



Bowl with wolf head

On display

Title/Description: Bowl with wolf head

Object Type: Bowl

Materials: Mountain-sheep horn

Measurements: l. 216 x w. 155 x l. 216 mm

Accession Number: 728

Historic Period: 18th/early 19th century

Production Place: North America, Northwest Coast, The Americas

Cultural Group: Tlingit

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

Krause (1956:125) reported that Tlingit hunters went up into the interior to catch mountain sheep and goats, the horns of which were then made into bowls and spoons. Undecorated horn ladles were also made by the interior peoples and traded to the coast, but Holm (personal communication, 1985) considers this bowl 'is probably Tlingit, and I believe that it was entirely made by a coastal artist rather than imported already worked from the interior.' Horn, when soaked and boiled, will form translucent sheets, and when very hot it can be pressed and moulded into shape (Hodges, 1964: 155).

The head is likely to be that of a snarling wolf, one of the principal crests of the Tlingit. The double lines behind the large nostrils vividly convey the appearance of a wolf's muzzle when the upper lips are drawn back over the teeth. The outer rim has well-worn hatched engraving of the kind that Holm (1983: 74) has interpreted as a skeuomorph, a decorative feature which has its origin in a functional feature of a similar object made from a different material (in this case the overlapping sewn border of a birchbark container).

The dynamic upward thrust of the head and the broad flare to the sides of the bowl make this an especially appealing sculpture. The warm honey colour of the translucent horn adds to the pleasing effect. Its appearance gives the impression of great age; a comparable piece in the Smithsonian Institution, with inward facing head, was accessioned by them in 1862 (Sturtevant et al., 1974: no. 46). There are no deposits of oil in this bowl, so it was probably used to serve dried food or berries.

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. 273.

Exhibitions

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

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Arbutus Limited on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of income from the Sainsbury Purchasing Fund.
