

# Decolonizing Alaska

As the world's attention shifts to the shrinking polar ice cap and the future of our planet, Alaska's place in the world has moved from the fringe to the center. Widely considered a "resource state," rich in extracts such as gold, fish, timber and oil, Alaska has been colonized for centuries by forces that divide and dominate this state's identity.

Alaska's art market has for decades reflected the colonization and repression that has defined the industrialization of Alaska, a stereotypical idea of Alaska featuring dogsleds and Eskimos, igloos and objects of native iconography often reproduced abroad. In reality, Alaska artists present expansive ideas of Alaskan culture and people in art that explores both endangered traditions and new constructs of identity. Alaska's artists propose a confluence of indigenous and global materials, expanding and redefining the roles of tradition and technology to explore difficult territories and express new ways of being.

How should we tell the stories of colonization? The challenge is not left to Alaskan Native artists alone. Excluding non-Native artists from the conversation only perpetuates colonization. The impact of the debate and the effort to resist colonization will be as big as the span of its engagement. Decolonization requires the concerted efforts and profound participation of both the colonizer and the colonized.

A new generation of Alaskan artists embrace adaptation and reinvention. Cross-pollination and hybridization between indigenous Alaskan and global materials and technologies is the direction of the future. The shared innovations, unconventional materials and respectful inquiry of this exhibit dismantles a hierarchy of colonization and celebrates a new era.

As we grapple with challenges of living at the leading edge of global environmental and cultural change, Alaska's traditional arts and technologies, which depend on the complex web of a healthy ecosystem, are more vulnerable than ever. Yet, in Alaska's diverse artistic production we see courage, ambition and ingenuity blazing from one generation of artists to the next, leaping across vast geographic distances and cultural experiences. Artistic invention and imagination are reshaping traditions and infusing Alaska with resilience. New possibilities for cultural identity and sustainability are emerging in an environment of respect and innovation.

## Special Thanks to:

