



Eskimo Whale Hunters Bust

A superb wooden bust, powerfully carved with a broad, oval face and pentagonal torso.

This figure was probably used as a whale-hunters, grave-marker. The naturalistic features show a prominent arched nose with the remains of a painted mustache and beard and gently arching brows with faint traces of painted brow lines.

The face offers a serene, elegant yet hieratic impression showing subtly swelling cheekbones, and hollowed, oval eye sockets and mouth. The facial expression, centered around the whale-shaped nose, is remarkably natural and animated with a strong, focused look to the eyes. The deep groove incised around the circumference of the face appears to have been used to attach a rim of fur depicting the hood of a parka, or perhaps to show that the face is wearing a mask. There are diagonal, lightly incised, crisscrossing lines (tattoos ?) decorating the chest.

It is reported that the figure was originally fixed in a small model kayak perched a-top a hunter's grave. The two outstretched arms would have been pegged to the shoulders using the socket holes, and the whole figure would fit firmly over an upright peg in the kayak which would explain the hole on the underside. The model kayak would be placed at the very top of a tall grave post, to which would be attached various utilitarian items that belonged to the deceased, such as cookware, paddles, guns, hunting gear, or other tools. See the example photographed and published by Edward S. Curtis in 1928 at Hooper Bay.

Brevig (Sitaisaq) village area, Port Clarence, Cape Nome, Alaska, USA.

Wood (driftwood, possibly cedar) and pigment with a fine patina of age, wear and permafrost stigmata.

17 cm.

Thulé period : 19th century or earlier, Wood dated by carbon 14 : 1440-1478 AD (Teste c14 CESAAR Numéro CES 24-048).

Literature:

Publication : Jacaranda - New Acquisitions, Summer 2022, N° 14, pp. 72-77, New York

See :

Elliott, Henry W. (1897) Our Arctic Province : Alaska and the Seal Islands, Library of Contemporary Exploration and Adventure, New York City, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons : Inuit Tomb

Edward S. Curtis (photography, text, editing) : The North American Indian : edited by Frederick Webb Hodge ; foreword by Theodore Roosevelt ; field research conducted under the patronage of J. Pierpont Morgan. ; Original photogravures produced in Norwood, Massachusetts by Plimpton Press and in Cambridge, Mass. by Suffolk Engraving in 1928.