

SEATTLE – As Seattle commemorates the centennial of a world’s fair that helped shape the region as it is today, a new [Burke Museum](#) exhibit will take a critical look at how indigenous peoples were represented at the fair.

In 1909, the [Alaska- Yukon - Pacific - Exhibition](#) (A-Y-P) celebrated the explosion of development in Washington State since the 1897 Yukon Gold Rush and showcased the resources of the region. Nearly four million visitors to the fair were exposed to representations of indigenous cultures from around the Pacific in ways that would seem abhorrent in 2009. Organizers of the A-Y-P did not have the same standards for cross-cultural understanding that prevail today. Indigenous communities were culturally exploited for entertainment and to promote Western capitalism across the Pacific.

“A-Y-P: Indigenous Voices Reply” opened May 30 at the Burke Museum. The exhibit juxtaposes historic objects and photographs from the 1909 fair with contemporary artwork by Native artists to explore how the representation and understanding of indigenous people and cultures has changed over 100 years.

Sixteen contemporary artists including photographer Matika Wilbur (Swinomish/Tulalip), stone carver Tony Ayala (Santa Barbara Chumash), mixed-media artist Philip John Charette (Yup’ik), weaver MaryLou Slaughter (Duwamish), multi-media artist Nick Galanin (Tlingit/Aleut), glass artist Preston Singletary (Tlingit/Filipino/European), multi-media artist Tanis S’eiltin (Tlingit), and multi-media artist David Neel (Kwagiutl) are featured.

Some of the artists in this exhibit drew inspiration from one or several of the objects held in the Burke’s ethnology collection. Garrett Jackson, Tlingit artist, says that “the main inspiration for my works comes from the items my great-grandfather, Lt. George T. Emmons, collected for museums in the late 1800s and early 1900s [the Emmons collection that was exhibited in the Alaska Building at the A-Y-P was purchased after the fair as one of the Burke’s founding ethnology collections]. I really enjoy studying the old pieces my ancestors made, and trying to capture the same feelings and traditions in my work.”

According to Robin Wright, curator of Native American art at the Burke Museum, the intent of the 2009 exhibit is to create a bridge between contemporary indigenous communities and the Burke’s collection of ethnographic objects from those communities.

“The exhibit is an opportunity for Native people to use the Burke’s collections and visibility to voice their sentiments on representation, resistance, re-appropriation, and revival.”

The [Burke Museum](#) is located on the University of Washington campus, at the corner of NE 45th St. and 17th Ave. NE. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, and until 8 p.m. on first Thursdays.