

ARCTIC RESOURCE

Can you find this little object in our gallery? What do you think it is?



FROM: The Arctic, possibly the Bering Sea, St. Lawrence Island

MADE: 1700-1799

MATERIAL: Mammal Tooth – probably Walrus

SIZE: 4.8 cm tall

OBJECT NUMBER: 118

See this online
<https://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk/art-and-objects/118-gaming-piece/>

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

Artist Kate Munro tells us why she has chosen this object for us to look at...

"I love this 300 year old Gaming Piece from the Arctic, it makes me imagine people having fun playing with it all those years ago! I love thinking about the friends or family sitting about making up games using pieces like these. I also love the way the person – maybe a child – is clinging on the end. It feels quite precarious..."



MATERIALS AND MAKING

This Gaming Piece has been carved from the tooth of a mammal, probably a walrus. It was made in the Arctic – the area around the North Pole. People there also make things from walrus ivory, which is the animal's tusks.



People in the Arctic have always had to be highly skilled to create things like harpoons, sleds, and clothes from the animals they hunted and from the other natural resources that were available to them. They carved and made things with their hands in freezing cold temperatures that dropped well below zero!



Many people in the Arctic believe that they owe it to the animals they hunted to use their body in a way that justified the animals' death.

They consider that it is important for people to have a respectful, balanced relationship with the natural world around them.

Professor Jago Cooper says that in the Arctic "*... people are an integrated part of an eco-system... part of a living world... a small and humble part.*"

WHY WAS THIS MADE?

The great skill of the craftsman, handed down through generations, was used to make something beautiful, spiritual, or useful out of *all* of the remains of animals which were killed. Nothing would go to waste - small pieces would be carefully carved by hand into things like pendants, amulets and gaming pieces like this one.



This object could be from a game called '*tingmujang*' in which several gaming pieces are thrown up in the air. Those that land upright then belong to the person they face.

The rules of the game echo the belief that animals choose to give themselves up to the hunter – perhaps the most deserving one.

Gaming pieces are often carved into the shape of birds, animals and people.

This one is thought to be a type of bird. This is a common character in '*tingmujang*', but it is rare to have a human figure clinging on like this.



DRAWING ACTIVITY

Look really closely at the Gaming Piece, and then make a drawing of it. Use shading as well as line to make it look 3-dimensional. Try making different marks with your pencil to capture the texture of the surface.

DRAWING ACTIVITY

Can you imagine and draw some of the other pieces of the '*tingmujang*' game? Your pieces could be birds, animals, or something completely different.

Do you think you make these in 3D? Could you carve them, or model them? What tools and materials could you use?

THIS MAKES ME WONDER.....

There is so much that we do not know about this object, but we can ask lots of questions to help us relate to it, and to begin to understand it better.

I wonder why this bird has a child clinging on to its head. What are they doing? Where are they going?

I wonder who made this little object.

I wonder if the Gaming Piece was bought, traded, gifted, or played with by the person who made it.



I wonder how the people playing the game would gather. I imagine a group of family or friends huddled together, talking and laughing.

I wonder how it came to be in a museum.

People all over the world have always played games. They can help us to relax and have fun, but they can also help us to find ways to solve problems, to work together, to develop skills, and to think in creative ways - really important stuff!

I wonder if you have played a game which is similar to *'tingmujang'*...

WHAT DO YOU WONDER?

Use this page to make a note of your thoughts about the Gaming Piece; the things which you are curious about; the things which interest you about it.

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....