Amutat Database Listing Criteria

Introduction

The Amutat database is a resource created by the Alutiiq Museum to connect our audience with ethnographic objects from the Alutiiq world. The database shares information and images of Alutiiq objects held by collecting institutions across the globe and presents them in a searchable online format. As many objects could be added to the database, the museum established the following criteria to identify objects to include.

Curator of Collections Amanda Lancaster, amand@alutiiqmuseum.org, manages the database. Please contact Amanda with questions or requests for collaboration.

Criteria

The database is intended to highlight Alutiiq traditions of design, manufacture, materials use, and decoration. As such, objects included in the database must meet each of the criteria listed below. Items that fall outside of these criteria often hold valuable information on Alutiiq history and the intersections between the Alutiiq and other peoples and cultures, but they are beyond the scope of Amutat.

(1) The object comes from the Alutiiq world – geographically or by direct association with an Alutiiq person.

Examples
   Included:

- A skin cap from Afognak
- A seal poke collected in the community of Ugashik
- A mask carved by a person of Alutiiq descent while living in Sitka.

   Not Included:

- A soapstone lamp from Greenland
- A spruce root basket with no known provenience

(2) The object is an example of Alutiiq manufacture. The object may include materials, construction techniques, and design styles from other cultures, but it must also show evidence of Alutiiq manufacturing—design, materials, alteration, construction, and/or decoration.

Examples
   Included:

- A woven spruce root hat with dentalium shells and painted designs.
- Dory knees cut by Alutiiq boatbuilders
- Clothing sewn from cotton flour sacks by an Alutiiq seamstress
- A wedding dress purchased in a store and hand decorated by Alutiiq seamstresses with beads and embroidery

   Not Included:

- A coiled grass basket by a Yup'ik weaver
- A commercially produced salmon can sealer used by an Alutiiq family

- Russian Orthodox vestments made by a non-Native priest living in an Alutiiq village.

(3) <u>The object was made by an Alutiiq person. This can be difficult to determine for older objects, as a maker is often not recorded. However, contextual clues – the location a piece was collected, the person who collected the piece and their work, the materials used, and even the style of the piece – will often provide clues.</u>

Examples
    Included:

- A grass basket woven by Eunice Neseth of Afognak Village in the Atka style
- A beaded headdress collected on Kodiak in 1872 by a visitor to Alutiiq communities, maker unknown.

    Not Included:

- An Alutiiq-style grass basket made at a Kodiak weaving workshop by a non-Native weaver.

(4) <u>The object is ethnographic. It was collected from a person and reflects Alutiiq traditions Generally, pieces in the database were made before about 1980, when the heritage movement began fueling a renaissance of artistic practice. We consider items made after this date, examples of contemporary Alutiiq art and craft.</u>

    Included:

- A bird arrow tipped with a shotgun shell casing
- A kayak model made for sale in the tourism trade

    Not Included:

- Archaeological artifacts – e.g., stone net sinkers from an ancestral settlement
- Contemporary artwork – works by living and recently passed artists (after ca. 1980)
- Replicas and objects made solely for educational purposes

Documentation

Because the Alutiiq Museum specializes in caring for and interpreting Alutiiq objects, and because it is common for Alutiiq objects to be misidentified or poorly described, the Amutat database includes information from both records shared by collecting institutions and interpretation by knowledgeable Alutiiq Museum staff members.

Examples:

- A staff member observes a basket was woven from spruce root, a detail not recorded in the accompanying accession record, and adds this detail to Amutat.
- A staff member notes that an object is an arrow (based on the style of its base) and not a harpoon head as recorded in the accompanying accession record. The staff member adjusts the description in Amutat and shares the correction with the institution that holds the object.
- A staff recognizes a concentric circle design on an object and notes it in the Amutat database to draw attention to it.