

BIO



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Aaron Elmore has been the exhibit specialist at the Alaska State Museum since 2012. He has helped produce over 60 exhibits at the museum in his tenure. From 2014-2016 he was the lead mountmaker for the new Alaska State Museum building's long-term galleries.

ABSTRACT

Three-Dimensional Mounts for Raven's Tail and Chilkat Robes

The Alaska State Museum would like to propose the presentation of a prerecorded talk for the 2024 Mountmakers Forum entitled "Three-Dimensional Mounts for Raven's Tail and Chilkat Robes." In the late summer of 2019, we began work on the design and fabrication of a new kind of mount for Northern Northwest coast weavings. The exhibit, entitled *The Spirit Wraps Around You (S.W.A.Y.)*, which was to coincide with dye analysis and work with weavers from across the Northern Northwest Coast, was scheduled to open the summer of 2020.

Yeah. 2020.

By the time we finally opened in May 2021, the mounts for S.W.A.Y. had reached a high level of quality, stability, and invisibility.

Northern Northwest coast robes are made to move, to be danced. Museums often exhibit these fringed weavings laying on an incline or, if robust enough, flat against a wall. Mounted this way they are impressive, but they cannot tell the story of their intended use.

We were urged by our co-curatorial team to exhibit the robes in S.W.A.Y. as if they were being danced. Even posable mannequins would have been too static by themselves and some of the blankets intended for exhibit were not robust enough to rest over shoulder-sized, compound curves for five months. Our solution was a rounded assemblage of steamed wooden slats with a silk gauze panel to flare out the long fringe. Standing on a single, 1"x1" aluminum tube, the nearly invisible mounts seemed to make the blankets float.

The exhibit showcased 30 robes, with 11 on slat mounts. Among the eight body-forms included, three were posable mannequins, one of which was posed as a dancer with a steamed slat armature to make the robe "move." Two early 19th-century robes were displayed at a shallow angle for conservation reasons. Nine more robes were displayed flat, mostly because we ran out of room! These too were given more impact by floating them off the walls 6 inches.

Two S.W.A.Y. mounts have since been re-fit to support and exhibit robes for the Sealaska Heritage Institute here in Juneau. One is currently on loan supporting the Hands Across Time robe (ASM 2020-9-1) at the Juneau-Douglas City Museum. Further, we have consulted with the exhibit team at the Crystal Bridges Museum in Arkansas to help them create a S.W.A.Y. mount for their Space Makers exhibit which opened in May of this year.

We would like to present our process and findings to the Forum. We want mounties, institutions, and their constituents around the world to benefit from what our co-curatorial team asked us to do.