



*Mark: Sonya Kelliber-Combs*

Sept 9 - Oct 14

**TUREEN**

Tureen presents *Mark*, the gallery's first show with Anchorage-based artist Sonya Kelliher-Combs (Iñupiaq/Athabascan). *Mark* is a two-venue exhibition, co-presented with STARS in Los Angeles, featuring bodies of work that merge synthetic and natural materials to center Indigenous collectivities against destructive settler practices in Alaska and beyond.

Mark

noun

1. a visible impression or trace on something, such as a line, cut, dent, or bruise
  2. a badge, brand, or other visible sign assumed or imposed
- verb
1. to put a mark or makes on
  2. to take notice; give attention; consider

Since the late 1990s, Kelliher-Combs has depicted her take on the walrus tusk form—customarily worn on parkas—as symbols in her interlocking *Secrets* series. As paintings or as sculptures, these symbols accrue metaphoric power. Some refer abstractly to the potency of secrecy: as personal protection, as the socially unspoken, or as the historically obscured. Others reveal more specific secrets: the *Credible Secrets*, on view in both galleries, refer to the 35 recognized abuse claims by Alaska communities against the Catholic Church.

Left open or stitched closed, as sculptural containers the *Secrets* mediate what is outside and what is kept—or forced—within. Blending beads, U.S. Geological Survey maps, nylon string, hair, and skins and intestines, they're worked into forms that continually reveal themselves and their textures and hidden content.

The two-dimensional *Secrets* are no less materially rich: Kelliher-Combs creates a kind of synthetic skin from acrylic gel. Applied on muslin, the surface quality appears fleshy, and gestures appear scar-like. Each layer signifies generations, the opacity and transparency of the material giving form to the latent feelings that can't quite find language or resolution.

Kelliher-Combs works with materials central to subsistence hunting—skins and intestines from walrus, seal, and reindeer, for example. Yet the human-made is quite literally woven in—or, in many works, it is not at all immediately clear what might be land-based or what is synthetic. The red Slips at Tureen could seem reminiscent of a de-fleshed hide or a thin garment. Kelliher-Combs produced these works as a response to accounts of institutional and interpersonal abuse she’s heard throughout Alaska and reaction to the pain, anger, and destruction that these traumas visit and revisit upon individuals and communities.

Kelliher-Combs’s work frequently draws on gendered cultural knowledge and intergenerational practices, and she invites members of her family and community into her process. Her Idiot Strings began in 2005 as a project engaging friends and family to hew abstract, cocoon-like pouches from walrus stomach, sheep and reindeer hide, found bed sheets, maps, flags, and clothes. The series’ title refers to tethers used to hang mittens, and the attached sculptural pockets are roughly hand-sized, suggesting an absent body. Idiot Strings began in part as a memorial to three of the artist’s uncles who died by suicide, a cause of death which disproportionately affects Indigenous North Americans. On view in Red, White, and Blue at STARS, the 2023 Idiot Strings appropriates the U.S. flag to acknowledge the history of a nation built on enduring foundations of violence and marginalization towards many communities.

At Tureen, Kelliher-Combs displays her New Artifacts series, initiated during the 2021 lockdown when she was collecting various objects from nearby beaches and dialoguing with the artist Maureen Gruben, whom she was supposed to be working with during an in-person residency. The title references the museological and anthropological practices that appropriate Indigenous culture—and Indigenous bodies—as artifacts from a “dying people.” As new “discoveries” of a sort, they arrive from the blurry realm between the land-based and human-made. These found objects—wood or rope alike—have been reshaped by natural forces. In Kelliher-Combs hands they’re transformed again, with her own hand, automotive paint, and symbols and marks. Existing in a speculative place that isn’t quite nature or culture, these artifacts are recovered from a past that has yet to arrive.

Marking time, marking place; leaving a scar—on an individual or a population; creating the dividing lines of nations and history; asserting presence: the mark, the central element from which its argued much art emerges, is hardly neutral territory. By juxtaposing land-based and synthetic materials, abstract and narrative forms, and individual and collective creation, Kelliher-Combs exposes and challenges Western consumptive and control-driven ideologies. Mark continues Kelliher-Combs’s commitment to not only commenting on settler society’s impact on Indigenous peoples and their Native lands, but opens possibilities for community, advocacy, and action.





*Pink Slips 2*, 2023, Acrylic polymer, cotton muslin, steel pin, paper, 44¼ x 22 in. (each), SK0005







*Credible Secrets with Red II*, 2023, Acrylic polymer, glass bead, nylon thread, cotton muslin, printed maps on cotton fabric, 64 x 40 in., SK0003







*New Artifact (Red)*, 2023, Found wood and automotive paint, 16 x 103 x 15 in., SK0010



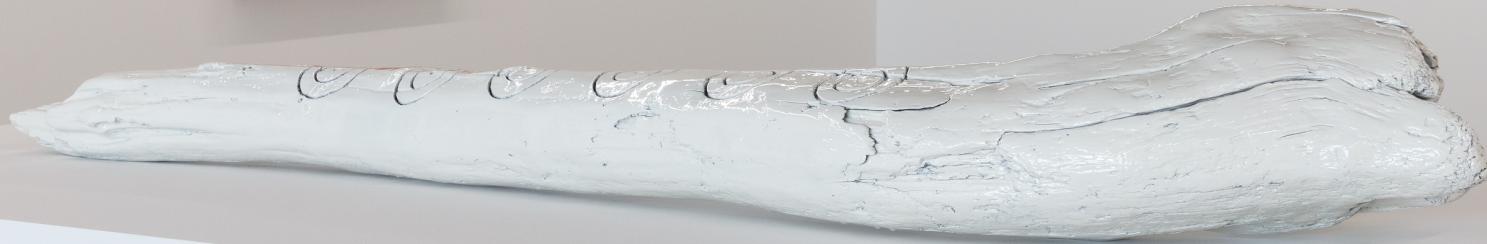


*Red Large Beaded Secrets*, 2023, Acrylic polymer, glass bead, nylon thread, cotton muslin, paper, 40 x 30 in., SK0001





*New Artifact (White)*, 2023, Found wood and automotive paint, 9 x 83 x 15 in.,SK0009

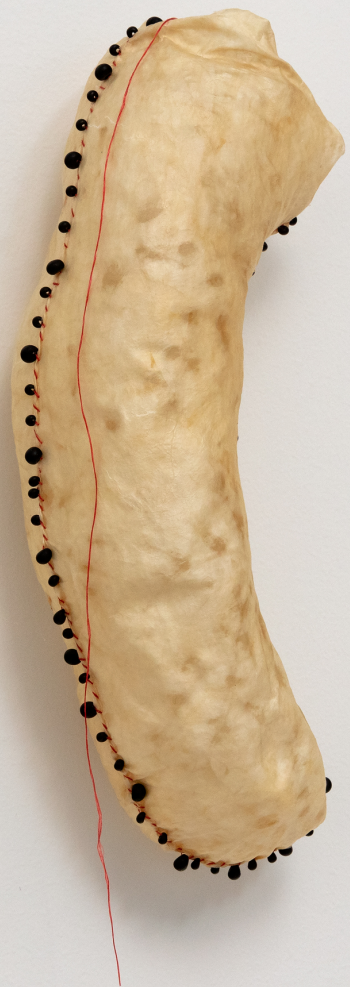








*Large Secrets*, 2012-2023, Walrus, stomach, seal intestine, reindeer, rawhide, sheep, rawhide, glass, bead, human hair, nylon, thread, cotton string, beluga intestine, and porcupine quill, Dimensions variable, SK0004





*Seafoam and Red Small Secrets*, 2023, Acrylic polymer, glass bead, nylon thread, cotton muslin, fabric, 66 x 30 in. (each),SK0008





*Credible, Small Secrets III, 2023, Printed maps on cotton fabric, human hair, nylon thread, glass bead, steel pin, Dimensions variable, SK0007*







*Small White Secrets with Neutral*, 2023, Acrylic polymer, glass bead, nylon thread, cotton muslin, paper, 40 x 30 in., SK0002







Sonya Kelliher-Combs (b.1969) lives and works in Anchorage, Alaska

## Education

1998 MFA, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

1992 BFA Cum Laude, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, AK

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

2023 Visceral: Verity, Alaska State Museum, Juneau, AK

2019 Goodbye: The Things We Carry, Yukon Arts Center, Whitehorse, YT Canada, Mark, Minus Space, Brooklyn, NY, Brand, Bunnell Street Gallery, Homer, AK

2018 Recent Work, Cyranos Gallery, Anchorage, AK

2017 New Work, Kenai Arts Center, Kenai, AK, Remnant, Peters Projects, Santa Fe, NM

2016 Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Carrie McLain Museum, Nome, AK

2015 Stitch: Line, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Anchorage, AK

2014 Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Recent Work, Jaffe Friede Gallery, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

2012 Qupak, Pratt Museum, Homer, AK, Where they Overlap, Gorman Gallery, UC Davis, Davis, CA

2011 Hide, Museum of Contemporary Native Art, Santa Fe, NM

2010 Hide, National Museum of Indian Art, New York, NY

2008 Walrus Family Portrait, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Anchorage, AK

2007 New Secrets, Well Street Art Company, Fairbanks, AK, Unraveled Secret, Bunnell Street Gallery, Homer, AK

2006 Unraveled Secret, Institute of American Indian Art, Santa Fe, NM, Secret, Modo Gallery, Hudson, NY

2005 Untitled Secrets, Well Street Art Company, Fairbanks, AK, Untitled, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK

2002 1000 Secrets, Decker/Morris Art Gallery, Anchorage, AK

2001 Idiot Strings, Catch and Release, Alaska State Museum, Juneau, AK

2000 New Works, Decker/Morris Gallery, Anchorage, AK

1998 Asianggataq, Harry Wood Art Gallery, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

1994 Formline, Carrie McLain Museum, Nome, AK, Transformation, University of Alaska Fine Arts Gallery, Fairbanks, AK

1990 Sonya Kelliher-Combs, Carrie McLain Museum, Nome, AK

## Selected Group Exhibitions

2023 Young Elder, James Fuentes Gallery, New York, NY

2022 Arctic/Amazon: Networks of Global Indigineity, The Power Plant, Toronto, CA, Pop-Aganda: Revolution & Iconography, The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, PA, Agency: Feminist Art and Power, Museum of Sonoma County, Santa Rosa, CA

2019 Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, MN, Physical Narrative, Elaine L. Jacob Gallery, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

2018 Aiviq & Nanuq: Sea Horse and Sea Bear of the Arctic, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK, Among All These Tundras, Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery, Montreal, Canada, Place of Origin, Korundi Museum, Rovaniemi, Finland, Art for a New Understanding, Native Voices 1950's to Now, Crystal Bridges, Fayetteville, AR, Stitching Beads, North Atlantic House, Copenhagen, Denmark, The Things We Carry, Kunsthall Svalbard, Northern Norway Art Museum, Svalbard Norway, The Un-heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S., Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, New York, NY

2017 Subsistence (NO/US), Gallery of Northern Norway, Harstad, Norway, Native Art Now, Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, IN

2016 Decolonizing Alaska, Bunnell Street Gallery, Homer, AK, Alaska State Museum, Juneau AK, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. SITElines: New Perspectives on Art of the Americas, SITE Santa Fe Biennial, Santa Fe, NM

2015 Fifth World, Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, SK, Canada, Gyre: the Plastic Ocean, David J. Spencer CDC Museum, Atlanta, GA

2014 Annual Group Show, Zane Bennett Gallery, Santa Fe, NM, Develop/Assemblage/Construct, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Anchorage, AK, Native Art Now - Contemporary Indigenous Art from North America, Nordamerika Native Museum, Zurich, Switzerland, Gyre: The Plastic Ocean, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK

2013 Masks and Transparencies: Contemporary Artists of Alaska, Orenda Art International, Paris, France, Sakahan, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, ON, Canada, This is not a Silent Movie, Los Angeles Craft and Folk Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Craft, Portland, OR; University of Montana, Missoula, MT

2012 True North, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK

2010 This is Displacement, Center for the Arts, Big Fork, MN; Northrup Theatre, Minneapolis, MN; Diverse Works, Houston, TX; American Indian Community House, New York, NY, Contemporary Inuit Art, Katuaq Cultural Center, Nuuk, Greenland

2009 Dry Ice, Robeson Arts Center, Princeton, NJ, 50/50: Fifty Years of Alaska's History, Statewide touring exhibit

2008 Native Voices, Contemporary Indigenous Art, Five Myles Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2007 Diversity and Dialogue: The Eiteljorg Fellowship, Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art, Indianapolis, IN

2005 Changing Hands: Art Without Reservation, Part 2, American Museum of Art & Design, New York, NY, Cheongju International Craft Biennial, Cheongju Arts Center, Cheongju, South Korea, Alaska Native Art & Culture Festival, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C., Defiant Objects, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK

2004 Works from Spenard 4215, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Anchorage, AK, Alaska Native Art: People of a Place, Art of a People, Sotheby's Institute of Art, New York, NY, Grand Opening, The Center, Anchorage, AK

2003 Points of View, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK

2002 The 8th Native American Fine Art Invitational, Heard Museum, Phoenix, AZ

2001 Ceremony of Healing, Alaska Pacific University, Anchorage, AK, State of the Art Biennial, Parkland College, Champaign, IL

2000 INVITATIONAL 7, Decker/Morris Gallery, Anchorage, AK

1993 Arts from the Arctic, Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK

## Collections

Forge Project, Taghkanic, NY  
The Whitney Museum of American Art, NY  
Denver Art Museum, CO  
Museum of Contemporary Native Art, Santa Fe  
Alaska State Museum, Juneau, AK  
Anchorage Museum, Anchorage, AK  
British Royal Museum, London, England  
Eiteljorg Museum, Indianapolis, IN  
Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH  
National Museum of the American Indian, New York, NY  
Nordamerika Native Museum, Zurich, Switzerland  
University of Alaska Museum, Fairbanks, AK  
Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, Anchorage, AK  
Anchorage School District, Chugiak High School, Chugiak, AK  
Anchorage School District, South Anchorage High School, Anchorage AK  
Cook Inlet Region Incorporated, Anchorage, AK  
Denaina Civic Convention Center, Anchorage, AK  
Fairbanks Airport, Fairbanks, AK  
Kawerak, Inc., Nome, AK  
Nome-Beltz High School, Nome, AK  
Shell Anchorage Corporate Office, Anchorage, AK  
Ted Stevens International Airport, Anchorage, AK

# TUREEN

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