

# Alaska natives show masterworks

Sixty thousand filter-feeding baleen whales in the Pacific Ocean head north each spring, undertaking a great journey to reach the nutrient-rich waters of Alaska. They'll migrate along the southeastern archipelago and southern coast of Alaska before passing through the Aleutian Island chain. There, they'll turn north once more and swim up the Bering Sea to complete their 6,000-mile voyage before entering the richest phytoplankton waters of all, the Arctic Ocean.

Along the way, the great behemoths swim by countless seals, sea otters, coastal brown bears, walrus, bald eagles, sea lions, and polar bears. Schools of herring and salmon swim underneath them; innumerable flocks of waterfowl fly overhead. Along the shores of the Bering Sea, the first whale's arrival arouses an innate longing within the traditional peoples, one that has been occurring for millennia—they're irresistibly compelled to commence the hunting seasons for all animals yet again.

The Alaskan Native Peoples still closely follow the annual hunting cycle, although their equipment is mostly non-traditional now. Another change to their lifestyle is that certain parts of these animals get utilized as material for artwork that will be acquired by the outside world, artwork that respectfully honors the world of, and their life in, the Far North.

The 21 peoples comprising "Alaska Natives" come from one of three primary populations — the Coastal Region Peoples of the south, west, and north; The Athabaskan Peoples of interior Alaska; The Northwest Coast Peoples of Alaska's southeastern archipelago. They are comparable to the three language groups of Europe — the Romance, Germanic, and Slavic nations. Each has varying languages and cultures, but within these three primary groups they remain relatively similar.

The people and artwork of Don Johnston, Teresa White, and Mark Tetpon — Aleut, Yup'ik, Inupiaq — have similarities while being distinctly different from that of the Athabaskan and Northwest Coast peoples.

Don, Aleut, moved to Anchorage 35 years ago to work construction but suffered a somewhat fortuitous back injury. While recovering, he met the highly acclaimed Inupiaq baleen basket weaver James Omnik Sr. James taught him the art and Don eventually became so skilled that some are now heralding him

as perhaps the finest baleen basket-weaver ever.

Baleen baskets are woven with the filtering plates found inside the mouth of plankton-eating whales. Baleen has a strength and flexibility comparable to fiberglass, so attempting to weave a small, intricate basket of this rigidity demands strength and fine motor dexterity at the same time. Typically, an elegantly carved walrus ivory handle or finial sits atop the basket's lid.

Don's contemporary perspectives on the traditional art-form not only explore the possibilities of what baleen baskets can be but led him to capture the 2017 Best of Show Award at the renowned and juried Native American art show — the Heard Museum Indian Fair and Market in Phoenix, Arizona. Seldom does an artist from Alaska gain entrance to this annual event; to win Best of Show is unprecedented.

Mark Tetpon, Inupiat, is a wood-walrus ivory-bone master carver who is virtually unknown outside of Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. He has done numerous shows in Anchorage and Seattle, where his pieces are quickly acquired, thus secreting away knowledge of his works and awareness about his prodigious talent.

Mark's pieces depict sea mammals or birds as they are understood within the spiritual realms of his people. A sculptured polar bear or

walrus might be drumming; an honoring mask that depicts a loon or seal's body will be surrounded by a dozen smaller sculptures paying homage to the life of The People.

Mark's father, John, from the traditional village of Shaktoolik along the Bering Sea Coast near Nome, mentored him in the ways of the Inupiaq people, during Mark's early artistic endeavors. John still collaborates with Mark on some pieces.

Bronze and ceramic sculptor Teresa White, Yup'ik Eskimo, is being lauded as one of the blossoming talents in the Native American art world. Her fresh perspectives on the ancient Yup'ik belief of transformation garnered a Best of Sculpture Award in 2018 at the Santa Fe Indian Market, the other apex event for Native American art venues.

Transformation concerns the traditional Yup'ik belief that a human can at least spiritually, if not also physically, become an animal—and vice versa—if proper behaviors are maintained. Thus, humans and the animals reside in a type of metaphysical brother/sisterhood coexistence. Teresa's works honor the interconnection of all beings, often focusing on the defining moments of the metamorphosis.

Note: The Marine Mammals Protection Act of 1972 limited the taking of bowhead and beluga whales in U.S. waters to the



PHOTO PROVIDED

Baleen Whales Breaching Coast of Alaska.

Inupiaq who live along the coast. However, other Alaska Native Peoples along Alaska's coastlines may harvest other marine mammals. There has long been a tradition of trading sea mammal parts among the different groups, so any Alaska Native may acquire the materials necessary for producing artwork from it. Once the sea mammal part has been hand-worked, it can be sold as long as the work will remain within the United States.

These artists will be offering an in-person show in Sisters April 26-28. Friday: Artist Reception from 4 to

7 p.m. with Jim Cornelius providing music. Saturday: art-making demonstration. Sunday: artists available till mid-afternoon. All events will take place at Raven Makes Gallery at 182 E. Hood Ave.



**Tasty THURSDAY**  
Caduceus Cellars  
April 25, 5-7 p.m.

**LIVE MUSIC**  
Sat., April 27, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Jazz Folks

391 W. Cascade Ave. | 541-549-2675  
corkcellarswinebistro.com

*Gypsy Wind Clothing*



Comfortable,  
Colorful, Affordable

**351 W. Hood Ave., Sisters**  
Wed.-Sat., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. | Closed Sun.-Tues.

Celebrating 4th Friday Artwalk

Supporting the Arts in Sisters for three generations.  
Visit Sisters Saloon & Ranch Grill  
after the Artwalk for  
dinner and drinks in  
one of Sisters' most  
historic buildings.  
Dine in or take out.  
Open til midnight.





190 E. Cascade Ave. • 541-549-RIBS

Not Using Your RV? Want it Sold?

CONSIGNMENTS WANTED!

9 REASONS to Consign  
Your RV with Larry's RV

- ★ We arrange financing!
- ★ We certify the RV as sound with a full systems check!
- ★ RV is shown at our lot, not at your home!
- ★ We have excellent Highway 97 exposure!



See our complete inventory  
online at [www.larrysrv.com](http://www.larrysrv.com)

Call 541-923-4564

3000 S. Hwy. 97 in Redmond

Stitchin' Post Gallery

4th Friday Art Stroll • April 26, 4-7pm  
Featuring Art Quilts by June Jaeger



CENTRAL OREGON  
QUILT SHOP HOP

APRIL 25-27, 2019  
Thursday - Saturday 9am - 5:30 pm

Grand Prize: Bernina Sewing Machine  
+ \$50 & \$25 Gift Certificates from each shop  
Free Fat 1/8 from each shop  
- Free Mystery Quilt Pattern -  
(Pick up a clue from each shop)



311 W. CASCADE AVE. • SISTERS, OREGON  
(541) 549-6061 • [stitchinpost.com](http://stitchinpost.com)