



Mask with Janus Head

On display

Title/Description: Mask with Janus Head

Object Type: Mask

Materials: Walrus ivory

Technique: Carving

Measurements: h. 106 mm

Accession Number: 1120

Historic Period: Old Bering Sea-Okvik (AD 500-750)

Production Place: Alaska, Bering Sea, North America, The Americas

Cultural Group: Old Bering Sea (Okvik)

Credit Line: Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Charitable Trust, 1996

This particular Janus Head is intriguing as the two sides seem to illustrate two individuals rather than a mirror image. If you look at the facial tattoo marks, you will notice that one side has curvilinear double lines from the nostrils along the cheeks as well as double lines on the chin. [1] This side has only one line to demarcate the eye-brows. The other side, however, has three single lines on each of the cheeks, no lines on the chin but double lines to demarcate the eyebrows. Yet, the nose, mouth and eyes are remarkably similar which begs the question whether in fact this is the same individual in different states? Or is it perhaps a woman and man?

Allen Wardwell, in collaboration with the American Federation of Arts, was one of the first who brought together Bering Strait ivories from the Ipiutak, Okvik-Old Bering Sea, and Punuk cultures in a large, public exhibition entitled Ancient Eskimo Ivories of the Bering Strait. [2] Furthermore, this was the first exhibition that only included Bering Strait ivories without objects from other corners of the world. [3] A staggering 167 objects in the end. What made this exhibition exceptional was the ability to bring together such vast amount of objects from private collections such as this one. Wardwell acknowledged his dependence on established art dealers Jeffrey R. Meyers and Ron Nasser. [4] With the assistance of Smithsonian curators Henry B. Collins, Jnr and William W. Fitzhugh, Wardwell organised the objects in Okvik, Old Bering Sea I-III, Ipiutak, and Punuk. [5] Wardwell's subsequent catalogue of the exhibition has been very influential in the art galleries and museums in terms of identifying respective cultures and reinforcing outdated dates.

Allen Wardwell, who included the object in his exhibition catalogue, described it as "the only known Okvik Janus head". [6] Lord and Lady Sainsbury must have come across this object in Wardwell's celebrated catalogue and bought it from the previous owners by Mr and Mrs. Harry Klammer or via an art dealer. It is not hard to see why Lord and Lady Sainsbury would have been captivated by this object to be added to their extensive Bering Strait collection.

[1] For tattoo marks on figurines, see Lars Krutak, *Sacrificing the Sacred: Tattooed Prehistoric Ivory Figures of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska*, in *Ancient Ink: The Archaeology of Tattooing*, ed. by Lars Krutak and Aaron Deter-Wolf, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), Pp 262-285; Lars Krutak, *Therapeutic Tattooing in the Arctic: Ethnographic, Archaeological, and Ontological Frameworks of Analysis*, *International Journal of Paleopathology*, 25(2019), pp. 99-109

[2] Wilder Green, 'Foreword', in *Ancient Eskimo Ivories of the Bering Strait*, ed. by Allen Wardwell, (New York : Published by Hudson Hills Press in association with the American Federation of Arts, 1986)

[3] Julie Hollowell, 'Ancient Ivories in a Global World' in *Gifts from the Ancestors: Ancient Ivories of Bering Strait*, ed. by William Fitzhugh, Julie Hollowell, and Aron L. Cromwell, (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2009), pp. 252-289, (p.268).

[4] Allen Wardwell, *Ancient Eskimo Ivories of the Bering Strait*, (New York : Published by Hudson Hills Press in association with the American Federation of Arts, 1986), p. 10

[5] Julie Hollowell, 'Ancient Ivories in a Global World' in *Gifts from the Ancestors: Ancient Ivories of Bering Strait*, ed. by William Fitzhugh, Julie Hollowell, and Aron L. Cromwell, (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 2009), pp. 252-289, (p.268).

[6] Allen Wardwell, *Ancient Eskimo Ivories of the Bering Strait*, (New York : Published by Hudson Hills Press in association with the American Federation of Arts, 1986), p.48

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Miriam Shiell in 1996 on the advice of Robert Sainsbury out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Charitable Trust.
