



Pendant in bird form

On display

Title/Description: Pendant in bird form

Object Type: Animal, Pendant

Materials: Abalone shell, Whalebone

Measurements: h. 83 x w. 40 x d. 18 mm

Accession Number: 729

Historic Period: Early 19th century

Production Place: North America, Northwest Coast, The Americas

Cultural Group: Tlingit

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1980

This carving of a bird of prey, an eagle or owl, is flattened oval in section and is pierced through the neck and the base of the tail with straight-drilled holes. It probably served as a neck pendant of the kind worn by shamans during healing and other rituals. A shaman's initiation involved a vision quest, a period of fasting in the wilderness during which he would experience encounters with animal spirits (*ye'k*) who would help him in his subsequent work. A shaman's paraphernalia, his pendants, rattles, masks and other equipment, depicted such creatures, whose powers might be invoked during a ritual performance (see de Laguna, 1972:670-725).

This pendant is smooth from much handling, and the abalone shell inlay contrasts pleasingly with the whalebone. Both materials are exotic, in the sense that neither occurs locally, and they had to be obtained by trade. Thus, this object's significance lies not only in the bird it represents, but also in the materials from which it is made, which signify access to and control over valuable outside resources.

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. 261.

Exhibitions

'Elisabeth Frink: Humans and Other Animals', Sainsbury Centre, Norwich, 13/10/2018 - 24/02/2019

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

'A World of Water: Can the Seas Survive Us?', Sainsbury Centre, Norwich - 15/03/25 - 03/08/25

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Arbutus Limited on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of income from the Sainsbury Purchasing Fund.
