



# HEADDRESS - *NACAQ*



*JJ Orloff models a headdress made by June Simeonoff Pardue.*

Headdresses were once part of the elaborate clothing worn at Alutiiq winter festivals. Participants in these events displayed their prosperity with beautifully crafted garments. The materials and decorative elements used in clothing reflected their wearer's age, gender, and social position. Wealthy Alutiiqs wore elegantly decorated parkas of valuable sea otter, fox, or ground squirrel pelts. Headdresses, jewelry, and tattoos added to the appearance of prestige conveyed by these rich materials. The less affluent wore simple clothing of common materials like bird skins. Whatever your status, your clothes provided a link to the spiritual world. Alutiiqs kept their garments clean, well repaired, and nicely decorated to show respect for the creatures that supported human life.

Women's headdresses were typically made from hundreds of glass beads strung on sinew and embellished with feathers colored with cranberry or blueberry juice. Strands of small beads were tied into a tight fitting cap with many dangling lengths attached to the sides and the back. These attachments often featured larger, heavier beads that swayed, glittered, and jingled as the wearer moved. In Prince William Sound, the daughters of Alutiiq chiefs wore headdresses of beads and dentalium shells that extended far down their bodies, sometimes reaching their heels. Beaded headdresses were often accompanied by matching earrings, chokers, necklaces, and belts. Teenage girls and young women wore these lavish ornaments to symbolize their passage into adulthood.

Men also wore headdresses. These garments were hood-shaped, and though they might include beads, they lacked the long strings associated with women's *nacat*. Some were made of ermine skins, decorated with feathers, pieces of animal hair, strips of leather and gut skin, and embellished with embroidery.

Today, headdresses remain a part of traditional dress. Alutiiq Elders, dignitaries, and performers wear them for special occasions. Along with the increasing use of these garments there is a growing interest in their manufacture. Alutiiq women are exploring the art of beading and passing it to the next generation through classes in village schools.