

ARCTIC RESOURCE



Artist Kate Munro has chosen this object for us to look at. Can you find it in our gallery? What do you think it is?

Kate said:

"I love this lady – she is standing with such strength and character, like she can face anything – even the challenges of Climate Change."

FROM: North-West Greenland

MADE: 1800-1900

MATERIAL: Walrus Ivory

SIZE: almost 10cm tall

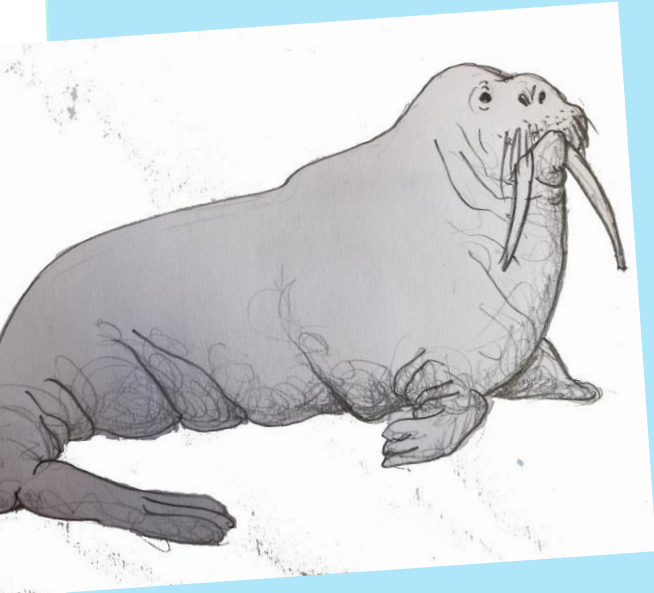
OBJECT NUMBER: 107

See this online
<https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/art-and-objects/107-female-figure/>

Object
photography:
Pete Huggins.
All other images:
Kate Munro



MATERIALS AND MAKING



This figure is carved from ivory – a hard white material from the tusks of an animal, in this case, a walrus.

Walrus live along the coast of Greenland, where this object is from. The people who live there have huge respect for the walrus. They are still allowed to hunt them.

In other parts of the world, elephants have been hunted just for their ivory tusks. This is now illegal as it has led to a big decline in their numbers.

In Greenland resources are very precious, so every last scrap of the walrus would be made use of – the skin for oil, clothing, drums and boats; bones and tusks for tools, little figures used as protective amulets or art works to trade.



ARCTIC IDEAS

Even now, there is still a special relationship in the Arctic between many people there and the other living things.

Arctic people believe that animals choose to give themselves to the hunter.

There is a respect for the animal as a living creature, rather than simply a source of materials or food.

This feels quite different from the attitudes in other parts of the world, where people take as much as they can get from the environment.

In the Arctic there are lots of different cultural groups, but they have much in common. Most have a respect for their natural world. Nothing is taken for granted.

Perhaps we could all learn from this – it feels key to a more sustainable future.

What do you think?



WHY WAS THIS MADE?



We don't know for sure why this figure was made, but we can make some guesses.

The figure is unclothed so we can see that it is a woman. Some parts of her body are clearly defined, and yet others – like the arms - are only suggested. She is perhaps holding her stomach.

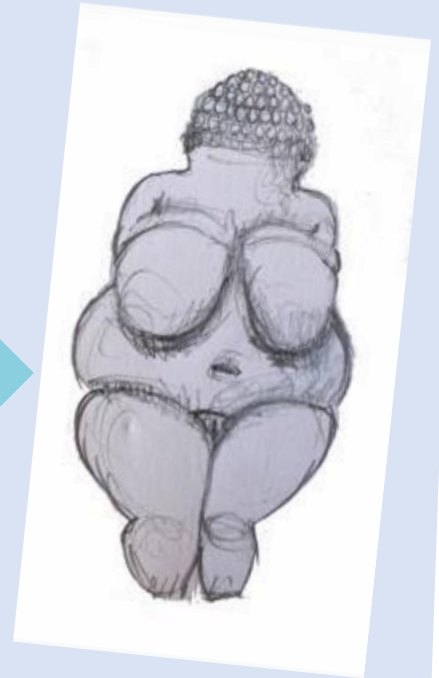
Her curvy form may suggest that she is a fertility charm – to bring luck in pregnancy or childbirth.

Lots of cultures around the world have made similar figures, like the 'Venus of Willendorf' found in Austria 23,000 years ago.

The female figure is the perfect size to hold in your hand, or carry in a pocket.

Why do you think people in the Arctic might want to make little figures like this?

I wonder how would it have felt to hold this object in your hand to carve it? What kinds of tools might have been used?



THIS MAKES ME WONDER.....

I wonder who made the female figure.

I wonder if the figure is a portrait of someone specific.

I wonder what life is like for women in the Arctic.

I wonder if women there still make clothes for themselves and their families.

This figure is 100-200 years old. I wonder if people in the Arctic still carve things from walrus ivory today.

I wonder where the craftsman was sitting, what they could see, and what they were thinking.



Look at the female figure's hair. Does it remind you of today's hairstyles?

This style was typical of women from the Greenland coast. The top knot was worn at different heights depending on which area you lived in.



WHAT DO YOU WONDER?

Use this page to make a note of your thoughts about the female figure.

Let your mind wander... write or draw your ideas about the object. Maybe you have lots of different questions... maybe some have answers, and others may be things we can only ever wonder....

Be brave, write freely and fill the page... some things which may seem silly at first, could turn out to be really useful thoughts....

DRAWING ACTIVITY

Explore the gallery to find other sculptures of women, perhaps with their babies. Draw a few of them on this page.



Sea Otter figure (Mother and Child)
MADE: c.1700-c.1800
PLACE: USA, Alaska
MATERIAL: Walrus Ivory
SIZE: 114mm
CULTURAL GROUP: Aleut
OBJECT NUMBER: 1060

Can you find this Sea Otter
'Mother and Child' from the Arctic?

See this online
<https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/art-and-objects/1060-hunting-charm-for-ijqax-fastener-or-ornament-for-gayaatuxux-hunting-visor-or-hat-of-sea-otter-mother-with-child-in-feeding-position/>

DRAWING ACTIVITY

Use this page to draw the female figure.

Look at it really carefully, and let your eyes go out of focus a little. Can you draw the different tones of light and shade.