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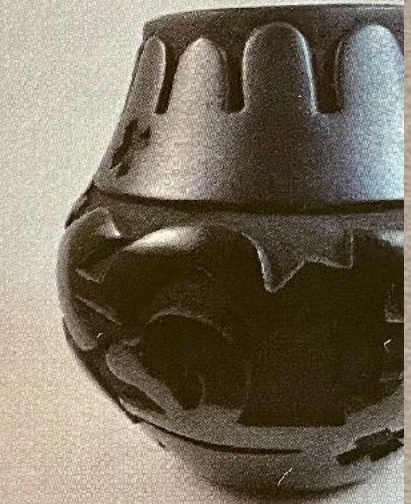
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## SEALASKA HERITAGE SUES NEIMAN MARCUS ALLEGING UNLAWFUL USE OF TERM “RAVENSTAIL,” COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

*Institute seeks injunction, compensation for damages*

April 20, 2020

[\(Educational Resources\)](#)

Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) has filed a federal lawsuit against Neiman Marcus, alleging the national luxury retailer falsely affiliated garments sold by them with Native artisans through its use of the term “Ravenstail” (Yéil Koowú) —one of the great weaving traditions of the northern Northwest Coast Native tribes—and unlawfully infringed the copyright of a famous Northwest Coast artist.

In the lawsuit, SHI is asking for an injunction against Neiman Marcus and its parent companies prohibiting them from selling the piece, which they are marketing as a “Ravenstail Knitted Coat” (right) and selling for more than \$2,500.

The institute is seeking statutory, compensatory, punitive and other damages. Any funds derived from the lawsuit will be shared with the family that owns the copyright to the Ravenstail robe from which the design was taken and invested in an arts and culture endowment.

The lawsuit was filed today in the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska. Prior to SHI filing the lawsuit, Neiman Marcus was made aware of the issues with their product but failed to take any action.

Through the lawsuit, SHI is telling the world that the sale of ancient art practices through people other than Native artists will not be tolerated, said SHI President Rosita Worl.

“In our opinion, this retail garment looks like a Ravenstail robe, and it features a replica of a design that is protected by copyright. It’s one of the most blatant examples of cultural appropriation and copyright infringement that I’ve ever seen,” Worl alleged.

“The unlawful taking of Indigenous intellectual property has to stop,” she alleged.

The lawsuit accuses Neiman Marcus of violating the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA), a federal law enacted in 1935 to ensure that products marketed and sold as “Indian” are actually made by Native Americans or Alaska Natives. The complaint stems from the company’s use of the term “Ravenstail.”

Ravenstail weaving is a unique, intricate and highly complex geometric art style invented by Native people of the northern Northwest Coast. Existing written and traditional evidence supports the manufacture and use of Ravenstail robes by the Tlingit, and the use of blankets in this weaving style by the Haida, Tsimshian and Sugpiaq/Alutiiq tribes. Contemporary weavers of these tribes, such as Haida weaver Evelvn Vanderhoop, also highlight the claim to this weaving tradition based on oral history passed down from generation to



## Sealaska Heritage settles Ravenstail coat case with Neiman Marcus, other defendants

March 3, 2021 by Jeremy Hsieh, KTOO



*Neiman Marcus sold the product on the left under the name “Ravenstail Knitted Coat.” Sealaska Heritage Institute sued in April 2020, saying that infringed on the copyrighted pattern in “Discovering the Angles of an Electrified Heart,” center, originally by the late weaver Clarissa Rizal, background. (Top photos courtesy of Sealaska Heritage Institute, background photo by Tripp J Crouse/KTOO)*

Sealaska Heritage Institute and the luxury retailer Neiman Marcus have settled a lawsuit over a coat the company sold. The coat bears a striking resemblance to a copyrighted, Alaska Native Ravenstail pattern.

The case began with Neiman Marcus but eventually grew to include 11 defendants.

[In a statement](#), Sealaska Heritage said they’ve agreed to work together to resolve the issue “under Tlingit law and cultural protocols.”

Jacob Adams is the cultural nonprofit’s attorney on the case. He said the terms of the settlement are confidential, but some effects of it may become public.

“There are conditions that are being met to meet the Tlingit law aspect and cultural requirement aspect. So, in the future, some things may be seen as a result of the settlement,” Adams said.

He said confidentiality helps avoid generalizing case law among other Indigenous groups that have their own cultural requirements.