



Wolf mask

On display

Title/Description: Wolf mask

Born: 1850 c. - 1899 c.

Measurements: h. 345 x w. 250 x d. 95 mm

Accession Number: 502

Historic Period: 19th Century - Late

Production Place: Alaska, North America, Norton Sound, The Americas

This mask is virtually identical to one collected by Bruce in the Port Clarence area in 1892-3 (VanStone, 1976: pl. 42), except that the birchbark tongue is placed on the opposite side of the mouth. Ray, who illustrates a related example, considers that the type comes from St Michael and was used in dances for the Messenger Feast, a festival which 'integrated homage to game animals, entertainment, feasting, trade, and romance' (1967: pl. 14; 35). The wolf and eagle received greatest homage in the Messenger Feast and masked dancers re-enacted myths concerning the transformation of birds into wolves (ibid.: 190-91). The presence of white feathers (goose or gull) on this example suggests its use in such dances.

The mask is thin and light in weight. The face is painted black and white, now faded, and there are traces of red on the mouth, tongue and around the top of the head. Remains of three quill 'whiskers' are set in the muzzle above each nostril.

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. 254-255.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1974.

Accessioned into the Sainsbury Centre, Univeristy of East Anglia circa 1989.
