**NEWS RELEASE**

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**NORTHERN BY DESIGN**

*The design of the Anchorage Museum’s new wing connects its collection*

*to the environment it references*

**ANCHORAGE, ALASKA – Sept. 13, 2017 –** Museum architecture, when it is successful, influences the presentation and reception of art, quietly influencing the way we appreciate and interpret a painting, a sketch or a contemporary installation. It is best when it embodies its purpose: to allow the works within it to tell their stories.

The [Anchorage Museum’s](https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/) new wing helps tell the story of Alaska and the North. The very materials used in the architecture of the wing reflect a sense of place – in this case, Anchorage, Alaska, a Northern city within a sub-arctic landscape.

Windowed galleries overlook the city’s urban and natural surroundings, connecting museum content to the environment it references. The façade is clad in zinc and Alaskan Yellow Cedar, pairing contemporary design sensibility with the materials’ durability and the weathering that defines Alaska’s built environment. Cedar is known for the sustainable nature of its cultivation and harvesting and performs well in challenging climates. Installed in perpendicular lines, the Alaska cedar fits with the building’s overall design while distinguishing itself from the brick of the original building and the 1980s addition, as well as the fritted glass of the front-facing David Chipperfield-designed wing.

Within the structure, spacious high-ceilinged galleries designed to accommodate both art and people deliver a compelling narrative for the North. Presented in this space are documentary works from expedition artists, along with Romantic landscapes by 19th and 20th century painters.

“We were intentional in designing a space with clean lines and open spaces, that offered a respectful palette to a wide range of artworks and reflected our local environment. This museum is one of the most important cultural institutions in the region, and it was important to us that it be appreciated for generations to come,” says John Weir, owner and principal architect at [McCool Carlson Green Architects](https://mcgalaska.com/) in Anchorage, the firm that helped design the museum’s new wing.

The design for the galleries allows for the presence of daylight, washing the space with ever-changing natural light. Twentieth-century American Romantic painters like Sydney Laurence (1865-1940) sought to capture in their paintings this distinctive Alaska light as it filtered through the clouds and reflected in the sky, water and mountains of the Alaska landscape. Laurence’s works hang in these galleries to be appreciated with little distraction from interior elements. Tall ceilings, large expanses of white walls and column-less open space are aspirational, hinting at the vastness of Alaska. Here, the indoor world of art and the actual outdoors comment upon each other.

In the gallery spaces, continuous heart pine floors, with a chalk finish and outlines of nails in the recycled wood, offer something more earnest and hardworking than pristine surfaces. The effect is intentional, suggestive of Northern character. In the same galleries that present works reflecting the romantic ideal of Alaska are also works by contemporary artists for whom landscape is a place in transition, at risk and altered by man.

Environmental portraiture by Inupiaq artist Bryan Adams shows the human and sometimes raw dimension of the Arctic through photographs of daily life in rural Alaska: children playing along an eroding coastline; a candid portrait of an Alaska family taken in a modest living room. The indigenous perspective is a critical part of the North. Museums have long segregated indigenous artwork from other traditional, modern and contemporary works. With this installation, the two are combined into one narrative of the North.

According to [Anchorage Museum Director and CEO Julie Decker](https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/about-us/museum-journal/museum-journal-archive/anchorage-museum-selects-julie-decker-as-new-ceo/), the new wing features representations of the North from the museum’s collection that do more than depict awe-inspiring views and everyday life. “The overall presentation of art has been curated to pose questions about contemporary issues and to imagine what the future Northern landscape might look like,” says Decker. “It furthers the museum’s mission to connect people, expand perspectives, and encourage a global dialogue about the North and its distinct environment. The time for this narrative is now.”

**ABOUT THE ANCHORAGE MUSEUM**

The Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center is the largest museum in Alaska, and one of the top 10 most visited attractions in the state. The museum’s mission is to connect people, expand perspectives and encourage global dialogue about the North and its distinct environment. Learn more at [www.anchoragemuseum.org.](https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/)

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