



Dancing figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Dancing figure

Born: 1800 - 1850

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Bone

Measurements: h. 103 x w. 30 x d. 20 mm

Accession Number: 197b

Historic Period: 19th century - Early

Production Place: Hawaiian Islands, Oceania, Pacific

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

These figures are an enigma, for their function is unclear and no other examples are known. They are, nevertheless, stylistically of interest in that the head form, with arching crest and chin, corresponds to certain old Hawaiian wood images (see Cox and Davenport, 1974: 135, 141, 166-7) and the posture, though unusual, can be seen in an early illustration of female dancers (Choris, 1822: pl. xvi). They may be the 'one-off' creation of an artist in the early decades of the nineteenth century, or possibly a result of the traditionalist revival which took place in Hawaii in the 1880s during King David Kalakaua's reign (see Rose, 1980: 215).

The hollow bases are each pierced twice, presumably for attachment, though whether to a staff or kahili handle is not certain. However, probable saw marks can be detected on the base of the larger figure and the possibility that they are not authentic Hawaiian objects cannot be discounted.

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. 29.

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1962. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
