



Crouching figure

On display

Title/Description: Crouching figure

Born: 1800 - 1900

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Walrus ivory

Measurements: h. 117 mm

Accession Number: 106

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Alaska, North America, The Americas

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The linked ring-and-dot engraving and the form on the face place the origin of this piece somewhere in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta area, perhaps Nunivak Island, where a belt ornament with similar features was collected by Nelson (Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1982: fig. 241). The function of this object is less easy to determine. The body has been hollowed, and the spaces between the limbs cleared, by a series of wide-gauge drill holes. Transverse perforations, not aligned, pierce the sides of the body. They were doubtless for bindings, and the comfortable way in which the figure fits the grip of a small hand suggests that it is the handle of a large knife or other implement, though the form is atypical.

Part human, part animal (caribou?), the figure could represent a transformed shaman or an *inua* spirit (ibid.: 14). The mouth is pierced and there are drill holes for ears and nostrils. The engraved designs are the same on both sides.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 240.

Provenance

Purchased by Lisa Sainsbury from H. Reisser in 1961 as a gift for Robert Sainsbury.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
