ANCHORAGE MUSEUM

Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi

The Dena'ina Way of Living

2

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

Lesson Plan 2
Being Dena'ina

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Elementary (Grades 3-5) and Secondary (Grades 6-12)

Overview

The teacher can choose among activities and ability levels to explore the topic of what makes a person Dena'ina, and why personal and ethnic identity are important. Strategies for exploring this topic include:

- Reading informative text for information and considering the question, "What does it mean to 'be Dena'ina'?" (there are texts at two levels)
- Examining and analyzing a photograph
- Building a virtual "toolkit" and explaining its relationship to identity

Goals and Desired Outcomes

Overarching Understanding

- People learn who they are by living with and learning about their family and community.

Essential Question

- What does it mean to "be Dena'ina"?

Assessments

- Student reading and comprehension, as based on text-based questions and class discussion
- Completion of a counting cord and explanation of its important events
- Writing about a historic photograph
- Completion of an eight-object virtual toolkit and explanation of three of the items

Learning Activities

Materials

- String, beads, fur, and feathers for counting cords
- Readings and text-based questions
- "Introduction to Dena'ina Culture and History: Life Cycle" by James Fall

- "This is my Story: 'Tanaina' No More" by Aaron Leggett
- Computers and Internet connectivity
- Historic photograph of Chief Nikaly and his family from Knik, 1918
- 24 photographs of objects from exhibition

Strategies

Strategy 1: Read informational text

1. Have students read the "Life Cycle" excerpt. If you teach younger students, you might want to introduce vocabulary such as:
    a) life cycle
    b) chore
    c) dodge
    d) wrestle
    e) succeed
    f) version
    g) seriously
    h) strict
    i) sturdy
    j) survival
2. Pose the text-based questions provided to ensure student comprehension of the reading.
3. Extend the discussion to the topical question for this lesson, "What does it mean to "be Dena'ina"? Introduce the question with the premise, "We learn who we are by living with and learning from our families and community." What did a Dena'ina child learn about, according to this reading?
4. Help students make connections with their own identities. What are they learning about who they are, based on their experiences with their families and community?
5. Have students do a fast-write or prepare a drawing that reacts to the prompt: "Compare the way your family raises children with the Dena'ina way that is described in the reading."

6. In the past, some Dena'ina people kept track of important events in their lives using counting cords or "string calendars" (see pp. 148 and 149 in the catalog, if it is available). For instance, a Dena'ina leader might use a counting cord to keep track of the potlatch feasts that he has hosted. Have students make their own counting cords to indicate important events in their lives. Ask them to share the meanings of the knots they have tied.

7. As an optional extension to this activity, have students transfer the information on their counting cords to a paper personal timeline. To involve students in first-person research, extend the timelines to the lives of their parents or grandparents.

Strategy 2: The Dena'ina Perspective of Identity Today (for Grades 6-12 only)

8. Remind students of the "*Yagheli Du!*" introduction they read in the last lesson. If necessary, reread it to the class.

9. Introduce the next selection, also written by a Dena'ina, this time a young man who grew up in Anchorage. Read "This is my Story: 'Tanaina' No More." Note that the full essay is available in the exhibition catalog.

10. Have students complete text-based questions to ensure their comprehension of this essay. Discuss their answers. Extend the discussion to inference: What do you infer about the effects of racism and stereotyping on Dena'ina identity, based on what the author writes?

11. Assign a fast-write and ask students to share their responses with a partner: What group(s) do I belong to that are important to my identity?

12. Research Anchorage populations online. As a class, discuss how this information relates to Aaron Leggett's and Clare Swan's contentions that Dena'ina people had become "invisible" in the twentieth century.

13. Discuss: Is it important to have a visual representation of a part of your identity in your community? Undertake a pair-share in which students identify some visual representations of their own identity in their community today.

Strategy 3: Examine and analyze an historic photograph

14. Project the photograph of Chief Nikaly and his family from Knik, 1918. Examine it together as a class as you would any historical photograph, looking at it quadrant by quadrant. Have students dictate to you what they see in the photograph as you write on the board. After all observations have been made, ask what questions this photograph brings to students' minds.

15. Have students write a response to the prompt, "What are these people laughing about?" For an extended writing assignment, have students create a complete short story inspired by the photograph.

Strategy 4: Build a virtual "toolkit"

16. Have students view the object photographs from the exhibition. Each student must choose one object to represent each of eight categories. The categories are:

    a) Something that would be useful in getting food

    b) Something that could be worn

    c) Something that I could use to carry something in

    d) Something to help me keep track of time

    e) Something that shows how important or wealthy I am

    f) Something I might wear at a ceremony

    g) Something that would be used in battle

    h) Something a child or teenager would have

17. Students will write about three of those objects, explaining for each:

    a) Why the student chose this object

    b) How the object was used

    c) What the object is made of

18. Give students an opportunity to share the information they learned and the objects they chose.

19. As an extension, you might make a bar graph showing the number of students who chose each object. If some objects were chosen by a number of different students, explore why this is the case.

Adaptation of

"Introduction to Dena'ina Culture and History: Life Cycle"

by James A. Fall

Original essay in *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi: The Dena'ina way of Living*. Edited by Suzi Jones, James A. Fall and Aaron Leggett (2013), pp. 1-45.

Dena'ina babies spent much of their early lives strapped in *ts'utl',* cradles made of birch bark. As they got older, they were cared for by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters.

Children learned through play. They had small bows and arrows, their own sewing kits, dolls, little boats, and other toys that allowed them to practice being adults. They were also given chores to help out the family. They were expected to gather firewood and get water for drinking and cooking.

Beginning at around two, Dena'ina boys were raised to be "tough." Older men took them to swim in cold water, and they ran every morning. Boys learned to jump high in the air so they could dodge the swinging paws of bears and other dangerous animals. Boys "wrestled with trees." Every morning, the boy grabbed a small tree and tried to pull it from the ground. When he succeeded, he moved on to a larger tree, making his arms and shoulders stronger and stronger. Boys practiced hunting and fishing with small versions of adult gear.

When boys were older and ready to learn seriously, they traveled to other villages to be helpers to an uncle. Nickafor Alexan explained,

Just as soon as [the boy] came in [the house] this uncle said, 'Nephew you visit me?' He answer 'yes.' And just as soon as he sit one of log from fire roll down. 'Nephew fix that.' He jump up and put the log back on the fire. And uncle ask if he could pack fresh water for him? He pack water. Every little thing, nephew do that.

Girls learned from their mothers and grandmothers. From an early age they picked berries. They practiced sewing by making doll clothes first, then making clothing for themselves. Their teachers were very strict. If a seam was not perfect, the girl's grandmother might rip it out and tell her to do it over again. It was important to learn to sew well, because clothes needed to be warm and sturdy so the person could survive through the winter.

When both boys and girls became teenagers, they had to live away from everyone else for a while. Girls stayed in their own small huts for a month. They practiced sewing and learned the rules they must follow when they became wives. Boys lived in the forest for five days with the men. During that time they were grilled with information and skills for survival.

Text-Based Questions on the Reading

1. What is a *ts'utl'*?
2. What sorts of games or toys helped prepare children to be adults?
3. What did boys have to do to become "tough"?
4. What would the characteristics be of a "tough" young man?
5. Why was learning to sew well such an important skill for a girl to learn?
6. What was the purpose of separating teenage boys and girls from the rest of the village?

Secondary Reading

Excerpts from
"This Is My Story: 'Tanaina' No More"
by Aaron Leggett

Original essay in *Dena'inaq' Huch'ulyeshi: The Dena'ina way of Living*.
Edited by Suzi Jones, James A. Fall and Aaron Leggett (2013), pp. 143-153.

I was born October 4, 1981, in Anchorage, Alaska, at the old Alaska Native Service Hospital on Third Avenue. My grandmother, Marie (Ondola) Rosenberg, was a full-blooded Dena'ina from Idlughet (Eklutna).

When my grandmother was born, in 1933, the Anchorage area had a population of about 3,000 people. When my mother was born, in 1957, the area had a population of about 80,000, and Alaska was a territory. When I was born, the population was about 180,000; today, it is close to 300,000.

The world my grandmother grew up in no longer exists. She grew up fishing with the family at Fire Island and hunting Dall sheep in the Eklutna Mountains. She spoke Dena'ina with her mom, Olga (Alex) Ondola, and her maternal grandfather, Beł K'ighił'ishen (Eklutna Alex). Today Eklutna Lake is a state park, and although the fish camp still exists at Fire Island, the regulations are such that it is no longer feasible for us to fish there. Today, I am the only person in the village who is learning the language, a task made all the more difficult because I never got the chance to speak it with my grandma.

I remember the day I learned that I was Dena'ina as if it were yesterday. It was November 22, 1984, a day or two after half my preschool class dressed up as Indians and the other half dressed up as Pilgrims. We knew we would then make cranberry sauce and put it in little Gerber baby jars. I remember being excited to give my grandma my Gerber jar for the Thanksgiving dinner. I remember giving it to her and saying, "Grandma, we dressed up as Indians in school." She replied, in her husky voice, "Aaron, you are Indian."

That one sentence would completely redefine who I was. What do you mean, I was an Indian? Indians were something I only saw in Disney's Goofy cartoons or that existed here long before "civilization." They lived in teepees and wore feather bonnets.

As I got a little older, I gradually came to understand what she meant when she said that we were "Indians." She meant, of course, that we were Dena'ina.

As I grew older, I began to struggle with my Native identity. The most obvious reason was the negative stereotype held by some in the dominant culture that all Natives

were drunks living on the street. Of course, this is rather mild when compared to the experience of people of my grandmother's and great-grandmother's generation, who would come into Anchorage and see signs hanging in the restaurants, signs like those in the Anchorage Grill that said "No Natives, dogs or Filipinos."

Another reason why I struggled with my identity as an Alaska Native is that I didn't grow up in a rural village. My village was, in fact, Anchorage, my ancestors' homeland. Therefore, I never really had the option of going back to a village to see what life was like.

In addition, there was virtually nowhere in Anchorage I could learn about the "Tanaina Athapaskans." Outside anthropologists, Europeans, referred to us as "Tanaina Athapaskans," and as a kid it was a bit unsettling because I always knew myself to be Dena'ina Athabascan.

It is hard for me to imagine what the future holds for us as Dena'ina people. Many of the things I could only have dreamed of a few years ago – such as interpretive signage, proper recognition, and a museum exhibition and catalog – are already happening.

Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done to reinvigorate *naqenaga* (our language). I dream that one day we will have our own museum so that we can continue to tell our story. I'm sure that one day a young Dena'ina person will read this and be amazed that there was a time when we were "invisible people."

Text-Based Questions on the Reading

1. What does the author mean when he says, "The world my grandmother grew up in no longer exists"?
2. How much is the Dena'ina language used today?
3. Why was the author at first puzzled when his grandmother told him he was an Indian?
4. How is Dena'ina culture different from the author's original idea of what it meant to be Indian?
5. What examples does the author give to indicate that Dena'ina culture is no longer invisible in Anchorage?

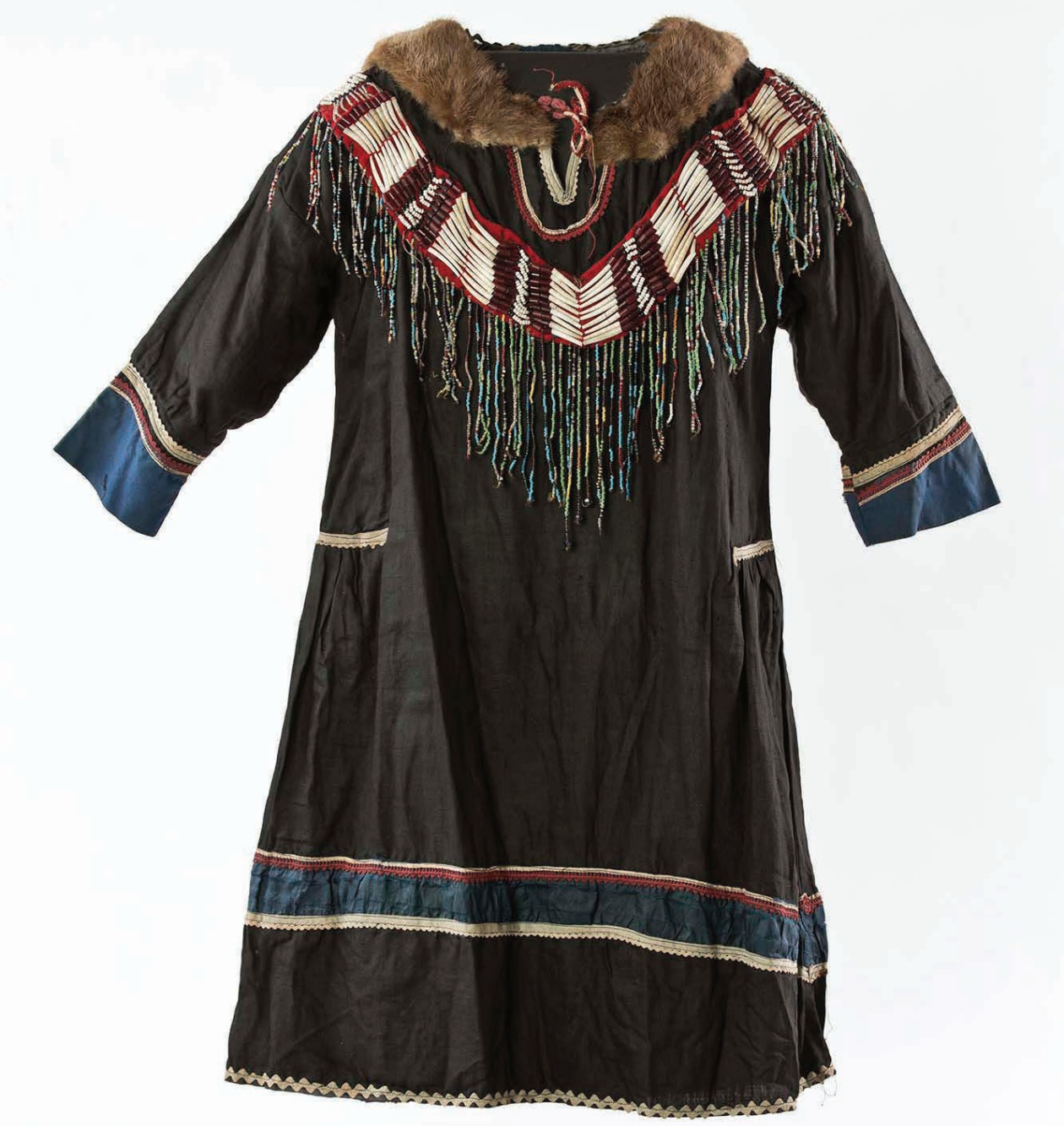
Historic Photograph

Chief Nikaly and his family, Knik, 1918. Photograph by H. G. Kaiser. Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1973.66.81.

Object Photograph

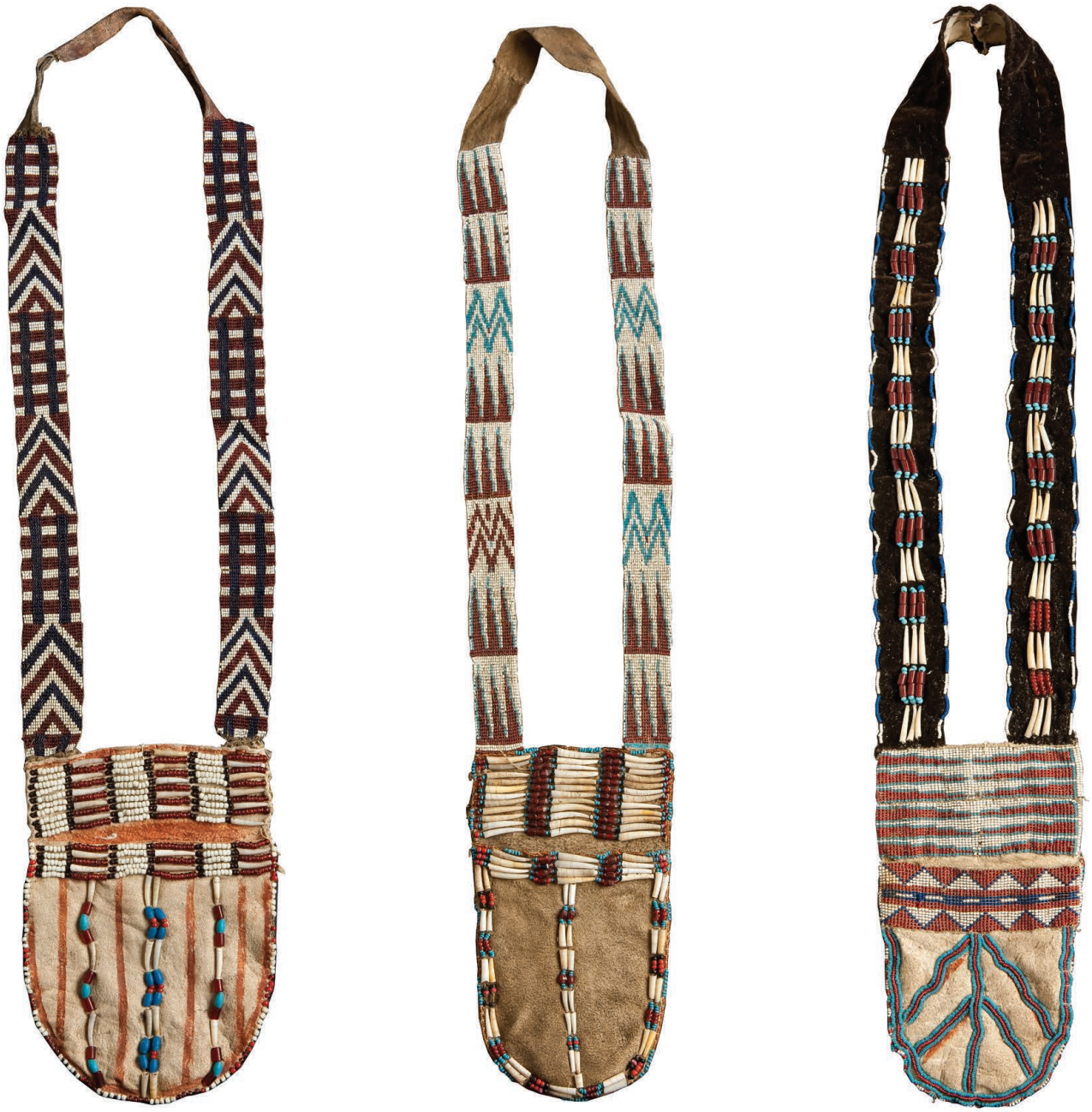
Vak'izhegi, bear gut parka, made by Helen Dick. Lime Village, 2009. L 91.4 cm. Bear gut, thread. Anchorage Museum, 2010.010.001. Photograph by Chris Arend/Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



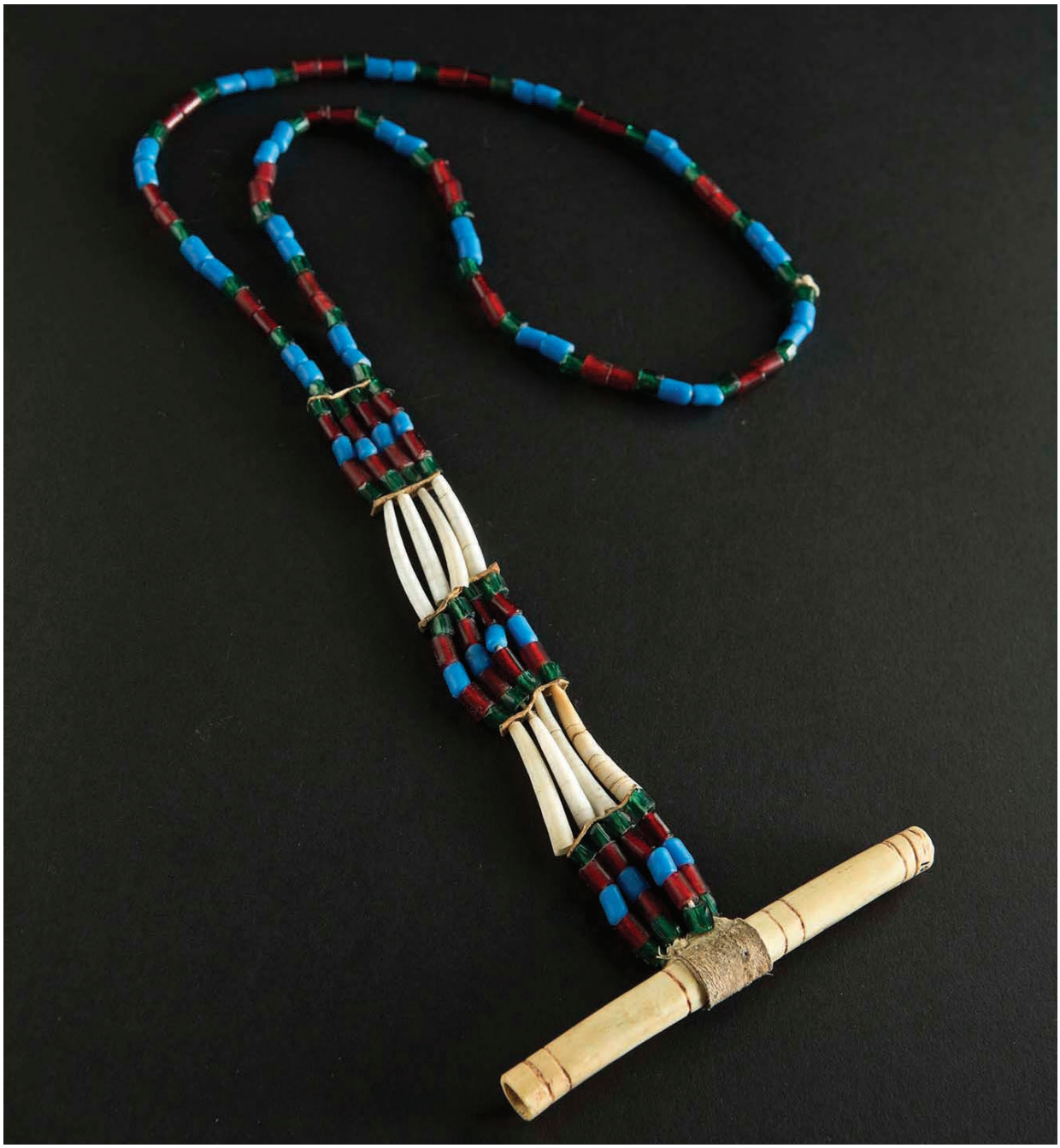
K'anyagi, dress. Chekok/Iliamna. L 86.4 cm, W 67.3 cm. Cotton, wool, dentalium shells, glass beads, beaver fur, thread. Private collection, on loan to the Anchorage Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



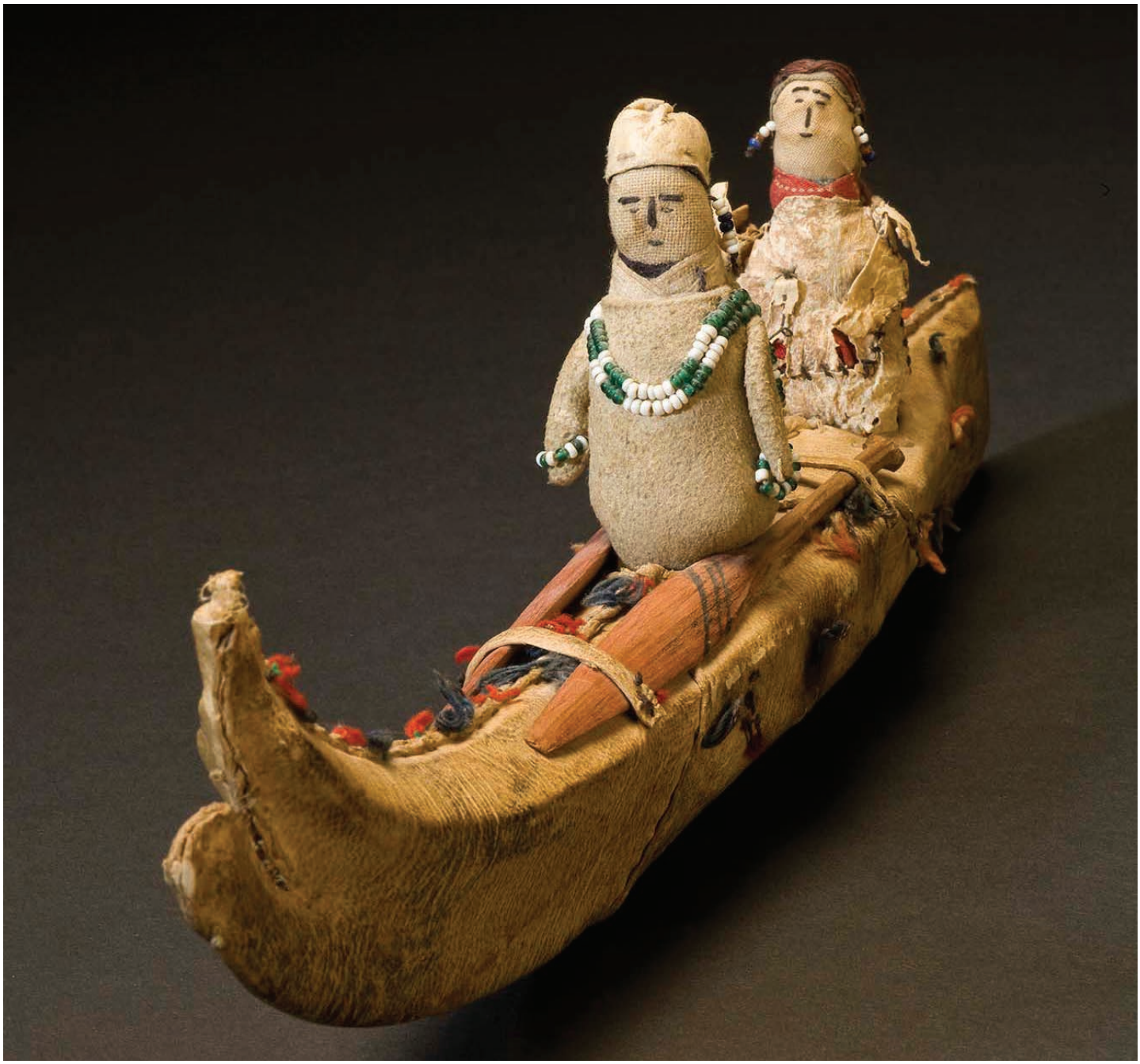
Viqizdluyi, fire bags. Tyonek and Knik River area, circa 1883. L 21 cm, W 12.5 cm. Moose hide (?), dentalium shells, beads. Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, IVA 6103, 6104, 6149. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



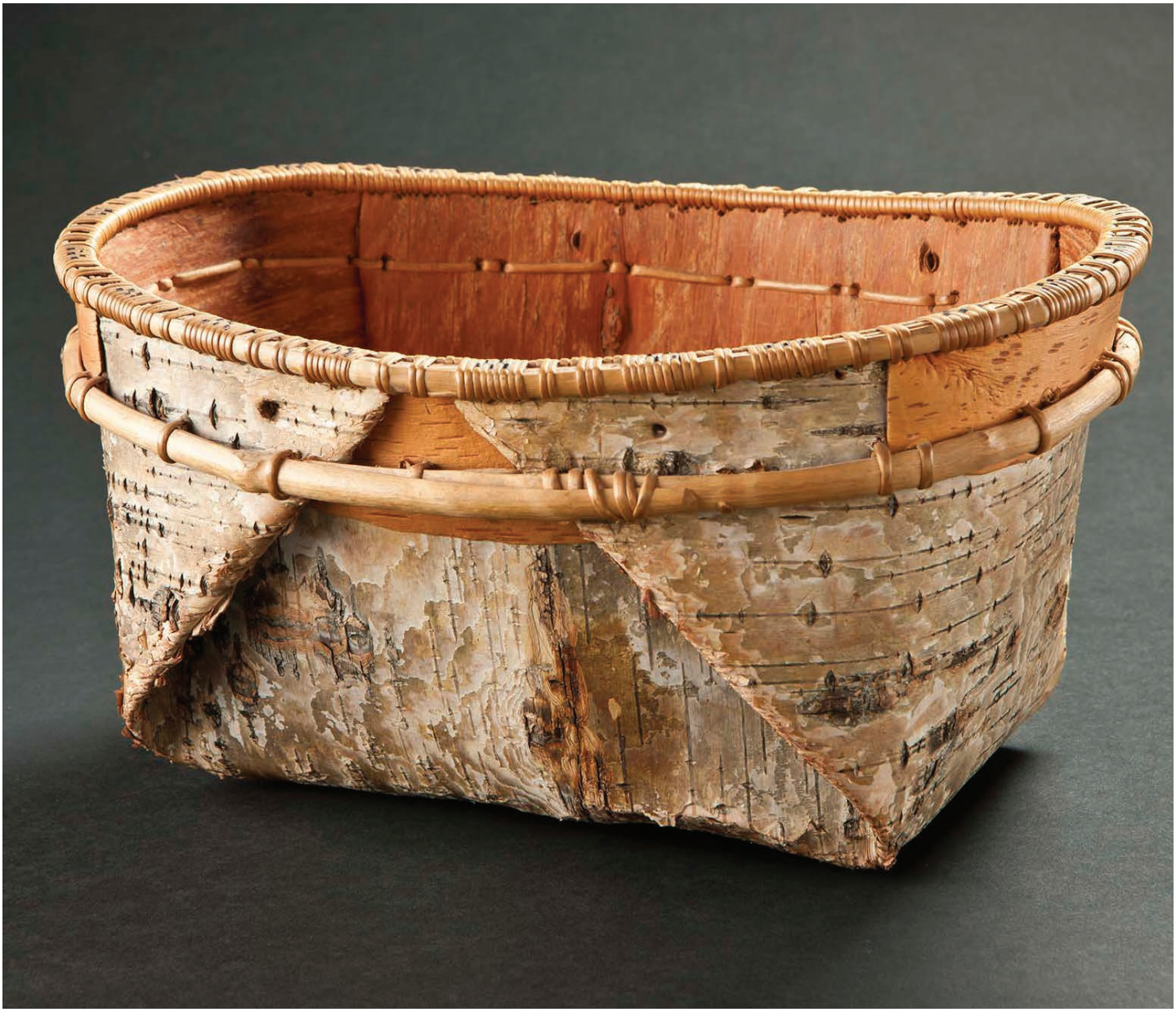
Ts'en zitl'i, drinking tube with beaded strap. Iliamna, 1931-1932. L 47.5 cm. Bone, dentalium shells, glass beads, caribou bone (?).Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, ANT.015852. Photograph © Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



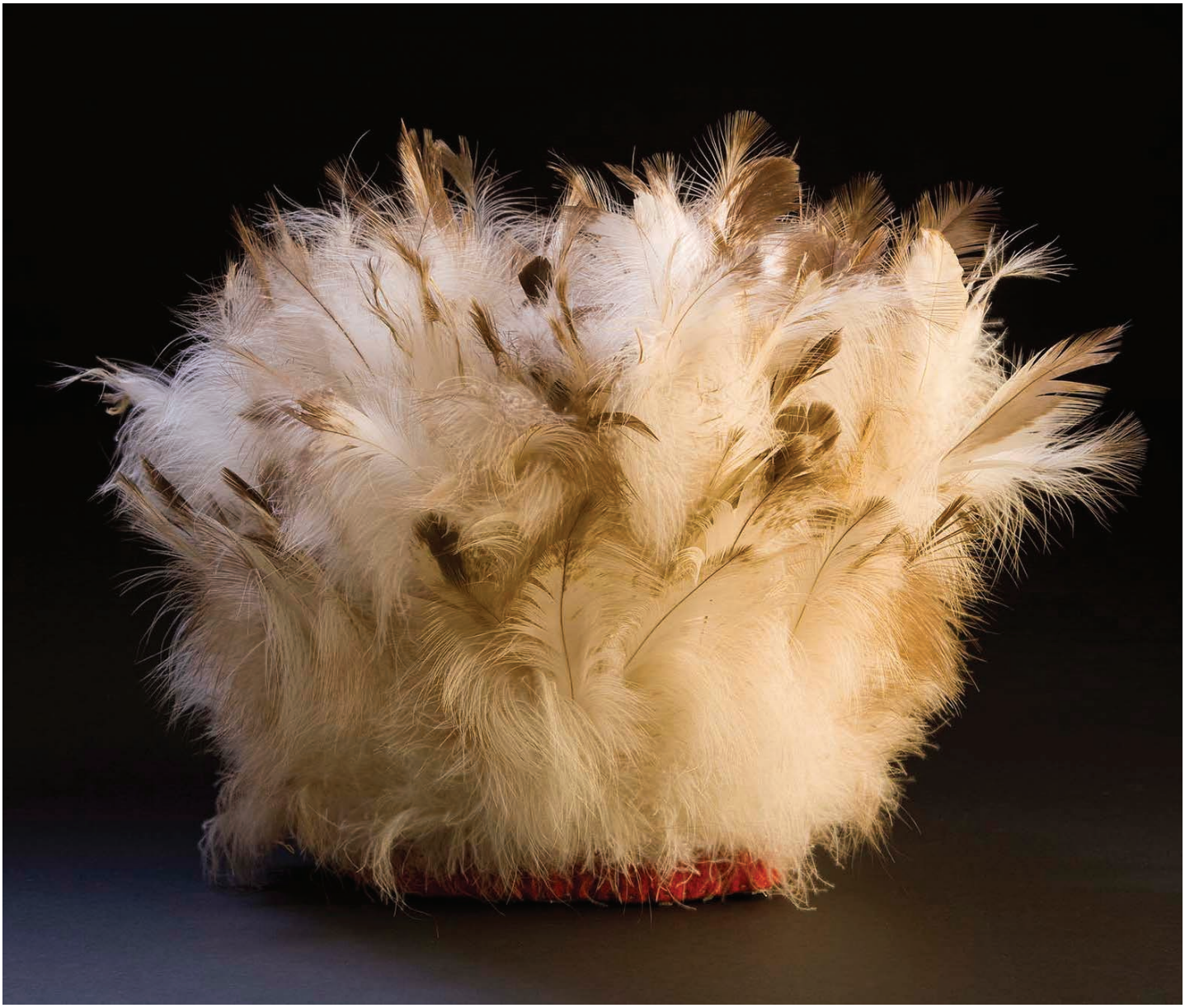
Biqidin gga, kayak model with two figures. Susitna Station, 20th century. L 32.2 cm. Moose hide (?), glass beads, wool and cotton cloth, wood, pigment. Anchorage Museum, 1997.048.003. Photograph by Chris Arend/Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



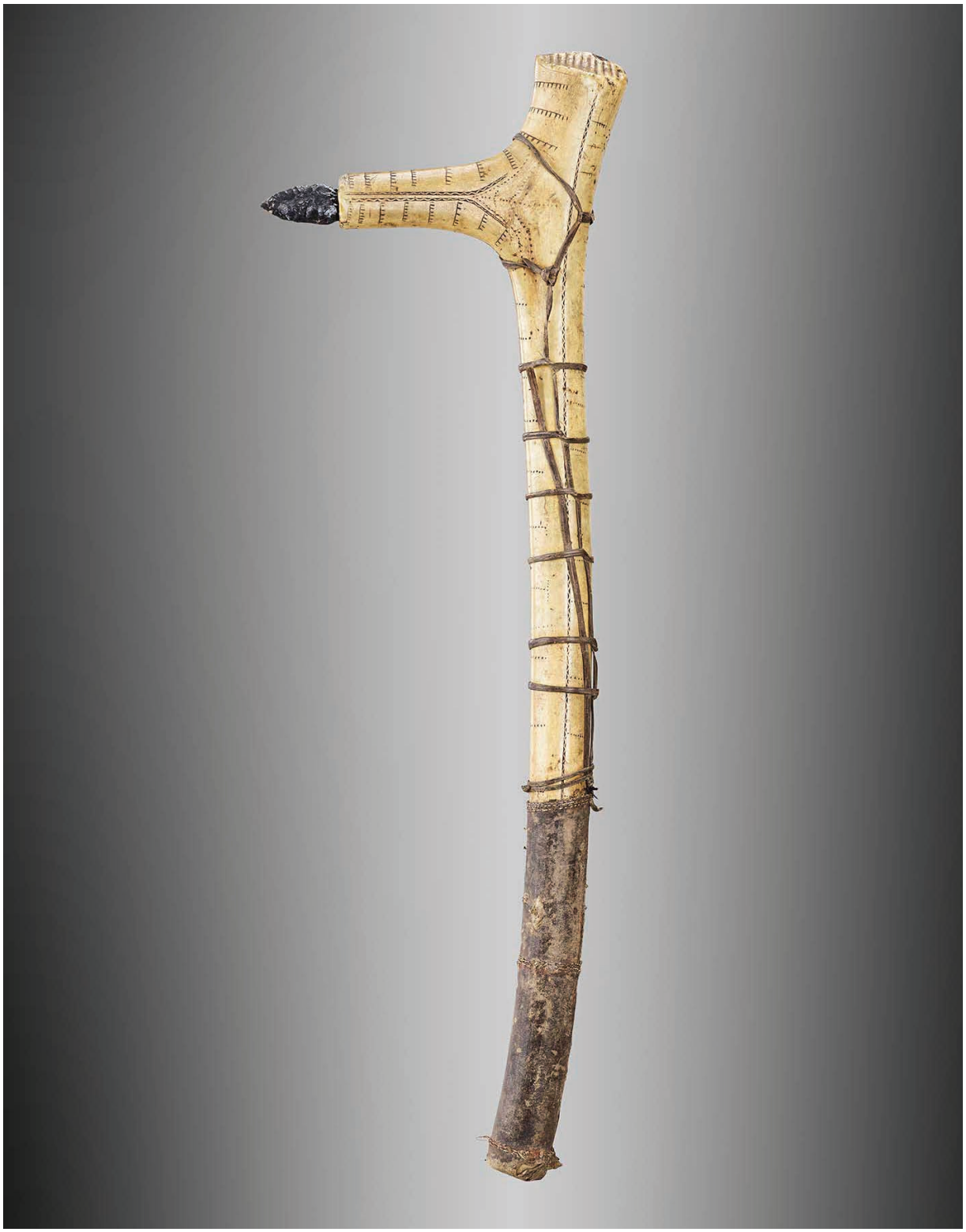
Ghelch'ehi, birch bark container. Stony River, circa 1940. L 34 cm. Birch bark, root, grass. Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, catalog no, 1.2E1179. Courtesy of the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



Chijeł, feather headdress. Willow, late 19th century. Diam. 31 cm. Eagle and goose (?) feathers, red wool, sinew. Anchorage Museum, 1978.035.005. Photograph by Chris Arend/Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



K'duheł, war club and arrowhead. Kenai, 1853. L 60 cm. Caribou antler, stone, caribou hide. The National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographic Collection, Hb106a and H840. Photograph © The National Museum of Denmark. Photograph by Arnold Mikkelsen.

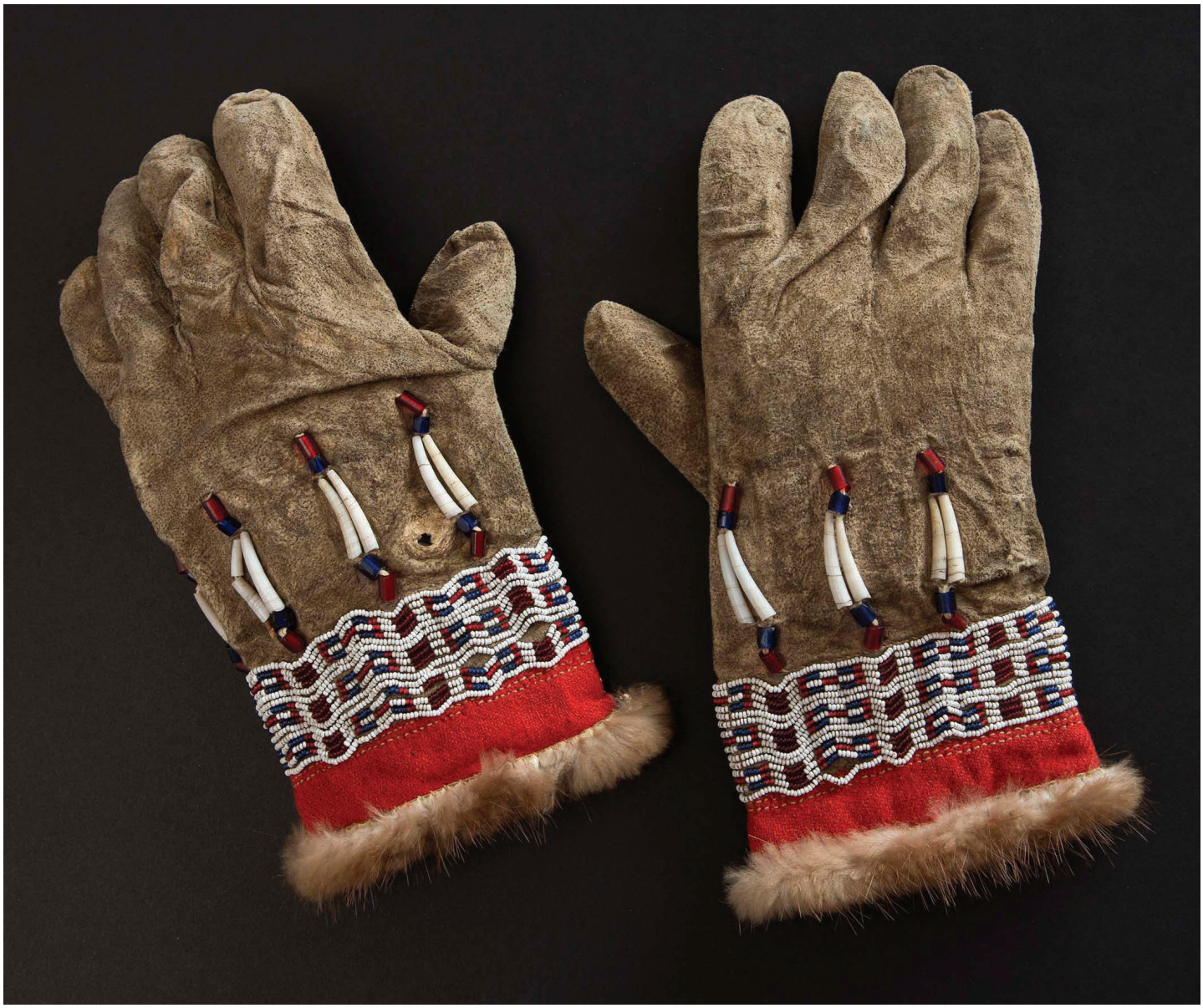
Object Photograph

Dalch'ehi, horn bowl. Cook Inlet, 1778. L 24.3 cm, W 11.4 cm. Dall sheep horn. British Museum, NWC33. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Object Photograph

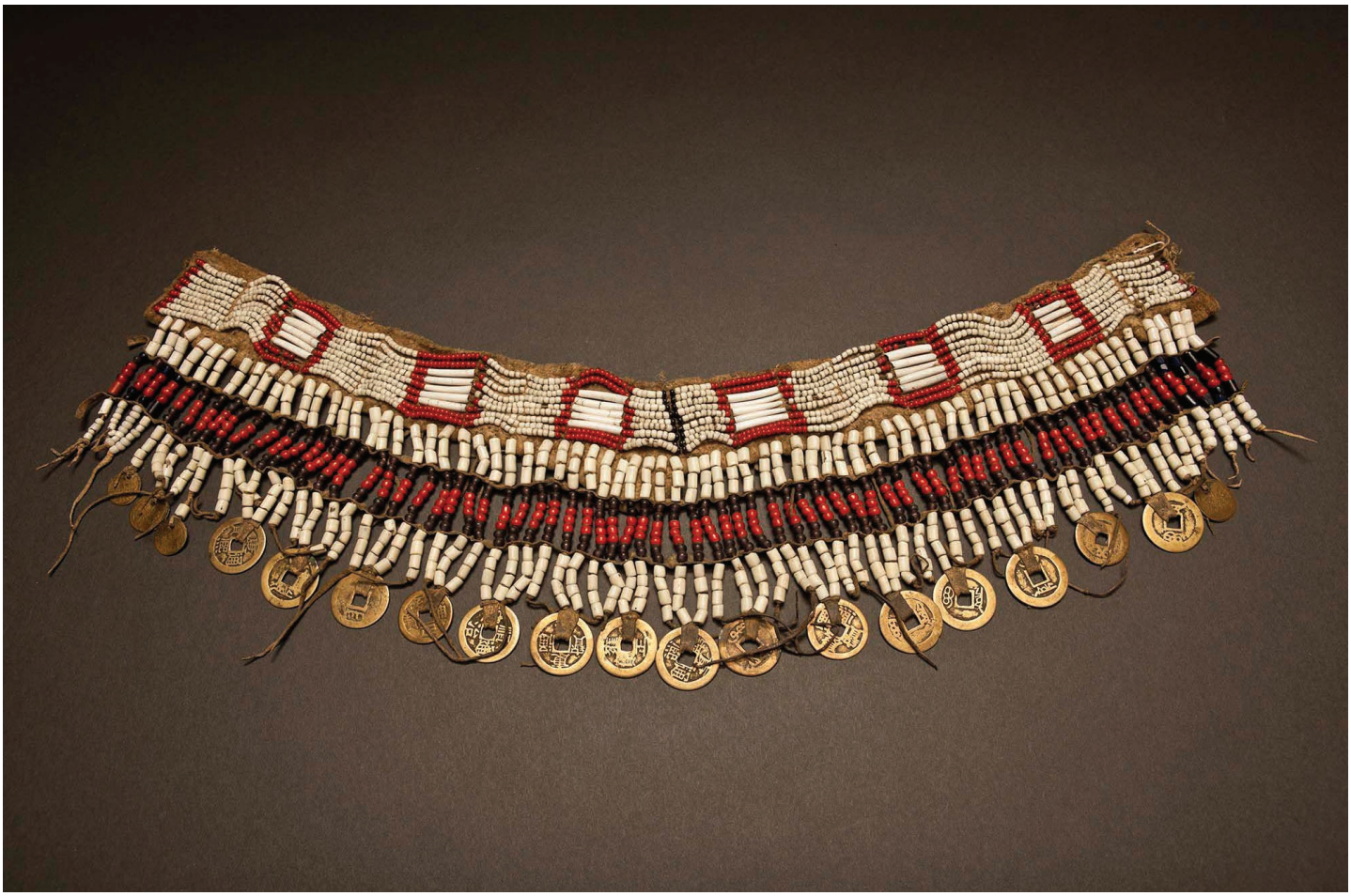
K'izhagi yes, knife sheath. Kenai Peninsula, circa 1790. L 31.7 cm. Caribou hide, porcupine quills, sinew, ochre. British Museum, VAN99. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Object Photograph



Lugech', gloves. Nondalton, early 20th century. L 26 cm. Caribou hide, dentalium shells, beads, wool, beaver fur, sinew, thread. Private collection. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



Deghk'isen sez, beaded woman's belt. Kenai Peninsula, 1883. L 54 cm, W 14.5 cm. Chinese coins, moose hide, dentalium shells, glass beads, sinew, coins. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6110. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

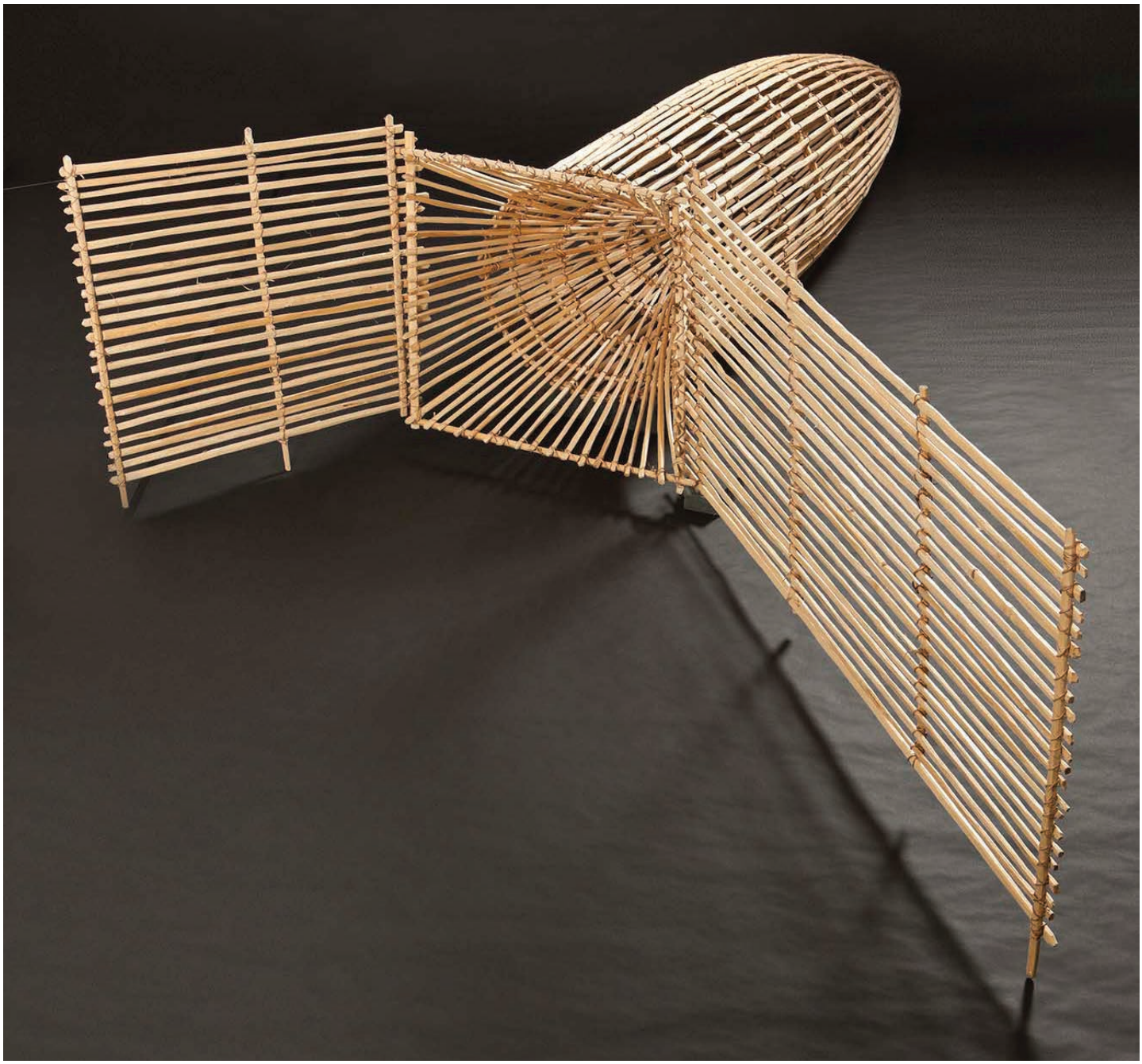
Object Photograph

Niłnuqeyishi, counting cord. Kenai, pre-1907. Gut, glass beads, feathers, hair.
Alaska State Museum, II-C-316g. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph

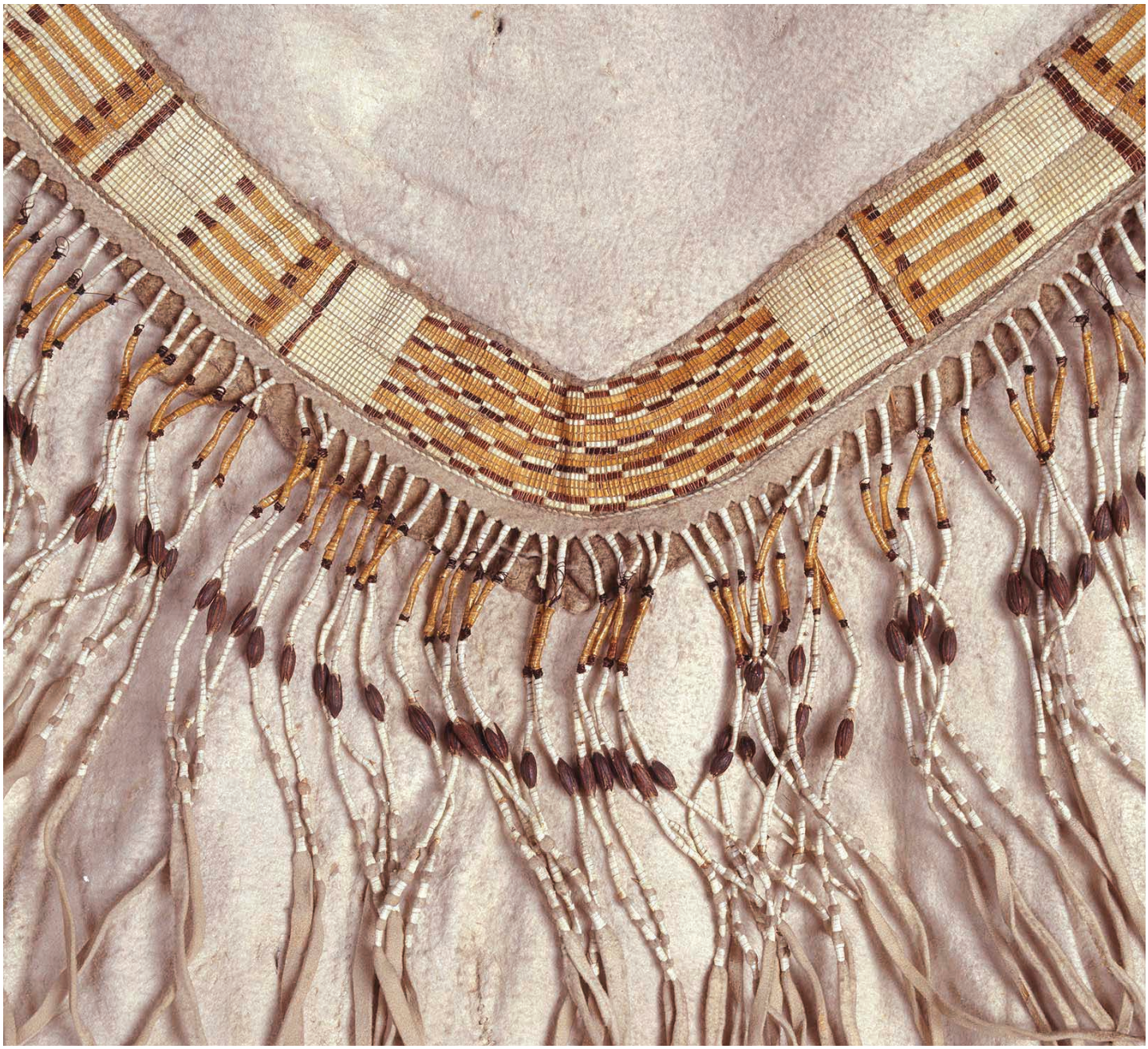
Q'us, quiver. Alaska, 1850s. Caribou hide, eagle feathers, porcupine quills, sinew, ochre. Furuhjelm Collection, Hämeenlinna High School (Hämeen Lyseon Lukio). Photograph by Marcus Lepola.

Object Photograph



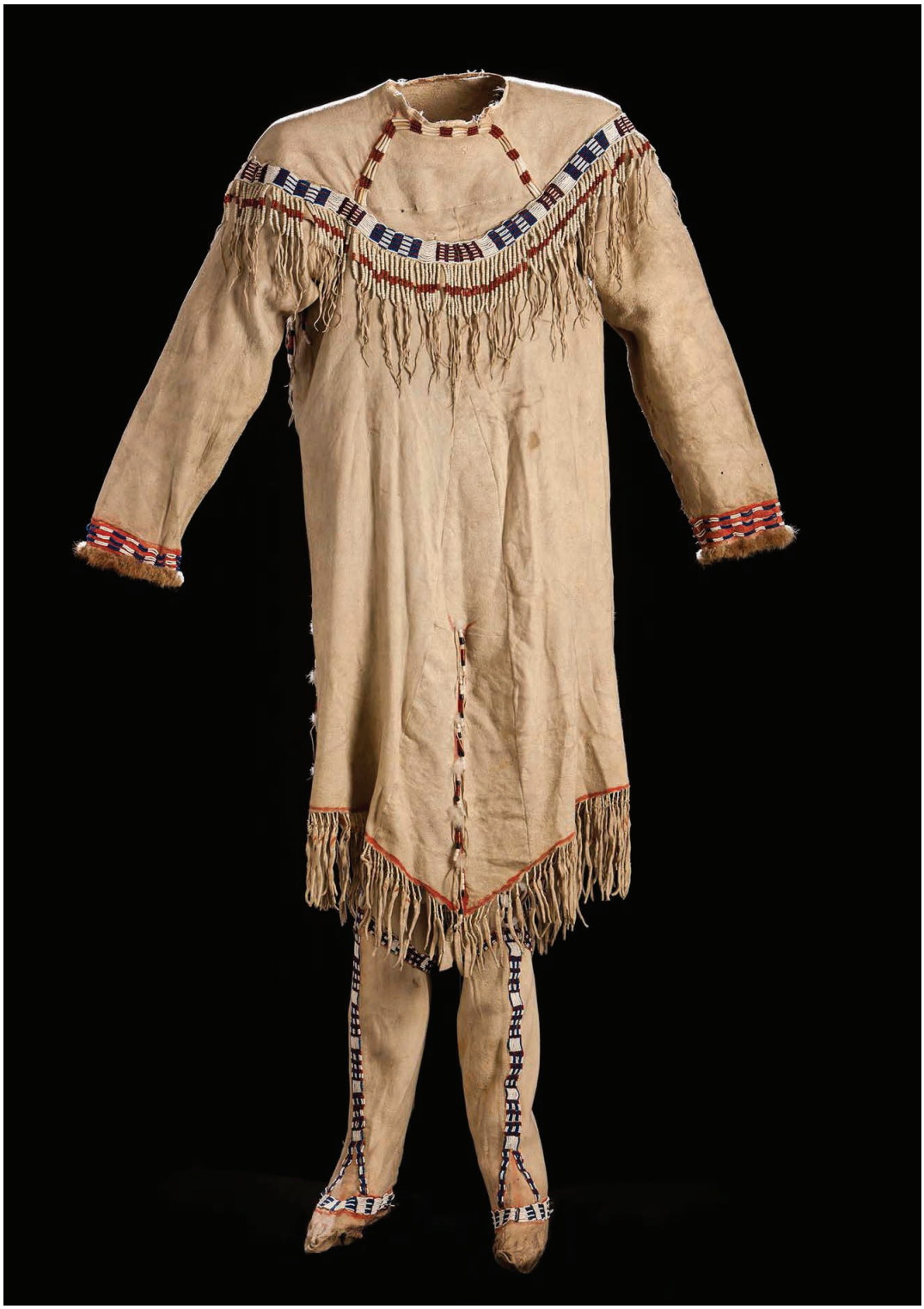
Hulehga taz'in, whitefish trap with fences. Anchorage Museum, 2009.010.001af, DH-W2K2874. Photograph by Chris Arend/Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



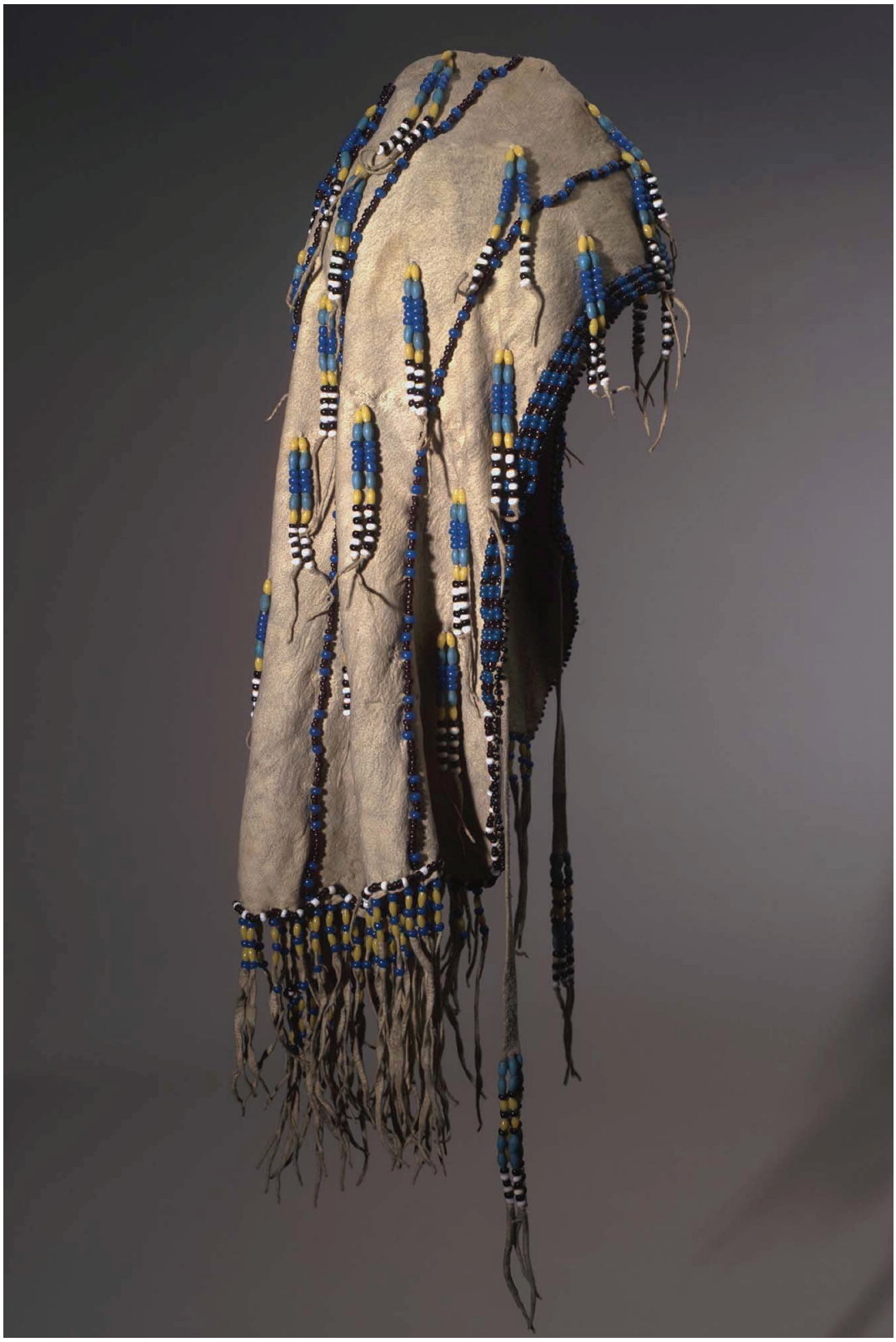
Detail (breast band VK167a) of *Kił dghak'a*, man's summer tunic. Collected by Adolf Etholen, donated 1846. L 141 cm, W 103 cm. Caribou hide, porcupine quills, fur (otter?), silverberry seeds, feathers. Museum of Cultures, National Museum of Finland, VK167A. Photograph © Finland's National Board of Antiquities/ Picture Collections. Photograph by István Bolgár.

Object Photograph



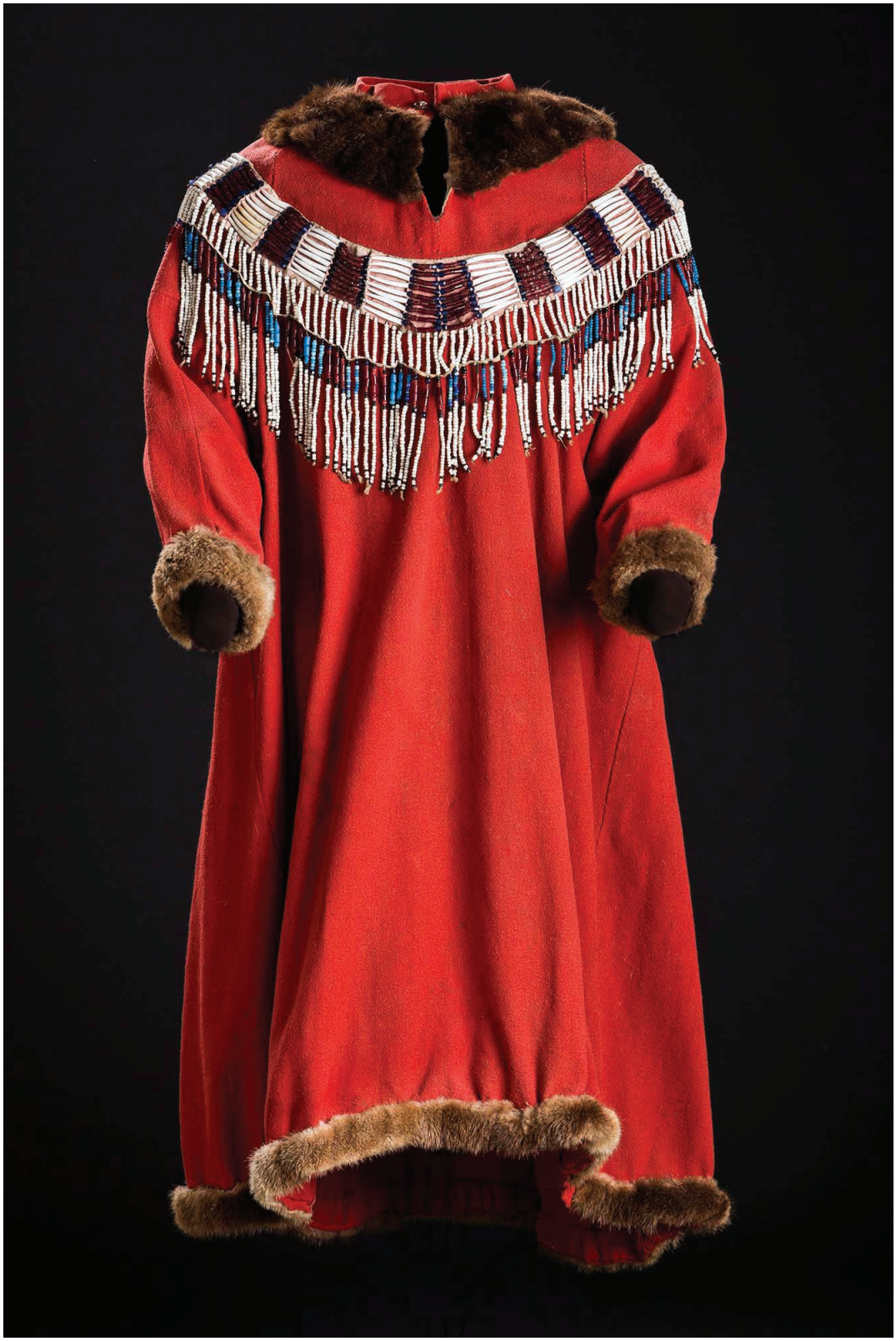
Kił dghak'a, tunic, and *tl'useł*, moccasin-trousers. Tyonek, 1883. Tunic: L 124 cm, W 54 cm. Caribou hide, beads, sinew, ochre, down (eagle?), fur trim (beaver?). IVA 6147. Moccasin-trousers: L 128 cm, W 53 cm. Caribou hide, beads, sinew, ochre. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6146. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



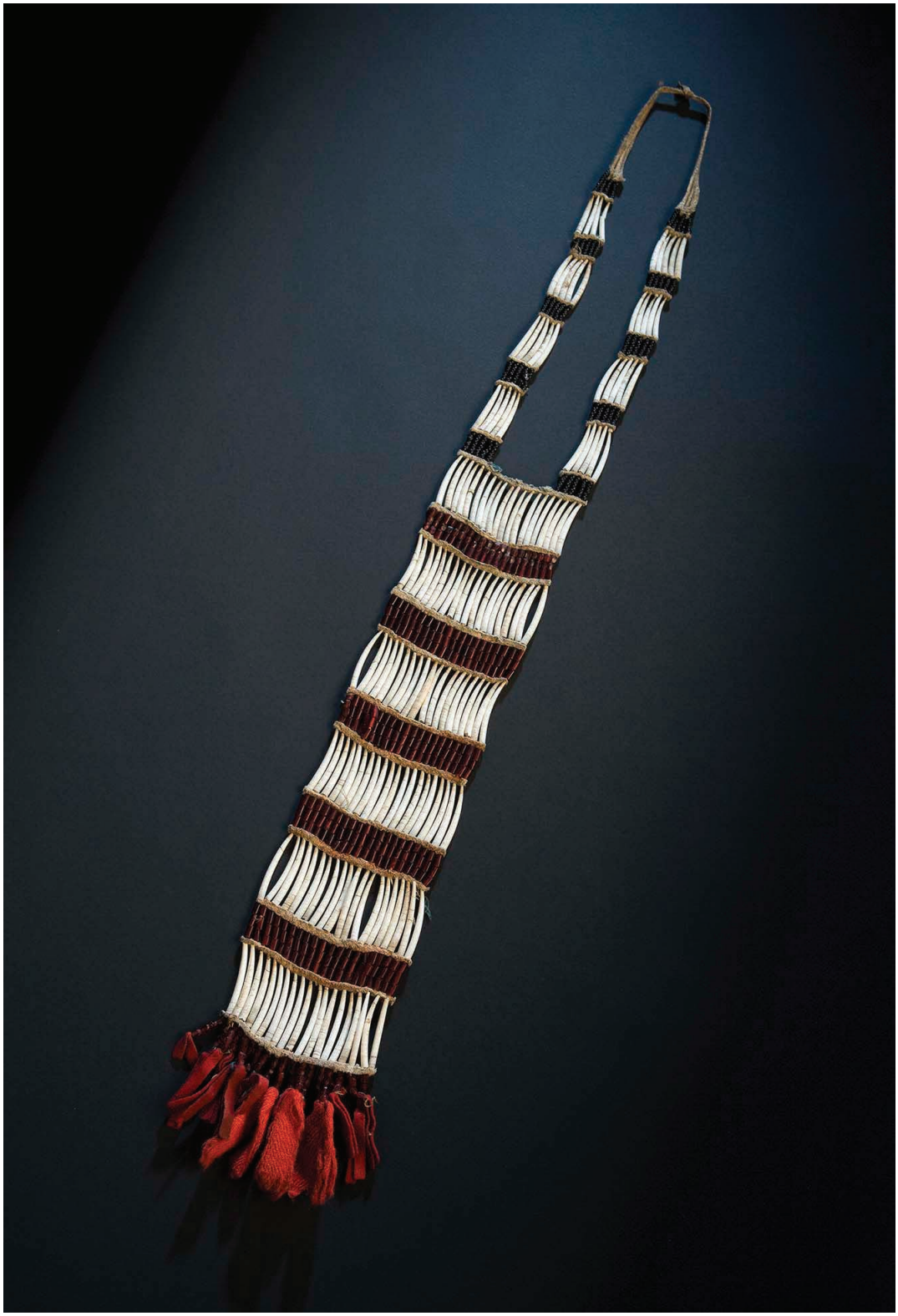
Chik'ich'a, hood. Kenai, 1894. L 61 cm, W 55 cm. Caribou hide, glass beads, sinew, thread. American Museum of Natural History, E/2383 C. Photograph © Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History.

Object Photograph



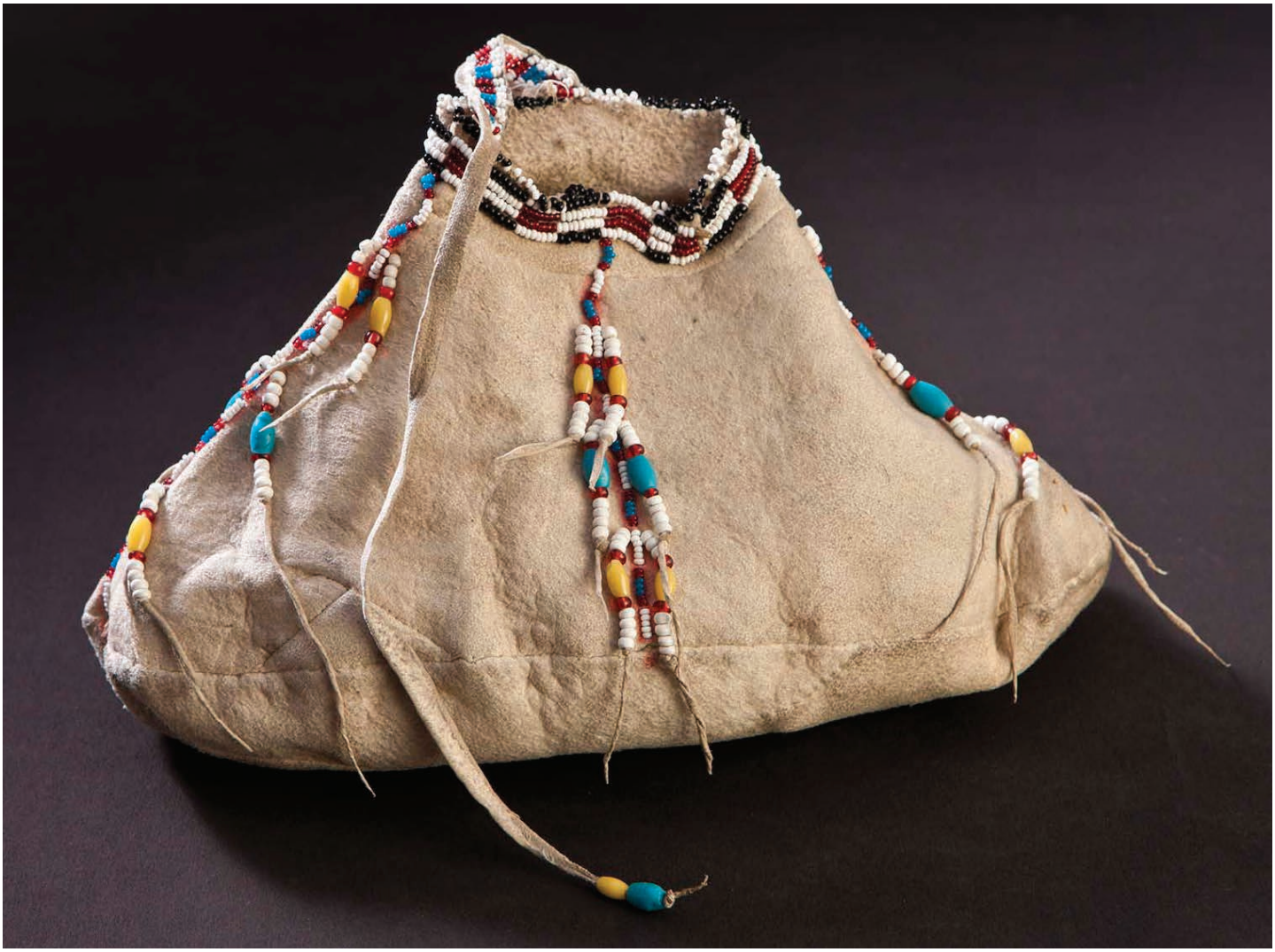
K'anyagi, dress. Stony River/Old Iliamna. L 116, W 79.5 cm. Wool, beads, dentalium shells, caribou hide (?), fur, thread. Private collection, on loan to the Anchorage Museum, L1971.003.001. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



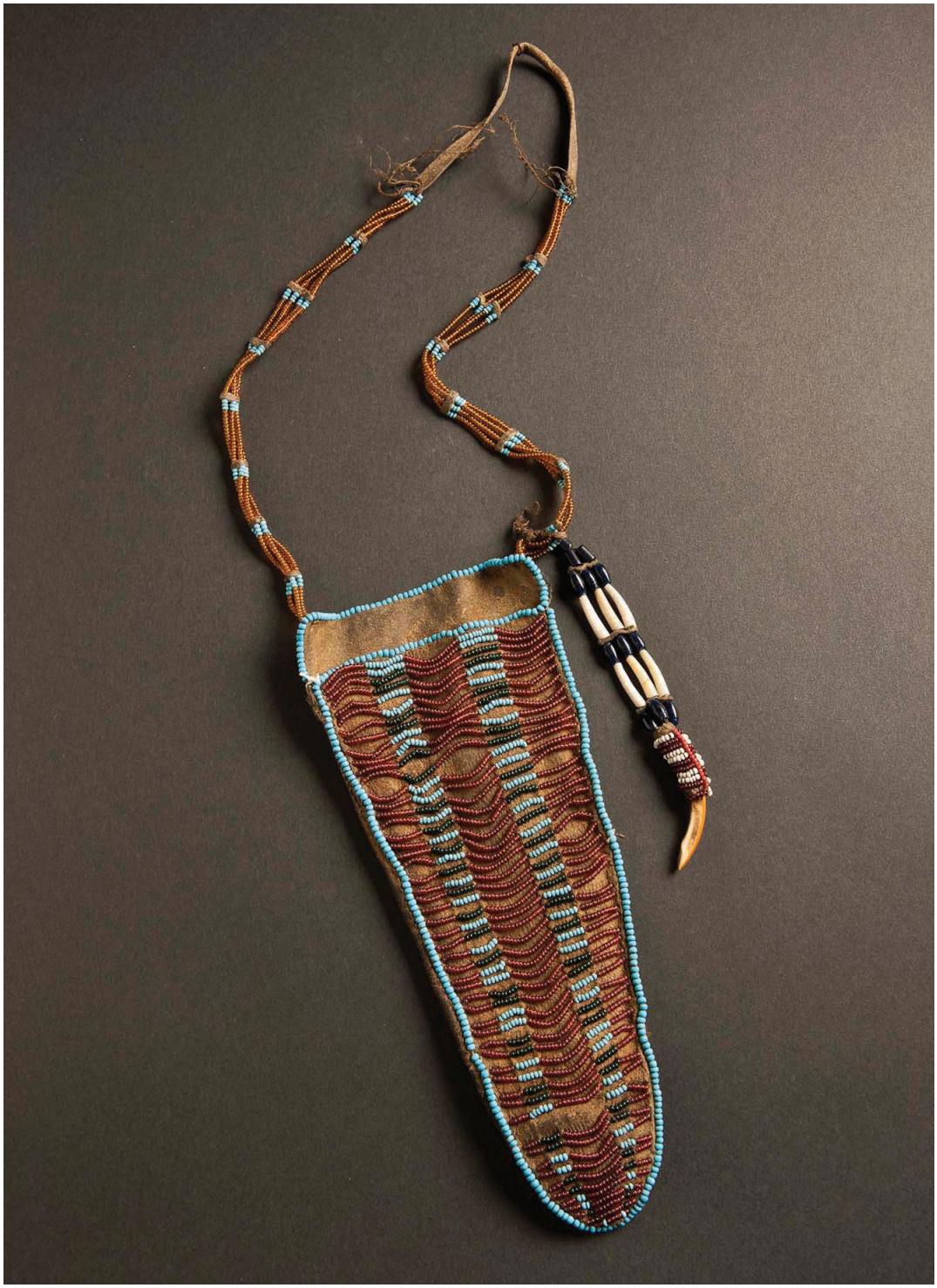
T'uyedi, dentalium necklace. Susitna Station, circa 1902. L 86.5 cm. Dentalium shells, sinew, beads, wool cloth. Anchorage Museum, 1978.035.002. Photograph by Chris Arend/Anchorage Museum.

Object Photograph



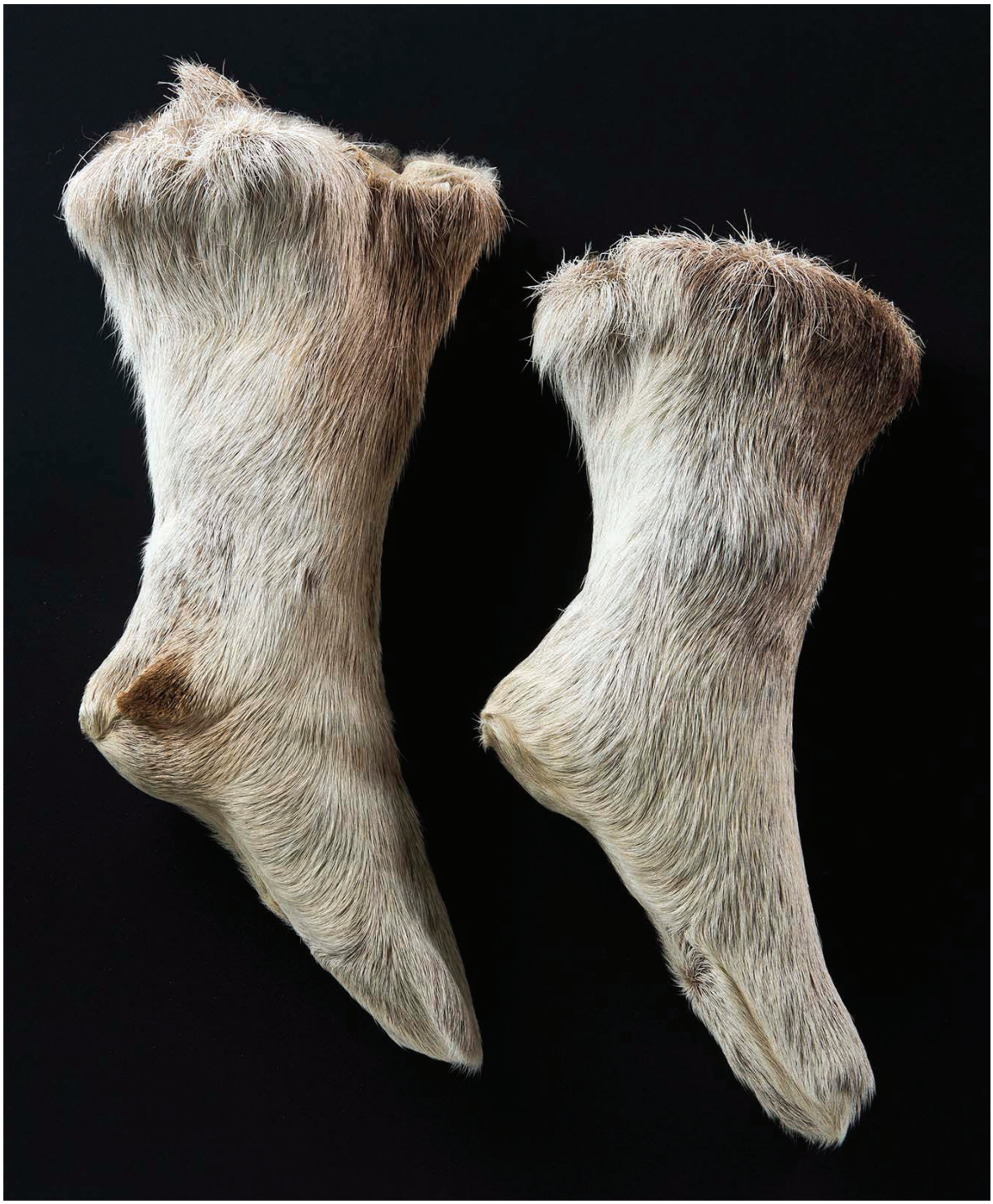
Vaqilani, caribou hide bag. Cook Inlet. Caribou hide, glass beads, sinew. Alaska State Museum, II-C-71. Photograph © Alaska State Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



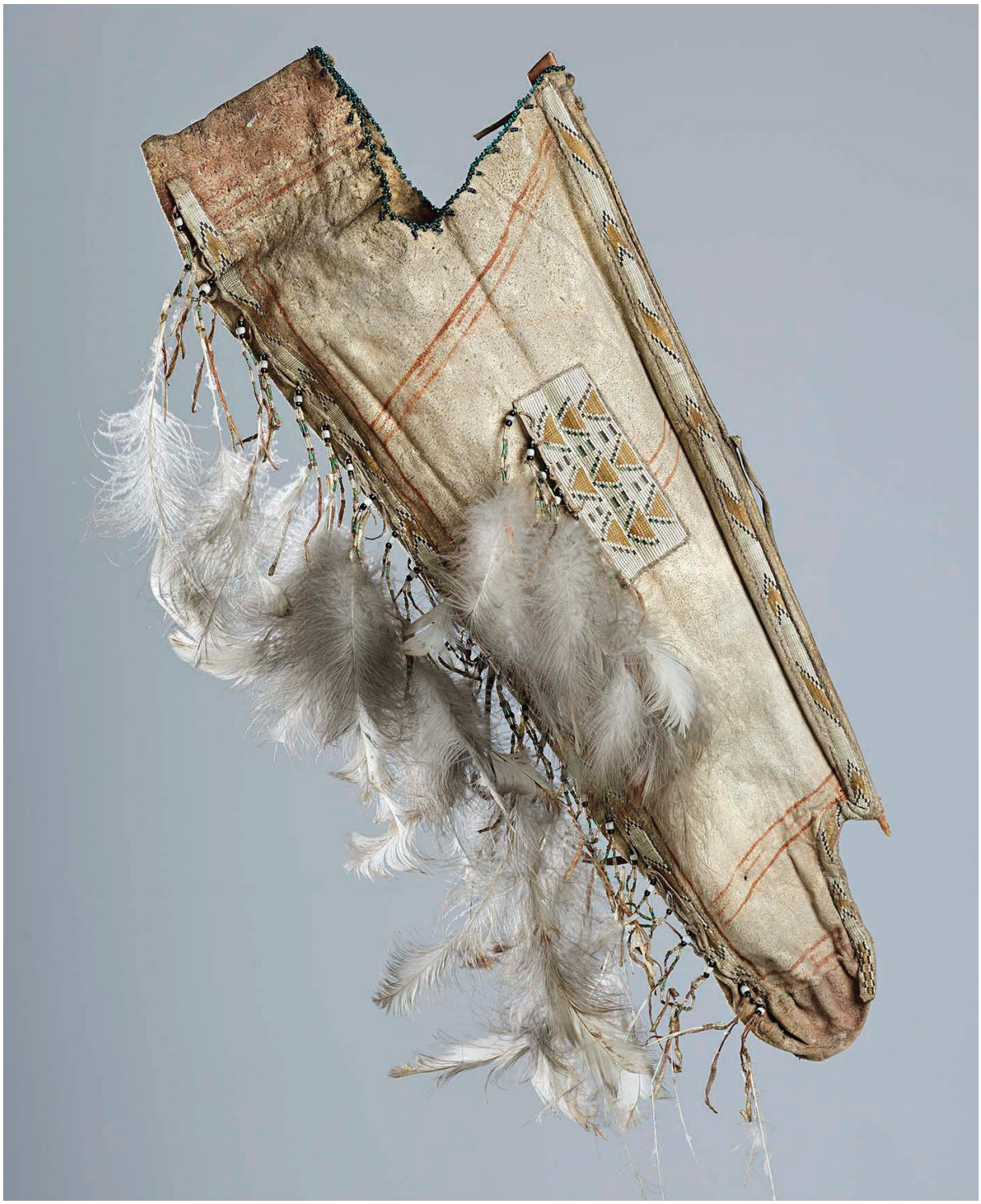
K'izhagi yes, chughi, knife sheath with beaver tooth. Tyonek, 1883. L 57 cm with strap, W 9 cm. Moose hide, beads, beaver tooth. Ethnological Museum Berlin, IVA 6101. Photograph courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



Tel, caribou skin socks. Kenai, 20th century. Caribou hide. Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center, City of Kenai Collection, 1968.001.001ab. Photograph by Chris Arend.

Object Photograph



Q'us, quiver. Kenai, 1853. L 71 cm. Caribou hide, eagle feathers, porcupine quills, sinew. National Museum of Denmark, Hb117. Photograph © The National Museum of Denmark, Ethnographic Collection. Photograph by Arnold Mikkelsen.