



Drill bow

Not on display

Title/Description: Drill bow

Object Type: Implement

Materials: Leather, Walrus ivory

Measurements: l. 343 x w. 75 x d. 55 mm

Accession Number: 661

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Alaska, North America, The Americas

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

Drill bows were a favoured surface for pictographic engraving, and numerous examples have been collected since the late eighteenth century (see King, 1981: pl. 6; Bockstoce, 1977; Choris, 1822; Nelson, 1899). Inuit engraving is usually filled with black or dark red pigment (as here), and often depicts scenes connected with hunting or ritual. Caribou are the principal subject on this example, shown resting, browsing and running towards a fence where hunters are waiting, one with a gun held to the shoulder. Caribou are related to the European reindeer, but were never domesticated by Inuit peoples, who hunted them for their meat and skins, which made excellent clothing. One panel of engraving also depicts costumed dancers with antlers and goat-like animals with short backward-curving horns.

The drill was an important part of an Inuit person's tool kit. Two types were used in historic times, the bow drill and the cord drill, the former used from the Yukon northwards. To operate the bow

drill the hide thong, present on this example, was looped round the drill shaft and the bow moved to and fro so as to rotate the drill shaft at high speed. The drill was steadied by a special holder slotted on to the butt and gripped between the operator's teeth. One advantage of the bow drill was that it left one hand free to manipulate the object being drilled.

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. 246.

Provenance

Formerly in the Van de Strate Collection.

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