



War god image

Not on display

Title/Description: War god image

Born: 1850 - 1950

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 768 x w. 81 x d. 85 mm

Accession Number: 135

Historic Period: 19th Century - Late, 20th Century - Early

Production Place: Mesoamerica, New Mexico, North America, The Americas, USA

Cultural Group: Zuni

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This object should not publicly displayed for culturally sensitive reasons. The object remains sacred to the Native American Zuni Community of New Mexico, USA. However, access will be allowed to the object in store for study and research purposes. Access will not be restricted but all researchers will be fully informed about the sensitive nature of the material prior to access being granted. The object should not be placed inside a storage box for culturally sensitive reasons.

Images of this kind, representing the elder and younger brother war gods, played an important role in two major rituals of the Zuni, the winter solstice ceremonial and the scalp ceremonial (see Stevenson, 1904:113 ff., 578 ff. and Parsons, 1939). Images were carved from cottonwood for the annual winter solstice ceremony, then painted and bound with bundles of feather prayer sticks. After receiving offerings the figures were placed in a shrine outside the village, where they were left to decay. Stevenson stated that the 'Gods of War are thus honoured that they may intercede with the rain-makers for rains to fructify the earth' (1904:116; pl. xxn). Similar offerings of feather prayer sticks and food were made to the war gods during the scalp ceremonial. On these occasions the figures were made from lightning-struck pine.

This figure, which is probably pine, has lost all its paint, except for some red traces around the fingers on the base. It has also decayed around the body where the offering bundles were attached. The hole in the body once held a wood projection, which early accounts identify as the navel, but

which Parsons (1918: 396) suggests has phallic significance.

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) pp. 294-295.

Provenance

Formerly in the possession of K. J. Hewett, London.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Mathias Komor in 1970.

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