



Head with spike

Not on display

Title/Description: Head with spike

Object Type: Ornament, Shaman

Materials: Walrus ivory

Measurements: h. 100 x w. 20 x d. 15 mm

Accession Number: 659

Historic Period: Mid 19th century

Production Place: North America, Northwest Coast, The Americas

Cultural Group: Tsimshian

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1976

This carving seems to imitate the form of the spikes on a shaman's goat-horn head-dress, where a face was sometimes carved at the base (see de Laguna, 1972:693, pl. 175, for a Tlingit example). The face here has human features but large, bear-like ears; the bear spirit, if encountered during a shaman's vision quest, was among the most important of his helpers. This is too small to be part of a head-dress, but it may have been a shaman's pendant or attachment of some kind. A clue to its former function is provided by a similar ivory in the Peabody Museum, Harvard (69-30-10/1922), which serves as a toggle on the end of a strap which ties a pouch of gambling sticks. The Skeena River provenance makes it likely to have originated among the Tsimshian.

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. 268.

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Tiny amulets in bone, ivory and wood were crucial parts of a shaman's regalia. The shamans were separate from the rest of Northwest Coast communities, conducting their mental, physical and spiritual preparation in the deep forest. They were known to wear their hair tangled and long, and were treated with awe and respect, being capable of bestowing curses and blessings. Their connections to the supernatural were deeper than those of others, and they held powerful positions within society.

Exhibitions

'Empowering Art: Indigenous Creativity and Activism from North America's Northwest Coast', Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 12/3/23 - 30/7/23

Provenance

Formerly in the collection of Harry Beasley.

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from K. J. Hewett in 1976 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
