

SHI Vitality of NWC Arts Survey

PREPARED FOR:

Sealaska Heritage Institute

December 2020

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McDowell Group Anchorage Office

1400 W. Benson Blvd., Suite 510
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

McDowell Group Juneau Office

9360 Glacier Highway, Suite 201
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Website: www.mcdowellgroup.net



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Introduction and Methodology

Introduction

The Vitality of Northwest Coast Arts survey was conducted in order to better understand cultural artmaking among Sealaska shareholders, including art mediums, skill level, motivations, material sources, sales venues, and income from art, for example. In preparation for development of a Certificate of Merit in Northwest Coast Arts program, respondents were also asked about the importance of NWC art, the value of obtaining a certificate of merit, and desired courses.

Methodology

The survey was designed and fielded online by Sealaska Heritage Institute in July and August 2020 using Survey Monkey. A link to the survey was posted on the SHI Facebook page with a potential reach of about 20,000 individuals. Links were also sent to artists in the SHI artist database, and subscribers to SHI e-blasts. A total of 223 people responded to the survey.

Cultural Artmaking Participation

Among all survey respondents, three-quarters (77%) said they participated in cultural artmaking.

Table 1. Do you currently participate in cultural artmaking?

Base: All respondents

n=223	% of Total
Yes	77
No	23

Most Common Art Forms

When asked for their top three art mediums, cultural artmaking participants identified over 13 different mediums. The most common mediums were formline (57%), beading (39%), felt sewing (28%), wood carving (27%), cedar bark weaving (24%), plant harvesting/medicinal (24%). A list of “other” mediums is provided in the Appendix B.

Table 2. What are your top three mediums as an Alaska Native artist?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=158	% of Base
Formline (painting, drawing, prints)	57
Beading	39
Felt sewing	28
Wood carving	27
Cedar bark weaving	24
Plant harvesting/medicinal	24
Ravenstail weaving	18
Silver/copper/gold engraving	13
Fur, skin, leather sewing	11
Spruce root weaving	8
Chilkat weaving	8
Drum-making	3
Film/digital art	3
Other	6

Level of Experience with Various Art Forms

For each of 16 different mediums listed, artists were asked to note whether they wanted to learn the medium, still needed guidance, worked independently, designed their own work, and/or shared knowledge with others. Respondents could choose not to answer, or to choose multiple answers, for each medium.

- The mediums with the highest number of responses were formline/design (138 respondents), beading (118), and wood carving (116).
- The medium with the highest percentage saying they wanted to learn was cedar canoe (91%), followed by wood monumental (82%), and spruce root weaving (74%).
- The medium with the highest percentage saying they still needed guidance was formline/design (49%). This medium also had the highest percentage saying they shared their knowledge with others (35%).
- The medium with the highest percentage saying they worked independently, as well as designed their own work, was beading (37% and 36%, respectively).

**Table 3. I use the following mediums at this level...
(% of those answering; multiple responses allowed)**

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

	I want to learn	I still need guidance	I work independently	I design my own work	I share knowledge with others
Formline/design (n=138)	38	49	26	28	35
Beading (n=118)	28	25	37	36	25
Wood carving (n=116)	56	36	16	17	16
Skin sewing (n=114)	53	27	32	13	17
Felt sewing/applique (n=113)	33	27	27	19	21
Cedar bark weaving (n=111)	44	42	14	13	13
Spruce root weaving (n=101)	74	20	8	5	7
Fiber arts/woven robes (n=100)	59	30	19	14	11
Metal arts (n=94)	73	17	7	13	14
Digital art/film/animation (n=93)	68	24	15	13	10
Storytelling (n=95)	66	22	13	6	20
Dance (n=95)	47	37	13	5	22
Music (n=85)	62	33	9	6	13
Performance (n=81)	52	33	17	11	19
Cedar canoe (n=79)	91	13	4	1	8
Wood monumental (n=77)	82	14	6	10	6

Motivation for Cultural Artmaking

When asked for their strongest motivation for making their artwork, artists most commonly selected cultural connection (90%) and preserving for future generations (79%). Other common responses included to help/include others (46%), want to teach others (42%), and as a source of income (35%).

Table 4. My strongest motivation for making my artwork is...
Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=158	% of Base
Cultural connection	90
Preserving for future generations	79
To help/include others	46
I want to teach others	42
A source of income	35
Performance	15
Exhibition	14
Other	18

Art Material Acquisition

MATERIAL SOURCES

Artists most commonly gathered their art materials within their community (42%), followed by purchasing them online or outside the community (29%), purchasing from other community members (19%), and relying on other community members (12%).

Table 5. Where do you get your materials to make artwork?
Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=154	% of Base
Gather locally within my community	42
Purchase online/outside community	29
Purchase from other community members	19
Rely on other community members	12
Sell to others	1

DIFFICULTY SOURCING MATERIALS

A majority of artists (60%) said they had difficulty sourcing materials. Some artists provided comments regarding difficulties in finding art materials. A verbatim list of comments is provided in Appendix B.

Table 6. I have difficulty sourcing materials.
Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=156	% of Base
Yes	60
No	40

Selling Artwork

VENUES

When asked where they sold their artwork, over one-third (38%) said they did not sell their artwork. The most common sales venues were Facebook/social media (39%), artists' markets (26%), local retailers (23%), galleries (18%), online (17%), and SHI store (13%).

Table 7. What venues do you use to sell your artwork?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=155	% of Base
Facebook/social media	39
Artists' markets	26
Local retailers	23
Galleries	18
Online stores (such as Etsy)	17
SHI store	13
Regional and/or state retailers	10
SHI artists' market	7
Word of mouth	5
Friends/family	4
Commissions	3
Museums	2
Not selling my work	38

INCOME FROM ART

When asked their total income from art sales in the last 12 months, average sales were \$4,600. Over one-half (55%) of artists reported no sales. The most common sales brackets were \$1-\$999 (15%) and \$1,000-\$4,999 (16%). The four artists in the \$50,000+ category include three with sales of \$100,000 and one with sales of \$70,000. Average sales among artists that had sales was \$10,320.

Table 8. What was your total income from art sales in the last 12 months?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=148	% of Base
\$0	55
\$1-\$999	15
\$1,000-\$4,999	16
\$5,000-\$9,999	6
\$10,000-\$49,999	5
\$50,000+	3
Average all artists	\$4,600
Average of those with income	\$10,320

CHALLENGES IN SELLING ARTWORK

When asked for their primary challenge in selling their artwork, one-third of artists (32%) said they had no problems. The most common challenges were time (24%), pricing (18%), and online sales challenges (10%).

Table 9. What is the primary challenge for you in selling your artwork?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=146	% of Base
No problems	32
Time	24
How to price	18
Online sales are tricky	10
Getting good photographs	5
Hard to get stores to carry work	5
Other	6

Training and Education

INTEREST IN TRAINING

All respondents were asked whether there were others in their community interested in learning Northwest Coast art forms. Nearly all said yes (93%), including 24% who said there were more than ten people interested in their community.

Table 10. Are there others in your community who would be interested in learning Northwest Coast art forms if they were offered?

Base: All respondents

n=185	% of Total
Yes	93
More than 10	24
No	6

MARKETING AND SMALL BUSINESS TRAINING

Nearly two-thirds of artists (63%) said they were interested in art marketing and small business training.

Table 11. Are you interested in art marketing and small business training?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=157	% of Base
Yes	63
No	37

When asked what types of business and marketing training they would prefer, artists most commonly suggested online classes (70%), master/apprenticeship models (51%), local classes (47%), and informal videos/web resources (44%).

Table 12. What types of business and marketing training would you prefer?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=146	% of Base
Classes online	70
Master/apprenticeship models	51
Classes in my community	47
Informal videos/web resources	44
Other training	9

LIMITATIONS FOR NEW LEARNING

When asked about limitations to accessing new information or learning new techniques, artists most commonly cited too few classes offered locally (66%), limited access to artists willing/trained to teach (59%), difficult to get materials/cost of materials (44%), and examples of historic work not available (30%).

Table 13. What are some limitations for you to access new information or learn new techniques?

Base: Participates in cultural artmaking

n=149	% of Base
Few classes offered in my community	66
Limited access to skilled artists who are willing or trained to teach	59
Materials are hard to get/cost of materials	44
Examples of historic work are not available	30
Need more time	7
Internet access is hard for me	6
Need more online options	6
Other	7

Certificate of Merit

Prior to questions regarding the development of a Certificate of Merit program, respondents read the following statement:

SHI is exploring a Northwest Coast Art Certificate of Merit program. The program would likely consist of 6 courses and be offered for optional college credit. Some courses may be offered that are currently not available for college credit. The program would likely allow specialization in a chosen medium and provide the option of distance learning. To help us in this effort please share your thoughts with us.

The following questions were asked of all survey respondents.

Value of Certificate of Merit

Obtaining a Certificate of Merit in Northwest Coast Art would be a value to me because...

A total of 195 survey participants provided responses. The most common themes are listed below. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

- It would provide credibility/confidence/legitimacy.
- It would make me a better artist/more knowledgeable.
- The ability to learn from skilled artists.
- I would be able to pass on knowledge.
- It would add value to my work/increase sales.

Courses that Would Enhance a Certificate of Merit Program

What types of courses do you feel would enhance a Certificate of Merit program?

All NWC art forms were mentioned, most commonly formline, carving, and weaving. Additional themes are listed below. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

- History of NWC art/traditions/Native culture
- Business/marketing/finance
- Native languages
- Material harvesting/preparation
- Tool making

Uncertainty Regarding the value of a Certificate of Merit

I am uncertain about the value of a Certificate of Merit in Northwest Coast Art because...

A total of 131 survey participants provided responses. The most common themes are listed below. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

- I am not interested.
- Not sure what it is or what it means.
- I am already trained.
- The cost.

Education

DESIRED LEVEL OF EDUCATION

When asked what level of education they were interested in, the most common response was Certificate of Merit in Northwest Coast Arts (45%), followed by Master’s or higher (14%), Associate (11%), and Bachelor’s (9%).

Those currently participating in cultural artmaking were less likely to be interested in a Certificate of Merit (40%) compared to those who are not (62%). This is likely due to a number of cultural artmakers that have been working at their art for many years and have achieved a level of success. Cultural artmakers were more interested in a Bachelor’s (11% versus 2% of others) or a Master’s (17% versus 7%).

Table 14. Which level of education do you feel would be of interest to you at this point in your life?

Base: All respondents

n= 196	% of Total
Certificate of Merit in Northwest Coast Arts	45
Associate Degree	11
Bachelor’s Degree	9
Master’s Degree or higher	14
Other	20

What do you feel the benefit of this level of education would be?

A total of 173 survey participants provided responses. The most common themes are listed below. Responses by those that expressed interest in achieving a certificate of merit were similar to other respondents, although they were more likely to mention gaining a better/deeper knowledge of NWC art, and the ability to gain knowledge not available through traditional higher learning. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

- A sense of accomplishment/confidence/satisfaction
- Increased knowledge/improved skills
- More employment opportunities
- Better understanding of NWC art

INDIGENOUS ART STUDIES AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

Over half of respondents (58%) said they would be interested in pursuing indigenous Art Studies at the college level. (That includes 62% of those engaged in cultural artmaking, and 45% of those not engaged in cultural artmaking.)

Table 15. I would be interested in pursuing Indigenous Art Studies at the college level.

Base: All respondents

n=214	% of Total
Yes	58
No	34
Maybe	7

Distance Delivery

INTERNET ACCESS

Among all survey respondents, 93% said they had easy access to internet/technology at home to take online or distance delivered classes.

Table 16. Do you have easy access to internet or technology at home to take online classes or distance delivered classes?

n=222	% of Total
Yes	93
No	7

USE OF ONLINE CONTENT AND NEED FOR ASSISTANCE

Please tell us a little bit about how you access online content and what might be helpful to increase your abilities.

A total of 195 survey participants provided responses. Many respondents mentioned the type of equipment they use (primarily laptops and cell phones), and the online applications they use (Facebook, Google, Instagram, Zoom, YouTube, and Venmo) The other most common themes are listed below. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

- More/better access and connections
- Better equipment
- Need to learn basic skills

Importance of Northwest Coast Art

Authentic Northwest Coast Art is important to me because...

A total of 221 survey participants provided responses. The most common themes are listed below. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

- It is a connection to traditions/culture/history/heritage/spirituality.
- It is a connection to my Tribe/clan/ancestors.
- It is who we are.
- It is cultural preservation.

Final Comments

A final survey question allowed respondents to provide any additional thoughts they had.

Is there anything further that you would like to share about studying, creating and/or selling your traditional artwork?

A total of 114 survey participants provided responses. Many respondents expressed gratitude to SHI for all they do, while others reiterated responses to other survey question. Some suggested other types of training, including more in-depth marketing, website design, how to display art, and how to increase sales. Several respondents suggested the need for more opportunities for artists to exhibit their art. Verbatim responses are included in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Respondent Characteristics

Respondents were more likely to be female than male (68% versus 29%). They most commonly fell into the 26-45 age group (51%) followed by the 46-62 age group (43%). Over half (57%) were Southeast Alaska residents, while 9% resided elsewhere in Alaska, and 33% lived outside Alaska.

Table 17. Gender Identity

n=206	% of Total
Female	68
Male	29
Non-binary	2
Prefer not to answer	<1

Table 18. Age

n=174	% of Total
18 or under	2
19-25	5
26-45	51
46-62	43
63+	-

Table 19. Community

n=202	% of Total
Southeast Alaska	57
Other Alaska	9
Outside Alaska	33