

## Pratt Museum Hosts Workshop Session as Part of Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center and Bristol Bay Foundation Project

Homer, Alaska (September 27, 2024)

*Pratt Museum Curator of Botanical Exhibits, Yarrow Hinnant, and Head Gardener and Ninilchik Tribal Member, Shawn Jackinsky, collaborated with the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center to participate in and facilitate multiple sessions of this project*



Recently, Pratt Museum Curator of Botanical Exhibits, Yarrow Hinnant, and Head Gardener, Shawn Jackinsky, collaborated on the project *Woven Together: Taperrnat Research and Art*, organized by Dawn Biddison, Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center in Alaska, in collaboration with the Bristol Bay Foundation and Alaska Native community members. The goal of this project is to support teaching and learning about Indigenous knowledge and techniques of harvesting and working with *taperrnat* (beach wildrye grass in the Yup'ik language) by connecting Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous students, and local learners.



In August, Emily Johnston, a Yup'ik knowledge keeper and weaver, accompanied learners on an outing to collect local beach wildrye. Emily (wearing a red jacket in photos above) led the group in identifying grass that is ideal for weaving, and taught them how to harvest it properly. She then instructed the group on how to braid and hang the grass for drying.

Ninilchik Tribal Member and Pratt Museum Head Gardener Shawn Jackinsky also collected wildrye grass (*Leymus mollis*) specimens that will go to herbarium collections, two for the University of Alaska in Fairbanks, Alaska and two for the U.S. National Herbarium at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. Herbarium samples harvested from seven locations for the Woven Together project were collected and documented by Indigenous community members of these lands, which has not been the practice of herbariums and scientists generally in the past.

Shawn harvested the herbarium samples, under the guidance of Emily Johnston. With a goal of collecting samples with traits desired by Indigenous weavers, Emily showed him examples of good weaving grass. His description and notes on the samples will accompany the specimens to the herbariums, along with contextual photographs, where they will be part of the official scientific record.



In September, the Pratt Museum hosted a second workshop for the *Woven Together* project, on weaving *tapernat*. Alutiiq and Iñupiaq weaver June Simeonoff Pardue led the workshop, sharing her knowledge of techniques for processing *tapernat* and weaving it into mats. The photos below include the workshop in progress, as well as a selection of items from the Pratt Museum Collection that are made from the same grass.



Information gathered, shared, and documented during this project will be added to the Smithsonian Learning Lab Platform, a website that is free to access by the public. The Learning Lab sites for the Arctic Studies Center in Alaska can be found here <https://learninglab.si.edu/> and features information about Alaska Native cultures and educational resources created in collaboration with Alaska Natives.

**About *Woven Together: Taperrnat Research and Art*** This project was co-developed by Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center Museum Specialist, Dawn Biddison, the Bristol Bay Foundation, and Alaska Native participants. It has been reviewed and approved by the Alaska Native Museum Sovereignty group and by tribal representatives in areas where the work is taking place: The Native village of Eklutna, Ninilchik Village Tribe, and Naknek Native Village Council.

“*Woven Together* will be based on work with Yup’ik, Sugpiaq, and Dena’ina community members – whom the Bristol Bay Foundation serves – as partners, participants, educators, learners and content-creators, along with other Alaska collaborators, for: 1) researching and harvesting *taperrnat* (beach wildrye grass in the Yup’ik language); 2) teaching how to prepare and weave *taperrnat*; and 3) creating and sharing resources for educators and learners. Alaska Native Knowledge-Keepers will be at the center of each element, and Alaska Native cultural protocols, values and expertise will be honored and shared throughout the project and in the co-created educational resources.” (Biddison, “Woven Together: A ‘Together We Thrive’ Project”, *ASC Newsletter*, May 2024, p. 17).

Information about a related project can be found here <https://learninglab.si.edu/collections/weaving-a-yupik-issran-grass-carryingbag/sbmuMYcg9n5Gv0QC>

**About the Pratt Museum** The mission of the Pratt Museum is to strengthen relationships between people and place through stories relevant to Kachemak Bay. It fulfills its mission by facilitating engagement between community members and strengthening understandings of our shared place. Through these activities, the unique relationship between the people and places of Kachemak Bay will be sustained far into the future. The Museum is open daily from 10am-6pm from Memorial Day to Labor Day and Tuesday-Saturday from 11am-4pm the rest of the year. Visit the Pratt Museum at 3779 Bartlett Street in Homer. Tel (907) 235-8635. More information is available at <http://www.prattmuseum.org/>.

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