



Pick head

On display

Title/Description: Pick head

Object Type: Implement

Materials: Walrus ivory, Wood

Measurements: h. 45 x w. 35 x l. 302 mm

Accession Number: 660

Historic Period: 19th century

Production Place: Alaska, North America, The Americas

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1976

This walrus tusk pick was formerly bound to a wood handle with hide thongs through the two holes near the butt (see Nelson, 1899: pl. xxxv for complete examples). Picks were used for ice clearance

around houses and for digging for roots in frozen soil.

This example, much darker on one side than the other, probably originates from the coastal region around the Bering Straits, as one of the four panels of engraving depicts a successful conclusion to a whale hunt. Whales are also cleverly incorporated into the design of the butt, where two complete bowhead whales are shown, their flukes ending where the panels of engraving begin. The depiction of whales was most common among the Inuit around the Bering Straits and along the north Alaskan coast, where whaling predominated over other hunting.

The four panels of engraving, each separated by a notched groove, show animated hunting scenes with whale, walrus and bear, as well as domestic activities around a house, with fish drying on a rack and a dog pulling a sledge. Houses in coastal Alaska were permanent constructions of wood and turf, not the ice-block igloo, which was restricted to the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic.

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. 242.

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from K. J. Hewett in 1976 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
