

WHERE **SCIENCE****HISTORY****AND****ART** CONNECT

To: Raven Hill Friends
From: Cheri
Date: December 9, 2023
Re: *Dem bones*

Raven Hill Discovery Center’s mission is to provide a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history and the arts. When Silvia Bello, researcher at the Natural History Museum in London, talks about early cultures—those living 50,000 years ago—she says, “The capacity to learn, integrate innovation into one’s own culture and adapt to new technologies and abstract concepts should be recognized as an element of behavioral complexity.” That same concept could be applied to today’s cultures. Whether they lived 50,000 years ago or are alive today, people, including artists, often find inspiration, as well as tools and raw materials in the world around them, connecting science and art in unique ways!



Bone antlers were the raw material for tools and artwork in many cultures.



The bone tools pictured above were fashioned by co-founder Tim Leach. Antlers were typically used for pressure flakers (bottom) and punches (top) in the art of flint knapping or stone tool manufacture.

Bone carving was and is practiced by many world cultures. It is a way to create both tools and art by carving animal bones, antlers, and horns, especially when ivory is not available. In the Arctic & sub-Arctic Indigenous peoples’ Inuit language, there is not even a word for art. Inuit people call such sculptures “sananguagait”, which is translated as “objects that are made or small replicas of real articles”. Archeologist John Shea says, “that one cannot identify the function doesn’t mean the object is a symbol (art). Who is to say whether the bone is a sinker for a fishing line, a spool for thread or some other tool?”

(Right) In the early days at Raven Hill, kids polished antler buttons to fasten on the flap of their leather pouches. Donated antlers were pre-cut and pre-drilled and then the kids did their own finish work!



Beads (left) can be easily made from antler pieces (right), which are cut, drilled and then embellished with small carvings.

We invite you to explore the bone carving art and artifacts at Raven Hill in person. Meanwhile, enjoy a few more pictures of bone tools and “sananguagait” that can be found in the Center’s collection.



Bone needles have been found at sites 50,000 years old. The small tool was used to sew clothing, as well as embroider designs on them.
Needle carved by co-founder Tim Leach



These bone buttons were used on underwear in the 18th century. They were usually made from cattle bone, which was boiled, cleaned and cut into lengthwise thin slabs from which discs were punched for the buttons.
Bonnie Culver Button Collection



A deer scapula makes a perfect hand trowel for digging, while a larger cow scapula works as a shovel.



“The Dancer”
Caribou antler with black dots of baleen by Troy Weyiouanna Jr. of Shishmaref, Alaska
Donated by Donna Bennett



Whale bone face carving with eyes & lip plug of caribou antler & baleen by artist Earl Iyatunguk of Shishmaref, Alaska.
Donated by Donna Bennett



Raven pendant—
Scrimshaw on caribou antler from the Fairbanks area of Alaska. Artist unknown



(Left) The fork formed by a two-point deer antler is a perfect “hoop” on which to weave a sinew web forming a unique dreamcatcher. The name is given to the traditional Anishinaabe “spider web charm” used for protecting infants as they sleep.
Artist unknown

Raven Hill is open from noon to 4pm on Saturdays, 2pm to 4pm on Sundays and other times by appointment, including holidays! Call 231.536.3369 or email cheri@miravenhill.org for more information or to make reservations.

Cheri