

**CELEBRATIONS: MASK CARVING WITH MIKE WEBBER GR: 9-12 (40-50 HOURS)**

**Elder Quote/Belief:** “Where are my big hands? Where is my big nose? Where is my big face?” Her husband was the bear, but now he had turned into a man. – From the story “The Woman Who Married a Bear” told by Stephan Britskalov, Prince William Sound Elder, 1933<sup>i</sup>



“Masks are an important part of celebrations. Masks bring out the story, the representation of family, and expresses a lot, depending upon the carver and individual.”  
–Mike Webber, Cordova

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Overview:** Sugpiaq masks represented ancestors, helpful and harmful supernatural beings, and the personified spirits of game animals (sing., *suk*, “its person”); all were magically summoned to the qasgiq (ceremonial house) during the winger festivals. The visitations of mask spirits were dramatized by dance, drumming, song, oratory, and ritual enactments of hunting, witnessed by the whole community. The ceremonies were an appeal to the animals for their return to hunters in the coming spring: to Imam Sua, the undersea woman who controlled all sea mammals; and to Nunam Sua, who dwelled in the forest and was the mistress of all land creatures.<sup>ii</sup>

In Prince William Sound, a person’s soul was believed to reside in the breath. After death, it traveled to the sky where there were forest, mountains, and streams just as on earth. At the Chugach Feast of the Dead, feasting and dancing ended with the burning of masks, food and gifts, which rose in the smoke to send message to loved ones and ancestors who have passed and are in the sky world.

**Standards:**

<i>AK Cultural:</i>	<i>AK Content Science:</i>	<i>CRCC:</i>
<b>E1:</b> Recognize and build upon the interrelationships that exist among the spiritual, natural, and human realms in the world around them, as reflected in their own cultural traditions and beliefs as well as those of others.	<b>F1:</b> Develop an understanding of the interrelationships among individuals, cultures, societies, science, and technology.	<b>C4:</b> Students should have the knowledge of traditional dance attire: A) Dance Regalia B) Bentwood visors/head dresses C) Masks

**Lesson Goal:** To understand the connection of the mask with the spiritual world as they are used to emphasize the story being told.

**Lesson Objective(s):** Students will:

- Be able to explain the significance of a traditional Chugach mask and the connections it made to the spiritual world.
- Create a carved wooden mask replica of a traditional Chugach mask.
- Learn the Sugt'stun/Eyak vocabulary words.

**Vocabulary Words:** Sugt'stun Dialects

English:	Prince William Sound:	Lower Cook Inlet:	<a href="#">Eyak:</a>
mask	maskaq	maskaq	
spirit	suq	suk	
Person of the Universe (sun)	Lam Sua		
Female person of all sea animals	Imam Sua		
Mistress of all land animals	Nunam Sua		
Mountain person		Ingngim suga	
Fog person		Taitum suga suuga	
Spirit with a long, pointed head (evil)	kala'aq	kala'aq	

**Materials/Resources Needed:**

- Elder or Recognized Expert carver to demonstrate and teach the art of mask carving
- Logs cut in half -freshly cut birch or ones with tight age rings (or thoroughly soaked for several days to become wet) one per student
- Totes filled with water (to keep block of wood wet)
- Plastic bags (one per student)
- Tracing Paper
- No. 2 Lead Pencil
- Wet Pencil
- Flexible ruler
- Compass (2 or 3)
- Chugach Mask Template by Robert Shaw (attached)
- Adzes- three different sizes – suggest the mini-series with handles attached (can order through Kestrel Tool at [www.kestreltool.com/adzes](http://www.kestreltool.com/adzes) - depending upon size of class, 4 mini-series would be plenty for 10 students. 5 Sitka Straight and Gutter adzes – 2 Lip adzes... if bigger classes, add more Sitka and Gutter adzes.
- Curved/crooked knives - 1 set includes long bend and short bend- order one set per student. (Can order through North Bay Forge at <https://northbayforge.com/bn.htm>)

- Mini knives for hollowing out the back of masks – one set per student (can order through North Bay Forge <https://northbayforge.com/bn.htm>) Short instructional videos showing knives in use are available to watch at [https://northbayforge.com/using\\_them.htm#maintarget](https://northbayforge.com/using_them.htm#maintarget)
- Gouges – 3 different sizes; ¼, 3/8, and ½ inch. The numbers on the gouges are in MM millimeters and the other number is the sweep. (Suggested brand is Swiss made -can order these through Woodcraft <https://www.woodcraft.com/categories/carving-gouges?brand%5B%5D=pfeil+Swiss+made>. Suggest ordering a set of 4 for each size)
- Leather strop (one flat, one rounded) to help sharpen the tools to keep the razor sharp edge on them (order from Woodcraft <https://www.woodcraft.com/products/flexcut-double-sided-paddle-strop> )
- Sand paper, 5 inch orbital electric sander with extra packs of sandpaper. (found at any hardware store)
- Cut resistant gloves (Kevlar or wire mesh) only need to have only one side on. (Can purchase on Amazon...suggest getting 3-Small, 6- Medium and 2-Large depending upon size of class)
- Acrylic Paint of desired colors and paint brushes
- Tung oil (purchase at any hardware store- a little goes a long way)
- Clean white cloths

#### Books:

- Crowell, Aron L., et. al., *Looking Both Ways*, Pg. 191-206
- Crowell, Aron L., et.al., *Living Our Culture, Sharing Our Heritage*, Pg. 170
- Birket-Smith, Kaj, *Chugach Eskimo*, Pgs. 109-111
- Johnson, John, *Chugach Legends*, Pgs 178-186
- Korsun, S.A., et. al, *The Alutiit/Sugpiat: A Catalog of the Collections of the Kunstakamera*, Pg.280-293
- Haakanson, Sven Jr., Steffian, A., *Giinaquq: Like a Face*
- *Two Journeys: A Companion to the Giinaquq*
- Varjola, Pirjo, *Ethlolen Collection*
- Ray, Dorothy J., *Aleut and Eskimo Art*, Pg. 114
- Bridgewater, Alan and Gill, *Carving Masks*
- Bridgewater, Alan and Gill, *Carving Totem Poles & Masks*

#### Website/Videos:

- Chugachmiut Heritage Preservation Website <https://chugachheritageak.org/Celebrations>
- Andrew Abyo – From Kayaks to Masks [https://youtu.be/cp\\_ZuRE24uQ](https://youtu.be/cp_ZuRE24uQ) (2:49)
- Sugpiaq Mask Dance <https://youtu.be/B4cpqtQffVQ>
- Carving a Tlingit Style Mask <https://www.ptwoodschoool.org/carving-a-tingit-style-mask>
- The Local: The Master Carver <https://vimeo.com/238096496>

#### **Teacher Preparation:**

- Invite an Elder or Recognized Expert to explain the traditional uses of masks and teach students how to carve a wooden mask.
- Review with the students the proper ways of showing respect for the Elder guest in classroom.
- Gather all the supplies needed (listed above).

- Blocks of freshly cut wood, variety of adze sizes, small curved /crooked knives, gouges, sand paper/sander, cut proof gloves, mask patterns, No. 2 and pencils to transfer pattern onto wood, compasses, rulers, transfer paper, Tung oil, acrylic paint
- Review and make copies of the lesson for each student.
- Review and have books, videos and websites available for the students to use.

### **Opening:**

Sugpiaq masks represented ancestors, helpful and harmful supernatural beings, and the personified spirits of game animals (sing., *suk*, “its person”); all were magically summoned to the qasgiq (ceremonial house) during the winter festivals. The visitations of mask spirits were dramatized by dance, drumming, song, oratory, and ritual enactments of hunting, witnessed by the whole community. The ceremonies were an appeal to the animals for their return to hunters in the coming spring: to Imam Sua, the undersea woman who controlled all sea mammals; and to Nunam Sua, who dwelled in the forest and was the mistress of all land creatures.<sup>iii</sup>

Most masks were burned after ceremonial use, so not many survived today. There were seven masks found in a cave that recently were repatriated and are now located in the Chugach Alaska Corporation building.

We will be researching about the traditional Chugach masks for the meaning and design behind each one. Once you are drawn to a certain type of mask, you will need to get approval from the instructor before you research more in depth on the background and story that will go with the mask when finished carving for presentation and display.

### **Activities:**

#### **Class I:**

1. If available, introduce the Elder or Recognized Expert to share their TEK on traditional masks and how to carve a mask.
2. Have students research and determine the mask wanting to carve. Suggest to start with simple mask to carve. Lesser details to carve out is easier and can leave the details for painting later.
3. Chainsaw logs of wood that has age rings close together, such as birch. Do **NOT** use cottonwood.
4. Cut the logs into pieces approximately eight to ten inches thick, twelve inches high. Typically, one can look in mirror and think about size of mask. Usually need wood that is about at least an inch larger than face. Split log in half.
5. For mask, you want freshly cut wood or soaked for several days to become thoroughly wet, this makes the wood cutting easier because the grain is swollen.
6. Take bark off to ensure there are no knots.
7. Place log in water and then in plastic bag, making sure to take out all the air as possible and tie shut. Important that the same process be done during the carving process, when finished for the day, **ALWAYS** place the wood in water to re-hydrate it and cover it in a plastic bag making sure to get air out of it so moisture stays in to keep wood wet for the next day.
8. When have mask design, use tracing paper and No. 2 lead pencil. Draw a vertical center line. Draw out the design on one side.
9. Put lead side down on the log and then trace over the lines to have it transfer onto the wood on the one side. You may need to use the wet pencil if the pattern does not transfer.

10. Flip the tracing paper and line up the vertical line then trace over the lines again making sure pattern transfers and it is symmetrical.
11. Mask now starts to come to life, look over the design and make sure the right side and left side match.
12. Determine where the raised portions are located and note where you will need to whittle away to give depth. Using the pattern, making special marks to indicate the raised parts of the mask. You can use a compass to mark out **exact** placement for outside of nose, lips, chin and eyes, using the same point on middle of forehead. Use the compass to also figure out the radius of the head. The compass give symmetry. Use the compass with both wet and no.2 pencil to leave good marks.
13. Carve out the details of facial features to approximately 90 percent and note, always start with the highest point, which is usually the nose, then forehead, then cheeks, then the chin and lips, and finally outside of eyes (eyelids) To make the details stand out you carve out and around the areas. You would start off with the bigger knives for less detail and as more detail the smaller knives, paying close attention where to carve out allowing the portions to be raised.
14. When initial shape is completed, hollow out the back of the face with the adzes, gouges and crooked knives.
15. Cut out (hollow out) back side of mask- approximately ½ inch thick evenly all around. This gives the wood consistency so dries out evenly.
16. Once hollowed out, go back to front and carve about five to eight percent more out from details- to make them stand out more.
17. Once happy with the face, use sandpaper to smooth everything it out.
18. Take a 3-4 week break and allow mask to dry out. Important to leave it alone, undisturbed.
19. During this drying process, for one week the mask should be placed on the floor, undisturbed. Second week placed on counter and last week or two place up high in the room. This allows even drying as it is placed in warmer temperatures each week.
20. NOTE: The wood shrinks (sometimes cracks) but as it dries, it will close up. When the mask crack closes up or thoroughly dried, the last minute clean-up sanding is needed. The mask will be easier to sand smoother when mask is dried as the grain has shrunk.
21. Once details are finalized, smooth out the cutting marks with the orbital sander/sandpaper.
22. Ready for painting, if desired. Mike likes to use acrylic paint.
23. When paint is dry, it is time to oil the whole mask. Mike likes to use tung oil (can be purchased at home depot) and note it goes along way. Use a clean cloth to wipe it all off. Do this twice.
24. Next day - buff and polish with oil, wipe off excess oil and buff in between coats. Repeat 3 times.
25. Attach leather straps on each side of mask above ear, and very top of the mask.

If desired:

1. Make small post –bite bar- in back of the mask for dancer to grip with teeth when dancing. This would be left as you carve out the back of the mask.

### **Assessment:**

- Students conducted research and can explain the meaning behind traditional Chugach masks.
- Students successfully carved a wooden Chugach mask and presented the story behind it.
- Students can successfully say and know the meaning of the Sugt'stun/Eyak vocabulary words.

# STEP-BY-STEP MASK CARVING PROCESS WITH MIKE WEBBER, CORDOVA



**Mike Webber**



Feb 11 at 11:44 AM • 👥

*Ready to teach a Mask class tonight using Adze and Crooked knives. There will be lots of chips tonight*



## **Step 1: Getting the Wood**

- Chainsaw logs of wood that has age rings close together, such as birch. Do **NOT** use cottonwood.
- Cut the logs into pieces approximately eight to ten inches thick, twelve inches high. Typically, one can look in mirror and think about size of mask. Usually need wood that is about at least an inch larger than face. Split log in half.

NOTE: For mask, best to have freshly cut wood, or if have to, soaked for several days to become thoroughly wet, this makes the wood cutting easier because the grain is swollen.

### **Step 2: Preparing the Block of Wood**

- Take bark off to ensure there are no knots.
- Place log in water and then in plastic bag, making sure to take out all the air as possible and tie shut. It is important the same process be done during the carving of mask, when finished for the day, **ALWAYS** place the wood in water to re-hydrate it and tightly cover it in a plastic bag making sure to get air out of it so moisture stays in to keep wood wet for the next day.

### **Step 3: Tracing the Mask Pattern onto Wood Block**

- When have mask design, use tracing paper and No. 2 lead pencil. Draw a vertical center line. Draw out the design on one side.
- Put lead side down on the log and then trace over the lines to have it transfer onto the wood on the one side. You may need to use the wet pencil if the pattern does not transfer.
- Flip the tracing paper and line up the vertical line then trace over the lines again making sure pattern transfers and it is symmetrical.
- Mask now starts to come to life, look over the design and make sure the right side and left side match.

### **Step 4: Gather Tools for Carving**

Tools needed:

- Various sizes of adzes- Sitka Straight and Gutter adzes – and Lip adzes being made to be used for the mask carving class.
- Curved/crooked knives -long bend and short bend
- Mini knives for hollowing out the back of masks
- Gouges – 3 different sizes  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and 1 inch wide
- Cut resistant gloves



Adzes handles being made by Mike Webber



Mask carving class in Cordova. Pictured are Teal, Angela (hidden) Dave and Mike.

### **Step 5: Whittle Mask Features According to Depth**

- Determine where the raised portions are located and note where you will need to whittle away to give depth.
- Using the pattern, making special marks to indicate the raised parts of the mask.
  - You can use a compass to mark out **exact** placement for outside of nose, lips, chin and eyes, using the same point on middle of forehead. Use the compass to also figure out the radius of the head. The compass give symmetry. Use the compass with both wet and no.2 pencil to leave good marks.
- Carve out the details of facial features to **approximately 90 percent**.
- Note, **always** start with the highest point, which is usually the nose, then forehead, then cheeks, then the chin and lips, and finally outside of eyes (eyelids).
- To allow the details to stand out, carve out and around the areas. Start off with the bigger knives for less detail and as it becomes more detailed, use the smaller knives, paying close attention where to carve out allowing the portions to be raised.



Teal and Angela carving out mask features



Mask features carved out to about 90 percent.

### **Step 6: Hollow Out the Back**

- When initial shape is completed, hollow out the back of the face with the adzes, gouges and crooked knives.
- Cut out (hollow out) back side of mask to approximately ½ inch thick- **evenly** all around. This gives the wood consistency so dries out evenly. Note the marks made in the back of mask saying to stop in certain areas.

If desired:

- Make small post –bite bar- in back of the mask for dancer to grip with teeth when dancing. This would be left as you carve out the back of the mask.





Mask hollowed out evenly to approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  thick all over.

### **Step 7: Finalize Detailed Features**

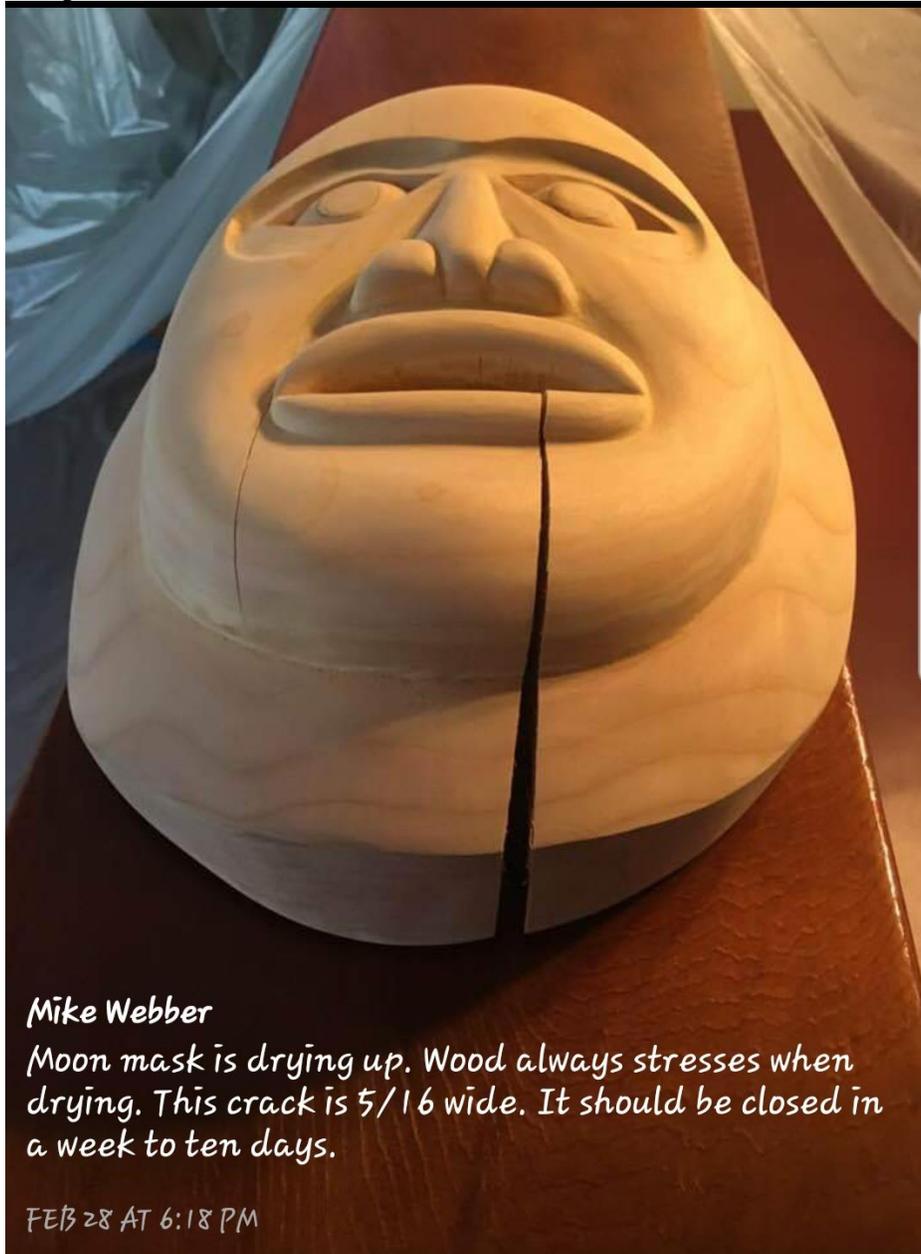
- Once hollowed out, go back to front and carve about five to eight percent more out from details- to make these stand out more.
- Once happy with the face, use sandpaper to smooth everything it out.



### **Step 8: Allow Mask to Dry**

- Take a 3-4 week break and allow mask to dry out. Important to leave it alone, undisturbed.
- During this drying process, place the mask at different heights:
  - One week the mask should be placed on the floor, undisturbed.
  - Second week place mask at counter height.
  - Third/last week or two- place mask up high in the room. Changing the height of mask during drying, allows a more even drying as it is placed in warmer temperatures each week.

**NOTE:** When the wood shrinks it sometimes cracks, but as the mask dries, the crack will close up so no need to panic.



### **Step 9: Finalize Details**

- If the mask did crack, wait until the crack closes up to ensure it is thoroughly dried.
- Now, the last minute clean-up sanding is needed. The mask will be easier to sand smoother when mask is dried as the grain has shrunk.
- Once details are finalized, smooth out the cutting marks with the orbital sander/sandpaper.



Mike, Angela, Tiffany and Teal

### **Step 10: Painting and Oiling Mask**

#### Painting-

- If desired, mask is ready for painting. Mike recommends using acrylic paint as it quite easy to work with, covers more and dries quickly. Pay close attention to bring out details.
- Allow the paint to dry.

#### Oiling-

- When paint is dry, it is time to oil the whole mask.
- Using tung oil, rub oil all over the mask and note it goes along way.
- Allow oil to absorb into mask.
- Use a clean cloth to wipe oil all off. Do this twice.
- Next day – buff and polish with oil, wipe off excess oil and buff with clean cloth in between coats. Repeat 3 times.
- If did not make bite post, can now attach leather straps on each side of mask above ear, and very top of the mask.

<sup>i</sup> Crowell, A.L., et.al, *Looking Both Ways*, Pg. 191

<sup>ii</sup> Crowell, A.L., et.al, *Living Our Culture, Sharing Our Heritage*, Pg. 170



Chugach Mask, photo courtesy of Dr. Crowell, Smithsonian Arctic Studies

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**Traditional Chugach Mask Template Drawing by Robert Shaw**

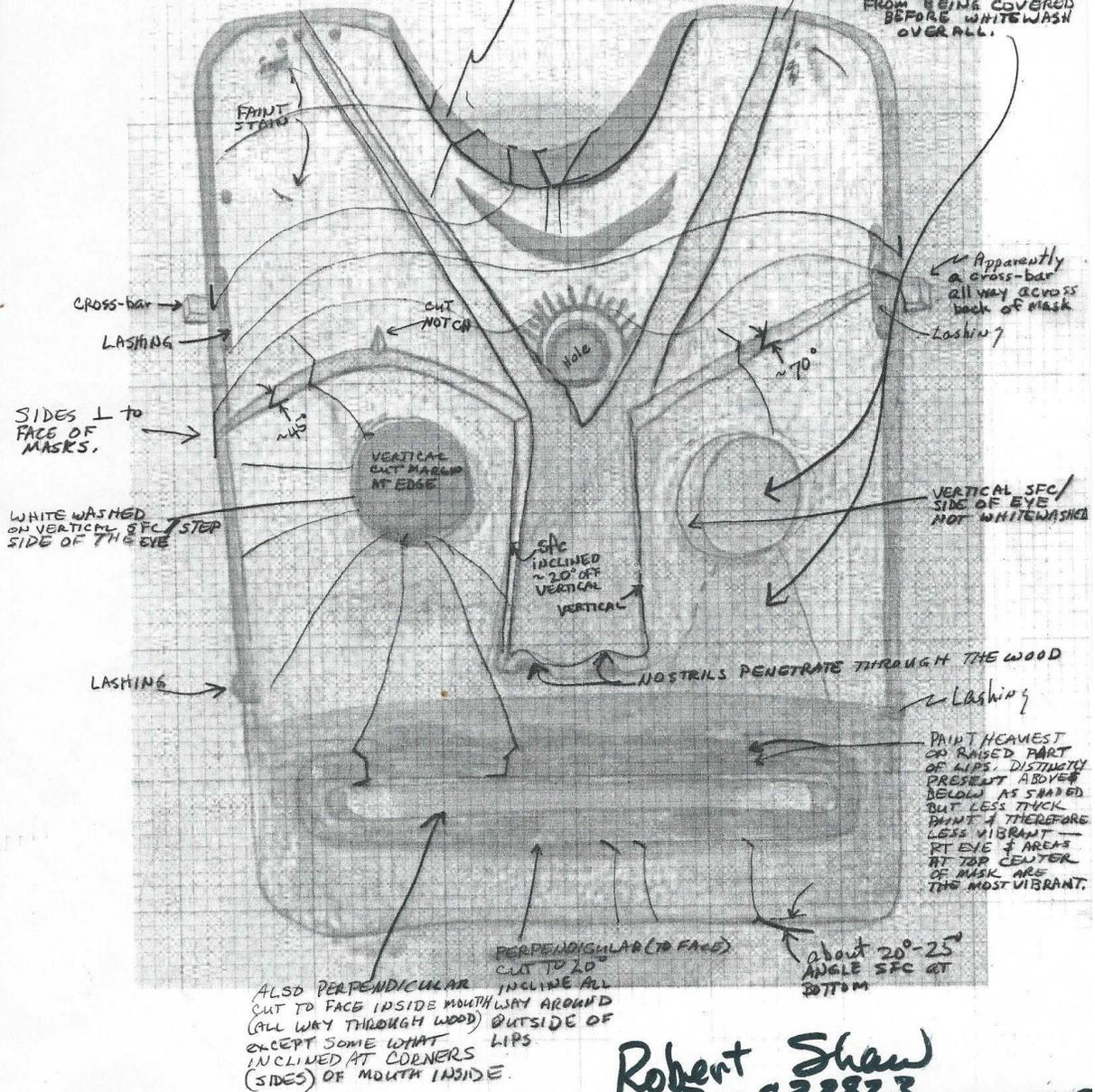


MASK IS ESTIMATED TO BE ~13" AT WIDEST  
 ~3" THICK FRONT TO BACK PROFILE  
 BACK IS HOLLOWED

Red is a little more carmine than ochre.

About 30° slope break from face sfc.

AGED RAW WOOD COLOR DISTINCTLY NOT WHITE WASHED, PROBABLY FROM BEING COVERED BEFORE WHITEWASH OVERALL.



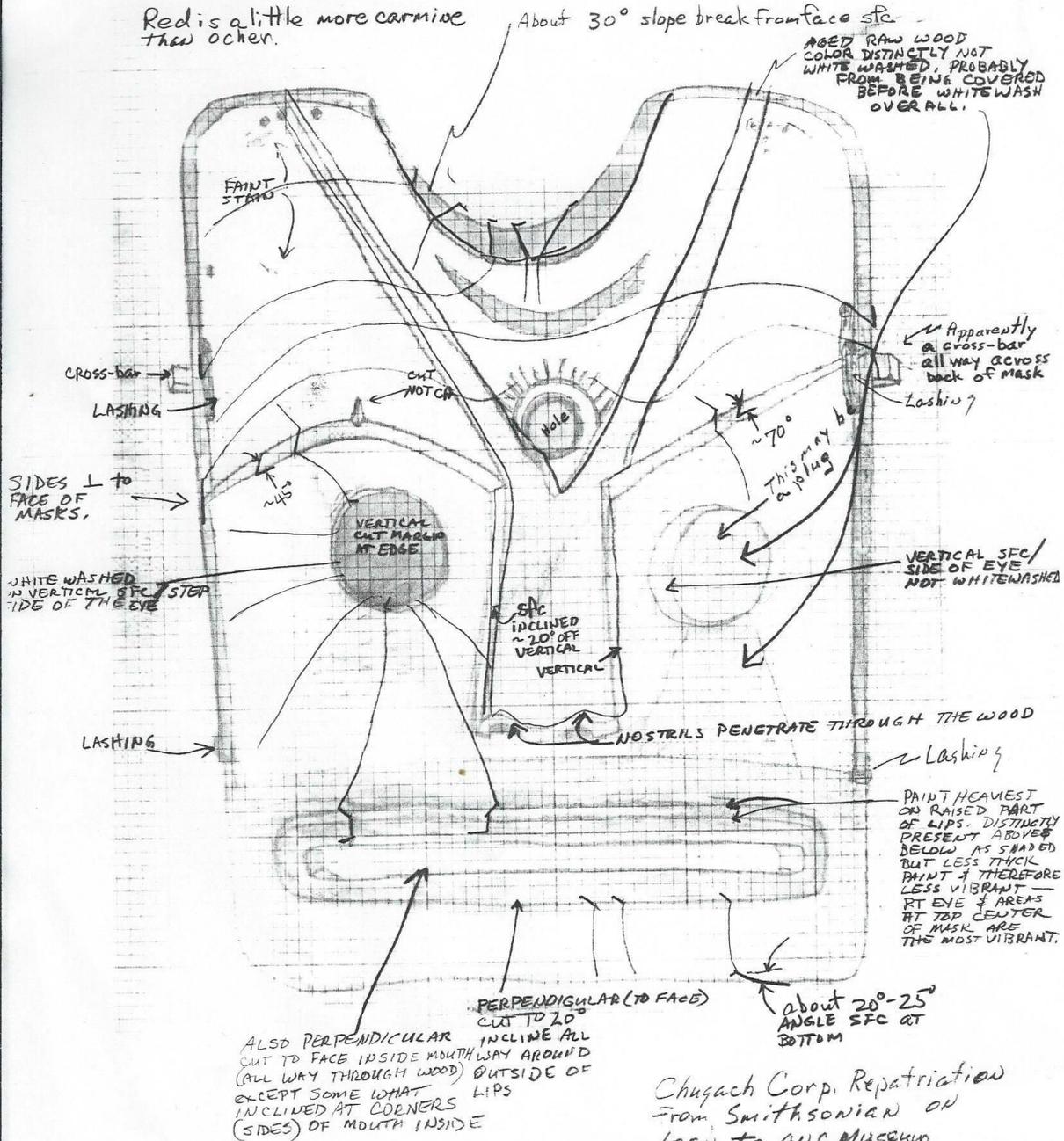
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Drawings by Shaw Feb, 2001

Chugach Corp. Repatriation  
 From Smithsonian on  
 loan to ANU Museum  
 collected from PWS

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### **Chugach Masks from Prince William Sound, Alaska**

The Chugach people of Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet have occupied this coastal area of the North Pacific Rim for thousands of years. The Chugach people have been called by many names over the years, such as Sugpiaq, Aleut, Eskimo and Alutiiq. The name Sugpiaq means "a real person" and refers to the original inhabitants of the Chugach Region. The language spoken in the Chugach region is commonly called Sugcestun.

The Chugach masks have recently been repatriated back to the Chugach people from the Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. In 1990, the United States Congress passed a law entitled the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) which empowers Native Americans to claim certain types of collections held by various museums and institutions. Materials that can be claimed include Native human remains, objects of cultural patrimony, funerary offerings and religious objects.



Visiting the Chugach Alaska Corporation Building to view the Chugach Masks. Note the size of masks compared to Amanda's head. Photo courtesy of Kari Brookover

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Note how big this kala'aq mask is compared to my head in the glass reflection



Mask photo courtesy of Kari Brookover





Photo courtesy of Dr. Crowell, Smithsonian Arctic Studies



Photo courtesy of Dr. Crowell, Smithsonian Arctic Studies





Mask carved by Jim Miller, Port Graham