



Wood Figure With Labret

E 324) Rare and large representation of an ancestor composed of an imposing ovalized head on a stylized torso. The regal and hieratic face is finely shaped with imposing eyebrows, protruding cheekbones, a straight nose and a grimacing mouth whose chin is adorned with a large labret made of walrus ivory. The eyes were originally painted and still bear the remains of a thick red ochre pigment.

Eskimo, Thule Culture, Western Alaska.

Wood (cedar, driftwood?), ochre and an insert in walrus tusk.

Aged and weather patina.

14.4 cm.

10th/19th century.

Due to the similarity of style and material it is possible to link this figure to a production site somewhere on the south western coastal area of Alaska in the vicinity of the Kuskowim and Ninglick Rivers.

Literature:

For comparative examples see the Nunalleq Project which is an international partnership between the Yup'ik village of Quinhagak, Alaska, and archaeologists based at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. It was initiated by the Quinhagak community to address two locally identified needs; to recover as much as possible from a rapidly eroding archaeological site and to reconnect young people to Yup'ik traditional culture. Over the past 15 years, the Nunalleq Project has contributed ground-breaking new information to our collective knowledge of pre-contact (i.e. pre-colonisation) Yup'ik culture, excavating the remains of large multi-room house dating between c AD 1570-1675. As of 2024, Nunalleq has produced the most extensive collection of pre-contact Yup'ik material culture in the world with over 100,000 artefacts. In 2018 a local, community operated museum opened in Quinhagak – where the Nunalleq Collection is on public view. Almost 500 examples of wood figures such the one offered here have been found in the various strata of the excavation, notably N° GDN-248:78012 and GDN-248:76791 which are of very similar style.