



## Crouching figure

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### **On display**

**Title/Description:** Crouching figure

**Born:** 1800 - 1900

**Object Type:** Figure

**Materials:** Walrus ivory

**Measurements:** h. 117 mm

**Accession Number:** 106

**Historic Period:** 19th century

**Production Place:** Alaska, North America, The Americas

**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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The linked ring-and-dot engraving and the form on the face place the origin of this piece somewhere in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta area, perhaps Nunivak Island, where a belt ornament with similar features was collected by Nelson (Fitzhugh and Kaplan, 1982: fig. 241). The function of this object is less easy to determine. The body has been hollowed, and the spaces between the limbs cleared, by a series of wide-gauge drill holes. Transverse perforations, not aligned, pierce the sides of the body. They were doubtless for bindings, and the comfortable way in which the figure fits the grip of a small hand suggests that it is the handle of a large knife or other implement, though the form is atypical.

Part human, part animal (caribou?), the figure could represent a transformed shaman or an *inua* spirit (ibid.: 14). The mouth is pierced and there are drill holes for ears and nostrils. The engraved designs are the same on both sides.

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. 240.

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## **Provenance**

Purchased by Lisa Sainsbury from H. Reisser in 1961 as a gift for Robert Sainsbury.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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