



Ladle

Not on display

Title/Description: Ladle

Born: 1800 - 1899

Object Type: Implement

Materials: Abalone shell, Copper, Mountain-sheep horn, Walrus ivory

Measurements: l. 289 x w. 80 x d. 250 mm

Accession Number: 121

Historic Period: 19th century - Mid

Production Place: North America, Northwest Coast, The Americas

Cultural Group: Haida, iv-IV, Possibly, Tlingit, Tsimshian

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This ladle is an accomplished and ambitious work by an artist who was clearly intent on achieving dramatic visual impact. The deeply-sculpted ivory handle is enlivened by abalone shell inlay, and is expertly fitted with copper rivets to an elegant horn bowl. Ivory is an unusual material for the handle of a composite ladle, but steel tools have allowed the artist to carve deeply and produce a miniature version of a memorial column. Two small figures (perhaps representing the same person) sit below a hawk and a raven respectively. They both wear conical hats with horizontal bands, representing a local type of chief's basketry hat with cylinders on top. These are popularly known as 'potlatch rings', denoting the number of potlatches given by the owner, but there is no conclusive evidence for this. Nevertheless, it indicates that the figures have chiefly status and are associated with raven and hawk crests. The raven has a cylindrical head-dress which echoes the form of the hats and is also found on many full-scale memorial columns.

Decorated ladles, spoons and bowls were provided for use at potlatch feasts, at which the hosts wished to impress their guests with crest carvings of high quality. The walrus ivory would have been obtained from the north or from traders; the mountain sheep horn bowl may have been imported from the interior in finished form, or made on the coast. It is pale and translucent showing that it has been steamed or boiled prior to being pressed and shaped in a wood mould. A precise attribution is not possible, but it is most likely to be of Tlingit or Haida origin.

When found by the vendor, the entire ladle was covered with a thick black varnish. This was cleaned off, which accounts for the pristine appearance of the carving on the handle.

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) pp. 274-275.

Exhibitions

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

Provenance

Previously in the Montrose Museum, Scotland.

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from K. J. Hewett in 1958.

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