



### **Eskimo gaming piece in the shape of a Loon**

E 221) A very large and naturalistic gaming piece which can be used as marker or counting tally. It is remarkably well carved in a sensitive manner with its head extended in search of prey. These markers are often carved in a generic format although some are sufficiently representative that the species can be readily identified as with this example, which represents a loon (*Gavia arctica*) recognizable with the long pointed beak, the head thrust forward and the twin feather tufts above and behind the eyes. The loon is often associated with shamanic practices through its distinctive call and inquisitive nature.

Thule Eskimo, Alaska. Mineralized walrus tusk (*Odobenus rosmarus divergens*). 8 cm. 1600-1800 AD.

### **Literature:**

Ref. : <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/56310>

“These carvings of swimming birds are pieces for a gambling game of “dice” or “jacks” that was played all across the Arctic. Bird figures found in archaeological sites show that the game spread across northern Alaska, Canada, and Greenland about 1,000 years ago, carried by the migrating Thule people, the ancestors of the modern Arctic people. In play, some birds land upright when tossed on the ground, while others tip over on their sides. In central Canada, where this ancient game is called *tingmiujaq*, players keep the birds that land upright, and whoever collects the most after several rounds is the winner. Sometimes, players can pick up only the birds whose heads point in their direction. Carvings almost identical to these pieces have been made as market art for the past 100 years.”