



## Visual Language featuring James Johnson



James Johnson, an enrolled member of the Tlingit and Haida Tribes of Alaska, is an exceptional artist who works in a variety of media, including wood carving, leatherwork, and painting. He is a member of the Tlingit Ch'áak' Dakl'aweidi Clan (Eagle Killerwhale). With a focus on traditional Tlingit wood carving, his work continues the long artistic traditions of his people. Born and raised in Juneau, Alaska, Mr. Johnson currently resides with his family in Phoenix, Arizona.

Encouraged to begin carving by his father, Franklin Johnson, Mr. Johnson is a self-taught artist who has been practicing his craft for fourteen years. He has dedicated his life to reviving the traditional arts of his ancestors. Although there is no word for “artist” in the Tlingit language, those that create carvings were known as *at kach aak'u* (carvers). Carving is an integral part of the preservation of Tlingit history and culture. In the words of Mr. Johnson, “it [carving] is a visual language that represents who the Tlingit people are, and how we live in balance with all things.”

His carvings are made from red and yellow cedar, materials used by Tlingit people for millennia. Utilizing tools such as adzes and crooked knives, he carves his pieces entirely by hand. In addition to creating three dimensional carvings of masks, helmets, and bowls, Mr. Johnson also paints works on canvas inspired by Tlingit designs and motifs. A unique area that he has expanded into is the painting of live edge slabs of mesquite wood with Tlingit designs.

Mr. Johnson has won numerous awards for his work including: 1st Place Wood Sculpture, 2019 SWAIA Santa Fe Juried Art Show, Santa Fe, New Mexico; 1st Place Wood Sculpture, 2020 Sealaska Heritage Celebration Juried Art Show, Juneau, Alaska; and Honorable Mention, Sculpture, 2021 Heard Museum Guild Juried Art Show, Phoenix, Arizona. His work is included in the collections of multiple museums including: the Art Institute of Chicago, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Sioux Indian Museum, and the Interior Museum.

Prices for the artwork can be obtained by contacting The Journey Museum store at (605) 394-2201. To purchase artwork after the exhibit closes, please contact James Johnson through his website at [jamesjohnsonnativeart.com/](http://jamesjohnsonnativeart.com/)

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*Gunakadéit S'aaxwu (Sea Wolf Headdress)*  
Red cedar, abalone, operculum, horse hair, deer hide  
© 2020 James Johnson



*Tsaa X'ayeit (Seal Bowl)*  
Red cedar, operculum, acrylic  
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*Kéet S'aaxw (Killerwhale  
Clan Hat)*  
Red cedar, abalone, horse  
hair, acrylic  
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*Lákt (Bentwood Box)*  
Red cedar, acrylic  
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*T'oos Sankeit (Shark Armor)*  
Elk Hide, Sinew, acrylic  
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