



Souvenir mug

Not on display

Title/Description: Souvenir mug

Object Type: Mug

Materials: Whalebone

Measurements: h. 143 x w. 106 x d. 55 mm

Accession Number: 917

Historic Period: Late 19th century

Production Place: Alaska, North America, The Americas

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1985

Europeans began to visit and settle in Alaska in increasing numbers during the second half of the nineteenth century, until by the late 1890s, at the height of the gold rush, some thirty thousand

settlers were based in the vicinity of Nome on Norton Sound. The local Inuit people, after first parting with much of their indigenous material (Nelson collected thousands of items between 1877 and 1881), began to make objects for trade with the settlers. Popular items were ivory pipes, engraved tusks and ivory cribbage boards. Basketry also blossomed at this time.

This mug falls within the souvenir category, though it is possibly unique, and the engraving style would date it to the 1870s or 1880s, since the bird-carrying-whale motif appears on a harpoon rest which was collected by Nelson (Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1982: 19,193), and the style is much more animated and less naturalistic than later engraving (see Ray, 1977: 214-41; Smith, 1980:96-117, for further details). The mug shows no signs of use and the back is plain.

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. 256.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from K. J. Hewett on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1985 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
