



POLAR BEAR EFFIGY

A large and archaic Eskimo ornament representing a flattened quadruped - probably a polar bear decorated with incised lines and dot motifs. The open mouth shows large squared teeth in a menacing grin. The attitude of the animal suggests similarities with the "flying bear" mythology most often represented in the concurrent Dorset culture (500 BC - AD 1000) far away in the North East of Canada. This notion of a shamaistic flying bear in the Dorset culture is being rethought at present and one of the recent theory's is that the representation is that of a polar bear swimming to attack its prey. In any case the animal here is beautifully represented as a stylized predator with its eyes set to either side of the head with the nostrils above the open and threatening teeth. The arms show notching at the extremities possibly representing the bears claws. The edges of the object are sharply beveled to create the impression of a 3 dimensional sculpture. Objects of this type were often pegged onto box lids through the two fixation holes and served as amulets as well as tally markers and reminders of succesful hunts.

Saint Laurence Island, Alaska.

Eskimo cultures of the Old Bering Sea periods (200 BC – 500 AD).

Mineralized walrus tusk.

13,5 cm.

