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QENA SINT'ISIS
ARGENT KVASNIKOFF

Prepared for the Pratt Museum 2017 exhibit of Qena Sint'isis
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Exhibit Supporters



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Introduction

This guide is a companion piece of the Qena Sint'isis project and art series. It illustrates the background and creation process of its designed Dena'ina alphabet, and also provides related details on the symbolism, linguistic function, and stylistic devices of the alphabet's artistic applications.

The motivations to create an alphabet for this language included both a desire to share features of the Dena'ina culture through its language using visualizations, and also to demonstrate a counterexample of how our everyday Latin alphabet dilutes our experience of languages. Languages that were not originally written using the Latin alphabet (or not written at all in the case of Dena'ina and countless other endangered indigenous languages worldwide) do not have a method to express the 'second language' of symbolism through a script, text, or system of glyphs.

Qena Sint'isis, the title of this project and art series,

uses the Dena'ina word for 'word', 'qena', and the word 'synthesis' as written using only Dena'ina phonetics: 'Sint'isis' is an approximation of the word 'synthesis'. This is because the 'th' sound we use in everyday English is not part of Dena'ina phonetics, and I chose to use the 't' and glottal stop sound written as 't' to approximate it. The word synthesis in the title represents the method of making the artwork 'synthesize' language and vision to hybridize meaning.

The artwork in this series features not only the Dena'ina language but several languages, all using Dena'ina phonetic approximations. This is a way to show how visual language can create its own context beyond the one from reading the words themselves. It's my goal to use this alphabet to share not only facets of Dena'ina culture derived from the symbology, but also to demonstrate that writing is an abstract extension of visual art that relies on a culture's conventions to communicate. Although inspirations and elements from a variety of cultures are represented in the pieces, each one is ideologically embossed with Dena'ina symbolism.

Artist Statement

Through my work I evaluate potential aspects of world society's future through ideas of spaces, ecology, spirituality, communication, and economics. Much of my drive is the need to make sense of changing perceptions of space, language, and culture to deconstruct rapid de-romanticizing of contemporary life in the recent information era of humanity that is coming to a close. This is an effort to allow societies to reestablish venerability and ceremony in everyday banalities to harmonize seemingly contrary economic and spiritual concepts. My process aims to illuminate the pitfalls of how, in a very general sense, global contemporary culture is passively described as inherently counterproductive and less deserving of reverence than previous civilizations or cultures.

My medium of choice is ink and paper as they are materials which universally represent the thin line between the two schools of human visual expression: representational drawings and illustrations, and

abstractions in the form of symbols and written language. I imagine my body of work to be an infinite written language in which each piece represents a single letter or syllabic phrase that correlates to the personal conveyance displayed.

With my art and its related applications in various forms of design projects I want to inspire new pathways of living in humanity's beginning synthesis era.

Biography

I'm an American artist currently living in my big, cold, empty home state of Alaska. On the spectrum of art vs. design my work heavily resides in the art side, however I am constantly intrigued by the applications of principles derived from art in design projects and ethics.

I was born in Homer, Alaska, and have always been deeply engaged with fine arts since my earliest memories at home. At age 13 I began to further engage in fine arts by starting Renaissance-era art history study independently, spending my free time working on a series of abstractions using acrylic paint and found materials, and creating my own style of comic illustration. While I have not had formal studio training my education has always revolved around the arts in some level. While attending Capilano University in Vancouver, Canada, I became further interested in the arts while studying anthropology and language and discovering the unique but often uncommonly known connections between art movements and civil developments. Much of my

formative inspiration came from the artists and institutions in the Vancouver area, especially from the post-modernist movement and those engaged in the beginning of the “synthesis age” that attempt to evoke social solutions by hybridizing our glut of knowledge and materials harvested during the information age.

In 2010 I moved back to Alaska to assume an administrative position with my Dena'ina culture tribe's indigenous government and social services offices. During my time there I became involved with the arts further, creating and administering social arts initiatives and events in rural areas of the Kenai Peninsula region of Alaska. I also participated in several indigenous cultural projects and much of the experience gained continues to be reflected in my current work.

In early 2014 I left my administrative position and began my work as an independent artist and designer, and today I am continuing to be happily working on my various projects and series.

Symbolism

The Dena'ina language incorporates many ideas and thoughts from cultures that speak a wide variety of languages. This is a result of the rapid process of cultural fusion in the Cook Inlet and southern Denali interior as early as the late 1600s. Beyond well-documented history of Alaska since colonial status and anthropological records that provide post-colonial first hand experiences, families and individuals who share their heritage to the culture and the region have provided oral clues to the culture's pre-contact state. Even before the age of exploration and the dominance of Russian culture in Alaska's southern coasts, it is shared knowledge that the Dena'ina culture was already being shaped by neighboring peoples. For the northern regions it was interactions with Copper River Basin cultures, in the western Cook Inlet Yup'ik peoples left an impressionable mark, and for those in the south, especially the southern Kenai Peninsula, Sugpiaq and Alutiiq culture played a role in the evolution of the local dialect and culture of Dena'ina.

Geographically, each of these cultural regions represent a different kind of 'sub-biome' and the diversity of Dena'ina's regional influences is well reflected in linguistic records.

Because of the spectrum of localized Dena'ina symbolism and influences it is impossible to offer definitive insight into lore, customs, or a specific style of the culture as a whole. With this alphabet I chose to honor this spectrum by incorporating symbolism from not only different regions, but also those that reflect periods of time. The symbolisms attributed to each letter and feature cannot be attributed to the views of all Dena'ina people entirely, so I created the art and system to be a reflection of what my own individual perspective is based on personal upbringing and continuing education.

This alphabet was loosely created using *acrophony*, which means each letter's name or sound is attributed to the beginning of a word which that letter would begin. This was done to help ensure a variety of symbols by limiting the scope of possibilities for each sound and as a way to mnemonically remember the 44 letter alphabet in its entirety.

Style & Writing

Creating letters with meaningful design is difficult because there needs to be a balance between imagery and practicality. If letters are too ornate they are not easy to reproduce and aren't easy to remember for reading, but conversely if they are too simplistic they will blur visually and lose symbolic association. For this alphabet I chose to slightly err on the side of the symbolism because the intended end result is to have a set of symbols that can each represent a concept on their own.

As well as creating letters I had to consider how they might be used together. Although I began working with them in notebooks by writing them in our standard left to right, top down line system I experimented with other directions: I was inspired by modern versions of Arabic and Hebrew to try right-to-left, classical calligraphy and printing of China and Korea using the top-down method, and more uncommon styles like the snaking right-to-left, up, left-to-right, up and repeating system of Rapa Nui's antiquated Rongorongo script (just one of the few ways

linguists have proposed it was read).

I then considered the Dena'ina cultural region itself and how it and other cultures of the northern Pacific organize ideas and expressions. I started writing the alphabet using a top-down system as I felt the letters looked more 'natural' and pleasing, and as an homage to the cultural group neighbors of two directions. To the southwest of Alaska and Siberia's coastal cultures is the region of the world where formal writing and ideographs evolved, written in top-down styles, and to the southeast is the region of the world where skyscraper-like trees and totemic symbols created from them are emblematic of the continent's northwest coasts. Considering that Dena'ina land is cradled between two stylistically skyward-oriented parts of the world it is fitting that this writing system honors that. However it is not something I strictly adhere to in practice, and I am always experimenting with composition and arrangements.

Chart

Note: The letters F, O, P, R, and W are not found in root Dena'ina language but appear frequently in loan words and expressions from several other language. For these letters I've created neologisms using strictly Dena'ina root words. Coincidentally, the Dena'ina language has a word for neologism: q'udid qena, 'new/novel word'

This diagram corresponds to the piece titled **Prismatic Dena'ina Alphabet Blocks** and its grid of the 44 letters of the Dena'ina alphabet. The sounds the letters represent in standard Latin script are written in parentheses below the names of the letters. The alphabetic order I've arranged them in corresponds to how the language is officially documented by linguists using a Latin style system. This is the same set of conventions where the A-B-C of English is derived from. The pages following explain the symbolism and creation of each letter individually.

Del (')	Ang (a)	Ben (b)	Chi (ch)	Ch'u (ch')	Daz (d)	Dli (dl)	Dzel (dz)	El (e)	Fe (f)	Gun (g)
Gga (gg)	Ghel (gh)	Hetl (h)	Han (h)	Iz (i)	Jab (j)	Ken (k)	K'azh (k')	Lugh (l)	Li (l)	Mil (m)
Naq (n)	Ov (o)	Pah (p)	Qan (q)	Q'es (q')	Rey (r)	Sem (s)	Shex (sh)	Tiq (t)	T'ah (t')	Tlegh (tl)
Tl'aq' (tl')	Tsa (ts)	Ts'en (ts')	Uz (u)	Vej (v)	Weh (w)	Xi (x)	Yagh (y)	Yi (y)	Zu (z)	Zhi (zh)

DEL

Sound: ' (glottal stop)

Name Origin: deleghi (drum)

Symbolism: Del symbolizes the beat of a drum, the instrument associated with life and collectivism. It represents the timbre of music and its harmony with the timbre of spoken language. Its shape represents a traditional curled spruce root drumstick endemic to Dena'ina lands.



ANG

Sound: a

Name Origin: Angiadahtnu (archaic name for Seldovia)

Symbolism: Ang depicts the pronounced beak of a puffin, an aquatic bird emblematic of the southern Kenai Peninsula's islands and fjords. The name Angiadahtnu is one of a few known names for the Seldovia region which is home to the southernmost extent of Dena'ina cultural homeland. The puffin can symbolize navigation of seas and skies and clans associated with water.



BEN

Sound: b

Name Origin: Bentuggezh K'enulgheli (Mt. Redoubt)

Symbolism: Ben represents the Cook Inlet's most active volcano Mt. Redoubt. Its Dena'ina name of Bentuggezh K'enulgheli literally translates to 'one with a notched forehead' and refers to the dipped curve of its peak. Redoubt is one of the most photographed mountains of the Alaska range and is iconic of the western views of the Cook Inlet.



CHI

Sound: ch

Name Origin: chik'a (wood)

Symbolism: Chi is shaped to reflect the angular front view of a split piece of firewood. Its symbolism is connected to the use of taiga trees as the fundamental building materials of ancient Dena'ina culture in all parts of life. Wood is still an iconic material today and is associated with the bounty of the wildlands.



CH'U

Sound: ch' (glottalized ch)

Name Origin: ch'wala (spruce)

Symbolism: Ch'u's shape is a half outline of a coniferous tree shape and honors the common species of spruce. The spruce, especially its sinuous and tensile root systems, was utilized by ancient cultures to create several living objects such as containers, traps, furniture, and ropes for construction.



DAZ

Sound: d

Name Origin: daz'i (fire)

Symbolism: The shape of daz is two curves that echo the wild upward reach of a flame. Fire symbolizes rebirth and the process of destruction in the cycle of life. Wildfires themselves represent fire spirits reshaping land for a new cycle of life to begin.



DLI

Sound: dl

Name Origin: dlin'a (mouse)

Symbolism: The rounded ear and nose of a small mountain rodent is represented by the shape of dli, and it symbolizes the fortitude of the unassuming mouse. The mouse is featured in a handful of continuously survived traditional stories and represents the strength of an individual against immeasurably large odds.



DZEL

Sound: dz

Name Origin: dzel (mountain base/foothill area)

Symbolism: Dzel's open triangle highlights the geographical transition of flat land into a high peak, and specifically symbolizes the height and grandeur of Denali and the Denali region's plateau-like elevations. Denali is called Dghili Ka'a in Dena'ina which means 'the high one', and it marks the northernmost extent of the Dena'ina lands.



EL

Sound: e

Name Origin: el'egen (shaman)

Symbolism: El's branching shape represents the roots of a wild violet flower, one of several plants used by Dena'ina medicine workers. Violet roots are used by being burned in a specific ceremonial bowl, and the medicine person of the clan or community would divine omens and guidance from their soft floral smoke.



FE

Sound: f

Name Origin: feghuduni (word created to mean cultural evolution through periods of time. Created with the root ghuduni, Dena'ina for cultural identity or belonging, and fe-, 'the study, observation, or phenomenon of'.)

Symbolism: Fe is a star-like shape of four arms radiating around a small circle. It represents both a traditional medicine wheel and the sun. It symbolizes the guidance of people through education and exchange with people from all cultures and experiences.



GUN

Sound: g

Name Origin: guna (local people/kin)

Symbolism: The crossing of thin branches to create a square in the shape of guna reflects the central fireplace of a nichit, a traditional partially underground Dena'ina home. The square of the nichit's fire pit represents the four directions, four classical elements, and the four seasons. This central fire is where meetings are held by clan leaders to administer day to day affairs and mark special events in time.



GGA

Sound: gg

Name Origin: ggagga (brown bear)

Symbolism: The brown bear is one of Dena'ina legend's most important figures if not the most important. The word ggagga in fact also means 'creature' itself, and is the base word to describe all animal life. The letter gga is shaped to represent the longest, center claw of a bear's paw, symbolizing its reach and amulet associations of power and strength.



GHEL

Sound: gh

Name Origin: ghelch'ehi (birch bark basket)

Symbolism: Ghel's ovular shape with ovular loops reflect the geometry of a birch bark basket, the most iconic classical Dena'ina craft. The careful folding and assembly of contiguous pieces of soaked bark from the birch tree is a precise craft, and the baskets can symbolize durability, skill, and wealth.



HETL

Sound: h

Name Origin: hetl (dogsled)

Symbolism: Hetl's shape is the profile view of a dogsled, the emblematic mode of transportation of Alaska and the Arctic world. It symbolizes people's relationships with domesticated animals, especially dogs, who are vital in Dena'ina culture both economically and spiritually. Dogs are considered mediums between the human and spirit worlds and having healthy, well fed dogs is the sign of a prosperous and respected home or clan.



ĤAN

Sound: ĥ (throat-based h)

Name Origin: ĥan (place of endeared people, invented word that uses ĥa, a Dena'ina pronoun for an endeared person, and the suffix -n which denotes place)

Symbolism: A valley between two peaks is the shape of ĥan. The Dena'ina word for marriage, tuq'a, is the same word for a river valley between two mountains. ĥan reflects the concept of the Dena'ina view of marriage parallels that of a valley, where two individual points of land are joined. It shows that two people do not change their own character or identity despite being united by a conceptual valley.



IZ

Sound: i

Name Origin: izin (arrowhead)

Symbolism: The arrowhead is iconic of nearly all pre-colonial culture in the Americas and has been adapted as a symbol of integrity and precision. Iz represents the Dena'ina tradition of arrow craft and the status of a warrior, the definition of which has transformed from strictly a hunter or combatant to include the definition of a person who protects cultural integrity and dignity regardless of cost.



JAB

Sound: j

Name Origin: jabila (rainbow)

Symbolism: Jab's two arced lines represent a rainbow, a symbol important to Dena'ina because of its associations with spiritual guidance, inspiration, and peace. As an amulet it provides medicine workers with the clairvoyance and serenity to aid in the immersion in spiritual guidance.



KAH

Sound: k

Name Origin: Kahtnu (Kenai River)

Symbolism: Kahtnu is the most recognizable feature of the northern Kenai Peninsula, and is, and has been, the lifeblood of Dena'ina tribes throughout their known and archaeological history. Kah's shape is the iconic tail section of a Kenai River salmon and it symbolizes prosperity and the gifts of river spirits.



K'AZH

Sound: k' (glottalized k)

Name Origin: k'azhu (sign, marker)

Symbolism: K'azh's graduated oval loops represent a stone trail marker that mark various types of passages in Dena'ina highland areas. The cairn-like structures made of either coastal or riverine stones symbolize sharing knowledge in the experience of others and trusting the path ahead.



LUGH

Sound: i

Name Origin: lugh (snare trap)

Symbolism: A simple snare for trapping makes the shape of lugh with its stick and roped loop. Lugh is also used in Dena'ina language to mean the “end” of something and can be attached to create expressions of endings. Lugh symbolizes the connection of life and death through the transition of time.



Ł

Sound: ł (voiceless l)

Name Origin: łi (glacier)

Symbolism: The geographic word for a glacier is expressed with the letter łi and its shape is the edge of a glacier's jagged mass where it meets its mountain waterway. Łi symbolizes the higher altitude portions of Dena'ina lands and especially Łiteh, a Dena'ina name for the Harding Icefield. It symbolizes the role of glacial systems in the environment and the easternmost points of Dena'ina lands. Spiritually, Łiteh is a type of natural holy site and marks the beginning of the spiritual world and the transition of land to the heavens.



MIŁ

Sound: m

Name Origin: miłni (water)

Symbolism: Mił is shaped to represent a drop of rain during the summer months. Water symbolizes the river systems and ocean and their role in Dena'ina mythology. Aside from being associated with water spirits, mił also symbolizes water's cycle and its essential role in life.



NAQ

Sound: n

Name Origin: naqaghuqesi (Big Dipper)

Symbolism: Naq's shape evokes the iconic constellation of Ursa Major, called 'the one that follows over us', or naqaghuqesi, in Dena'ina. The letter also represents the early 20th century which saw the seeds of urbanization and when Dena'ina lands eventually became the cradle of the new state of Alaska with its iconic Big Dipper flag.



OV

Sound: o

Name Origin: ochre, English loan word

Symbolism: Ov's shape of an arc and three vertical dashes represents a section of a more elaborate pattern used as decoration, especially facepaint, in pre-colonial Dena'ina culture. The Cook Inlet basin is lined with rich pigments from both plant and stone sources, and the letter ov is a tribute to the natural ochres in a rainbow of hues that dominate classical Dena'ina artistic materials. The letter also symbolizes early Dena'ina history and the origins of clans and familial lines.



PAH

Sound: p

Name Origin: Pacifica (Latin loan word)

Symbolism: The swirled curves of pah evoke an wave in motion before meeting the shore. Pah symbolizes the unique connection of Dena'ina culture to the ocean. Of all cultures in the Na-Dene family that extends from the interior of Alaska through Canada, the Great Basin, and parts of Mexico, Dena'ina culture is the only one which developed a maritime tradition through oceanic settlements and trade. Pah honors all cultures who call the coasts and islands of the Pacific Ocean home, and their unique connection to each other through the world's largest physical feature.



QAN

Sound: q

Name Origin: qanchi (porcupine)

Symbolism: Qan's jagged structure represents the quills of the North American porcupine, an animal endemic to southcentral Alaska. The porcupine represents patience and the rewards of hard work and dedication in Dena'ina stories. Aside from being potential nuisances, porcupines are also a sign of a happy home if they den nearby.



Q'ES

Sound: q' (glottalized q)

Name Origin: q'es (cloud)

Symbolism: The shape of a cloud is represented by q'es and its significance refers to the Dena'ina origin stories. In these stories, people were made by spirit who sent a cloud to the peak of the highest mountain in the land. When the cloud touched the peak people were born, and they then descended down and spread throughout the land reaching all the way to the coasts. Dena'ina clans were made depending on where that group settled and how they branched out from the original source of spirit's gift of human life.



REY

Sound: r

Name Origin: raven (English loan word)

Symbolism: The raven is spiritually associated with nearly all cultures of the Pacific northwest and in Dena'ina lore is associated with cleverness, trickery, and wisdom. Called ggugguyni (little creature, and arguably little 'brown bear') in Dena'ina, the raven's nonspecifically rooted name shows its high regard in the pantheon of animal spirits. The raven also symbolizes the connections and cultural influences shared between Alaska's indigenous cultures as modern Alaskan and recent Dena'ina history have adapted stories and new connotations of the raven spirit.



SEM

Sound: s

Name Origin: sem (star)

Symbolism: Sem's radiating points evoke the shine of Polaris, the north star, and it's position at the unmoving center of the visible universe. The letter symbolizes the use of Polaris for navigational guidance, and the connection between all cultures in the northern hemisphere who also take in the star's inspirations.



SHEX

Sound: sh

Name Origin: shex (health)

Symbolism: Shex is the Dena'ina world for health and is represented by the letter which represents a wild lowbush blueberry. The blueberry is symbolic in Dena'ina culture as being a gift of nourishment and wisdom from the spirits. It also represents the three types of health in Dena'ina thought, the physical self, the spiritual self, and the 'breath of life' self, a type of 'second spirit' that is an independent being.



TIQ

Sound: t

Name Origin: tiqadi (sea life)

Symbolism: Tiq's curved lines evoke the use of dentalium shells in late classical Dena'ina design. The letter recognizes the importance of trade and oceanic traditions to Dena'ina culture, and also represents the use of beadwork in long, geometric lines that is common to Na-Dene cultures.



T'AH

Sound: t' (glottalized t)

Name Origin: t'ah (clearing in a forest)

Symbolism: A forest clearing is represented with t'ah's parabolic lines that show the curved horizon of the tree line as seen from a clearing in a sub-arctic forest. T'ah symbolizes the clearing's connection between the land, universe, and the spiritual world. A forest clearing can be regarded as an auspicious location for its higher spiritual energy.



TLEGH

Sound: tl

Name Origin: tlegh (oil)

Symbolism: A stone oil lamp used by ancient peoples in the Kachemak region is represented with the letter tlegh. Its significance bridges ancient Dena'ina origins to the 21st century with the importance of oils through the generations. Ancient stone lamps were used to burn animal or plant oils as a source of light, or possibly even used for food purposes. Today, fossil oil is the most prolific material of industry and life effecting substance in all of Alaska and the letter also recognizes its transformation of people and land.



TL'AQ'

Sound: tl' (glottalized tl)

Name Origin: tl'aq' (night)

Symbolism: Tl'aq's dancing curve shape echoes the bending light of the aurora borealis, called yuyqush in Dena'ina. The aurora is called a “dance” by several northern Na-Dene cultures and is compared to the dance of spirits in celebration. It can also symbolize the prophetic omens in winter of the new year to come.



TSA

Sound: ts

Name Origin: tsa (boulder, isolated stone)

Symbolism: A weathered monolith with a distinguished mineral streak makes the symbol of tsa. The letter represents large, independent boulders and stones that are used as points of reference on coasts, highlands, or in rivers. Their unusual positions isolated from similar stone structures give them special connections to stone, hunting, and harvest spirits, and the clans associated with them.



TS'EN

Sound: ts' (glottalized ts)

Name Origin: ts'en zitl'i (drinking tube)

Symbolism: Ts'en represents a Dena'ina drinking tube where it meets a pool or container of water. The tube is a Dena'ina craft that is made from either bone or fine wood and were an early type of drinking straw. Tubes were used when traveling light was necessary and water containers were not practical. In some regions they were ceremonial in purpose and elaborately decorated. They were either worn by girls entering womanhood, worn by clan leaders with beads and patterns displaying their status, or given as gifts to visitors of high esteem.



UZ

Sound: u

Name Origin: Uzintun (Homer Spit)

Symbolism: The name of the letter uz honors the indigenous name of the iconic Homer Spit, Uzintun, which means 'lands extend out place' in Dena'ina. Its shape is a stylized sea star that symbolizes the aquaculture of the southern Kenai Peninsula region. Uz also represents the spiritual importance of Uzintun as a place where people can seek the guidance of sea spirits.



VEJ

Sound: v

Name Origin: vejex (caribou)

Symbolism: The antlers of a caribou make up the profile shape of the letter vej. Symbolically, the caribou represents collective work and determination in its reference to the migratory patterns of the herd. The caribou's antlers which are compared with the blazing flames of a fire is a symbol of fire or fireweed clans.



WEH

Sound: w

Name Origin: wesuŷ tuyu'u (invented word to mean glass float, created from prefix we- to mean a refined object, suŷ, 'sand', and tuyu'u, 'object of beauty or luster'.)

Symbolism: The letter weh's symbol is a glass globe with a divot that represents the nautically symbolic glass float. These primarily Japanese originating floats symbolize the period of time in Dena'ina lands where the modern fishing industry took root. It also represents the cultural connection of all people who live in Dena'ina lands today and the domestic use of glass floats as a decoration that evokes the history of the Cook Inlet.



XI

Sound: x

Name Origin: xeyi k'qat'a (winter food supply)

Symbolism: Xi's shape is an outline of an intricately woven grass basket and it's decorated lid. Grass baskets are a Dena'ina art in coastal grasslands and the craft is also associated with neighboring Alutiiq cultures, whose lands are nearly entirely coastal. The name of this letter reflects the symbol of the basket as prosperity and wealth, especially of ornate baskets reserved specifically for gifts and potlatch type functions held by leaders.



YAGH

Sound: y

Name Origin: Yaghenen (Inland, peninsula)

Symbolism: Yagh's shape alludes to the geographical shape of Dena'ina lands as a whole, the inland southcentral region and the Cook Inlet basin. Its shape also represents the Dena'ina directional system of measuring distance radially from a single point of significant elevation and comparing distances along a sector's two lines.



ŶI

Sound: ŷ (throat based y)

Name Origin: ŷihenu (invented word meaning innovative craftsmanship and technology from ŷi-, prefix for a noun of changing or progressing states, and henu, 'work')

Symbolism: Ŷi's shape is that of a skin sewing bag and its cord closure. The sewing bag represents craftsmanship and refinement and evokes Dena'ina culture's use of intricately sewn geometric designs. The letter symbolizes future thinking and the tools of facing challenges in order to improve people's lifestyles and environment.



ZU

Sound: z

Name Origin: zanuch'eltani (pendant necklace)

Symbolism: An amulet or pendant necklace is represented by the shape of the letter zu. The necklace symbolizes beauty and the use of jewelry designs to denote status and kinship in a Dena'ina clan. It can also symbolize rarity and the most important prized and decorative stone in Dena'ina culture, gold agate, also called nudechghela. The stone is considered a gift from spirits that fall from the sky, and they are signs of good fortune and blessings.



ZHI

Sound: zh

Name Origin: zhatektish ('there is an echo')

Symbolism: A sound's resonant echo provides the name for the letter zhi. The shape represents a voice's point of origin and its growth as it is sound is echoed and repeated. Symbolically, zhi represents the power of an individual thought or idea having the potential to grow and make significant changes in the future.



Resources

It could not be possible to complete this project without having the privilege to reference essential resources that provide invaluable insight into Dena'ina history and culture. This is especially true for myself as being from the south peninsula where familial and locally-specific knowledge has nearly been completely lost. By comparing inherited knowledge and lore to research from written records of Dena'ina culture and language speakers throughout the southcentral region I have gained an insightful perspective of my own inherited ancient history that I was not privy to before. I cannot say that my conclusions or inspirations as I understand them are experienced by all Dena'ina heritage sharing people the same way. However, I can state that by fusing my own individual experience with the many viewpoints of others I feel confident that I have served the purpose of growing the language and culture in my own capacity.

Resources I would like to specifically note from my research are:

Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi: This is the beautiful companion book to the cultural project that sought to spread awareness of Dena'ina, the native culture of Alaska's southcentral region, where urbanization has made its largest impact. It contains several personal histories and provides in-depth historical analysis and contemporary perspectives of the culture and how it has radically changed.

Dena'ina Topical Dictionary: This book compiled by the distinguished linguist of Alaska Native cultures, Dr. James Kari, is the largest written record of Dena'ina vocabulary and it is an invaluable publication for anyone who is interested in Dena'ina culture or language. The dictionary is ordered by topical categories of words, providing a way to analyze the language and how it shifts words and expressions due to importance, commonality, and other conventions that we may not experience in English or other contemporary major world languages.

Lastly, the most important resource I have is the cultural knowledge from my family and tribal community, who have all been extremely supportive of my endeavors.

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Thank You

Please visit my website for more information about any of my art projects. This will also be the future home of the *Qena Sint'isis* digital archive.

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Front Cover Photograph: Prismatic Dena'ina Alphabet Blocks, Watercolor, 2017

Rear Cover Photograph: Q'es Krieyshon, Installation completed in 2016. Located at the Ninilchik Traditional Council Community Hall.

