

Yupik masks tour Alaska through October 1996

"Our Way Of Making Prayers: The Living Tradition Of Yup'ik Masks," the first major exhibition of Yup'ik Eskimo material planned by Alaska Native people in collaboration with the Anchorage Museum community and organized by the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, will open at the Toksook Bay Dance Festival and be on view Jan. 18-21.

The 58 masks on exhibit in Toksook Bay, collected from southwestern Alaska villages between the late 1800's and the

1940's, will be used to assist young people in understanding the ways of their ancestors, shown in the context of the stories which inspired them and the dances that were celebrated in the lives of the Yup'ik-people.

"Our Way Of Making Prayers" is curated by Dr. Ann Fienup-Riordan, an Alaska anthropologist, with guidance from a group of Yup'ik elders and traditional bearers, including Andy Paukan of St. Marys, Paul John and Teresa John of

Toksook Bay, Cecilia Martz and John Pinquayak of Chevak, Mary Stachelrodt and Alexie Issac of Bethel, and Elsie Mather, Kwigillingok and Bethel.

Linguist Marie Meade interviewed numerous Yup'ik elders about the masks and their associated stories and dances and translated their words, which will be used in the interpretation of the exhibition, and in a bilingual catalog, written by Fienup-Riordan and published by the University of Washington Press, which will accompany "Our Way Of Making Prayers."

Following the Toksook Bay Festival, the 58 masks and an additional 32 masks will be on display at the Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center in Bethel from Feb. 1 through the Camai Dance Festival March 25.

All of the masks are on loan from the Alaska State Museum in Juneau, the Sheldon Jackson Museum in Sitka, the University of Alaska Museum in Fairbanks, the Burke Museum in Seattle and the National Museum of the American

Indian in New York City.

Following the showing in Bethel, the 90 masks will return to Anchorage where they will join an additional 100 masks from the Museum für Volkerkunde in Berlin, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., the Moravian Historical Society in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and the Anchorage Museum. Masks from several private collections will also be included. The Anchorage display will open May 9 and continue through the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention in October 1996.

In Anchorage a four-day Alaska Yup'ik Heritage Festival will take place May 9-12, during which dance groups from Toksook Bay and St. Marys will perform and Yup'ik visual artists will demonstrate various crafts. Also in Anchorage, a two-day symposium to complement the exhibition will take place May 10-11.

Major support for "Our Way Of Making Prayers" is provided by grants and corporate gifts.