Authentic Alaska Native art may carry a State "Silver Hand" symbol which features the words, "Authentic Alaska Native Art from Alaska." By contrast, items may carry a "Made in Alaska" emblem which means that the item was made in Alaska, but not necessarily by an Alaska Native.
- Recognize that authentic Alaska Native art may be expensive because of the artistic skill and effort necessary to produce it. Quality Alaska Native art embodies the artist's craftsmanship, culture, and heritage. If the price seems too good to be true, make sure to ask more questions about the item and its maker.
- If buying online, confirm the seller's physical address and phone number in case you have questions or problems. Check purchase terms, including shipping and handling, refund policies, and delivery date.
- If buying in person, try to pick up and examine a piece before purchasing it. Some items that appear to be soapstone carvings may actually be made of resin. Real stone is cool to the touch, while plastic is warm. Stone also tends to be heavier than plastic. A figure that is presented as hand-carved probably isn't if you see or can order ten more like it that are perfectly uniform or lack surface variations.

1. James Johnson, Tlingit, Raven, Painting, © 2021 *

2. Edwin Noongwook, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, Woman Dancer, © 2018 *

3. Joshua Mendalook, Native Village of Diomedes, Ivory Necklace, © 2021 *

4. Jennie Wheeler, Tlingit, Beaded Moccasins, Sea Otter Fur Trim, © 2021 *



REPORT MISREPRESENTATIONS

- **Indian Arts and Crafts Board**
www.doi.gov/iacb | 888-278-3253
- **Federal Trade Commission**
ReportFraud.ftc.gov | 202-326-2222
- **Alaska Attorney General Office**
 Consumer Protection Unit
www.law.alaska.gov/department/civil/consumer
 907-269-5200/888-576-2529 (toll-free outside Anchorage)

SOURCES FOR INFORMATION ON ALASKA NATIVE ART

- **Anchorage Museum Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center**
www.anchoragemuseum.org/visit/smithsonian-arctic-studies-center
- **University of Alaska Museum of the North**
www.uaf.edu/museum
- **Alaska State Council on the Arts** - arts.alaska.gov
- **Indian Arts and Crafts Board**
www.doi.gov/iacb/alaska-resources
- **Alaska Native Heritage Center** - www.alaskanative.net
- **Alaska State Museums** - www.museums.alaska.gov

5. Earl Atchak, Cup'ik, Chevak, The Future Berry Picker,
 © 2003 University of Alaska Museum of the North, UA2003-13-1, Photographer Barry J. McWayne,
 Rasmuson Foundation Art Acquisition Fund Collection.
6. Audrey Armstrong, Koyukon Athabascan, Wife's Bowl, © 2009 University of Alaska Museum of the
 North, UA2009-18-1, Rasmuson Foundation Art Acquisition Fund Collection
7. George Bennett, Sr., Tlingit, Bentwood Boxes, © 2016

*Indian Arts and Crafts Board Museum Collection

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