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Students showcase their creations at Iñupiaq Fine Arts Festival

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Whether it's carving, sewing, cooking, kamipiak making or storytelling, Iñupiaq College students got a chance last week to showcase what they have been working on this semester.

Iñupiaq Fine Arts Festival brought together Iñupiaq Studies students and teachers at Utqiagvik's Tuzzy library on April 13.

Traditional food was at the head of the table: students Eunice Numnik and Panitchiaq Kagak brought pickled Maktak and qunulliq jelly, while Eunice Numnik served aqqik sorbet.

Lucinda Elliott showed her kamipiak-traditional boots she is working on in the maklak making course while Inuit Art Studio course students presented intricate caribou skin masks at the festival.

Instructor Jerica Leavitt worked with Louisa Kakianaq Riley from Anaktuvuk Pass to learn the art of caribou skin mask making and driftwood molds. After learning from Riley, Leavitt went through the process of making a hand carving a driftwood mold and then made her very own caribou skin mask.

Then Leavitt brought that traditional knowledge to Iñupiaq Studies at Iñupiaq College so that her students can also learn that art form and create their own caribou masks and molds. Last week, several of them proudly presented their creations.

Driftwood carvings, fox hat and slippers and handmade ulus were also showcased at the festival.

"In Inuit Art Studio, students create a number of projects," Leavitt said. "This semester included an ulu taught by Yves Brower and Jonas Ahsoak Sr., ivory beads and earrings taught by Percy Aiken, a whalebone arch painting, caribou skin mask, and Utqiagvik clay qulliq- seal oil lamp."

The event also featured storytelling.

Marie Ahlook Stackhouse showcased a cartoon that she and her husband Ernie created as part of a project for Inuit Storytelling, called "The Weepers," and Brett Reich read an Inuit story from the Nunamiut Unipkaanich book.



Traditional and Contemporary Native Food Preparation students Eunice Numnik and Panitchiaq Kagak with instructor Jerica Leavitt, showing pickled Maktak and qunulliq jelly they made. Photo by Kendra Aline Mack. -

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"Part of normalizing our traditional stories is getting the stories out there in the community," Leavitt said.

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