



Miniature whale

On display

Title/Description: Miniature whale

Object Type: Animal, Figure

Materials: Walrus ivory

Measurements: l. 45 x w. 18 x d. 5 mm

Accession Number: 722

Historic Period: Punuk period (c. AD 500-1200)

Production Place: Alaska, Cape Prince of Wales, North America, The Americas

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1980

Bowhead whales, which this miniature appears to represent, have been important quarry since Punuk times around the Bering Straits and along the north Alaskan coast. A Punuk attribution is suggested here. The details of eyes, mouth and double blow-hole are carefully rendered; the underside is plain.

Animals, important in myths and as a source of food and raw materials, have always been favoured subjects for Inuit artists; carvings were attached to hunting equipment or ritual objects. Our knowledge of prehistoric ritual activity is very limited, though in the nineteenth century many rituals were directed at placating animal spirits for past catches and assuring a plentiful supply of game in the future.

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. 234.

Provenance

According to the vendor, George Everett Shaw, it was collected at Cape Prince of Wales, Bering Strait, in 1979.

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from George Shaw, Aspen, Colorado, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of income from the Sainsbury Purchasing Fund.

