

Alutiiq Masks Return After 136 Years

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{audio}images/stories/mp3/080507.alutiiq_masks.mp3{/audio}

French Collection Loaning Masks For Exhibit

Anne Hillman/KMXT

After 136 years, part of a French collection of Alutiiq masks have returned home to Kodiak for an exhibition. Anne Hillman has more.

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The masks, commissioned and collected by French anthropologist Alphonse Pinart in 1872, will be exhibited at the Alutiiq Museum at the end of May. It took the Museum's Executive Director Sven Haakanson, Jr. six years to bring back the masks. He helped unpack them on Monday morning.

Clip -1

Haakanson excitedly spoke about the morning's work. He was helped by local elders and Celine Ramio, the conservator from the Musee de la Ville de Paris, who helped transport the masks from their home in France. Rose Kinsley interpreted as Homue described her feelings.

Clip - 2

Ramio came to Kodiak to help protect the masks during the 4 days of transport and to learn more about Alutiiq culture. She said the masks are meaningful to French museum visitors as well.

Clip - 3

The local exhibit will include 34 masks of varying sizes and ages that were used for dancing. Some of the masks were carved with stones and beavers' teeth, others with metal. Nine of the smaller, brightly painted masks were commissioned by Pinart and he wrote down the songs and stories associated with them.

To prepare for the exhibit, Haakanson is building a wooden structure in the corner of the museum.

Clip - 4

The museum will display translations of the stories alongside the masks.

Clip - 5

Haakanson says the exhibit gives a glimpse of the Alutiiq past that he hopes will have a profound affect on modern expressions of the culture.

Clip - 6

The exhibit opens to the public on May 24 and will show in Kodiak until September then move to Anchorage. In Kodiak, I’m Anne Hillman.