



Spoon

Not on display

Title/Description: Spoon

Object Type: spoon

Materials: Iron, Mountain-goat horn

Measurements: l. 229 x w. 65 x d. 70 mm

Accession Number: 869

Historic Period: Early/mid 19th century

Production Place: North America, Northwest Coast, The Americas

Cultural Group: Haida, Tlingit

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1983

Horn spoons of this general type are not uncommon, but this example is exceptional for the quality of the carving on the handle, where an inverted human figure crouches beneath a raven-like bird. The figure is deeply cut and has a rhythmic quality, particularly apparent in the arrangement of the arms and legs. There is an extensive body of myth concerning the activities of raven and early humans, and the design here may refer to a particular mythic episode (see Swanton, 1909; Boas, 1916; de Laguna, 1972).

The crispness of the carving recalls the work of the best Haida argillite pipe carvers, but certain stylistic features, such as the broad eyebrows of the figure, point to a Tlingit origin for this spoon. Local trading practices make attributions difficult, for, as Boas observed (1916: 57), the 'products of different parts of the country and of different tribes were so varied, that a lively trade existed all along the coast. The Tsimshian sold to the Haida, in exchange for canoes, particularly boxes of olachen oil, carved spoons of mountain-goat horn... and bighorn-sheep horn, wool and woolen (sic) blankets.' The bowl of the spoon is plugged into the handle and secured with an iron rivet. Cavities in the eyes, wrists and wings were almost certainly once inlaid with abalone shell.

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. 276.

Exhibitions

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

Provenance

Formerly belonging to Mrs D. J. Hill.

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Sotheby's, London, lot. 47, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1983 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
