

**The Minneapolis Institute of Arts
Accessions Proposal**

Curator: Joe D. Horse Capture

Department: Arts of Africa and the Americas

Date: 17 March 2011



1. Description and Summary of Object or Group of Objects:

Accession Number: L2011.15.1

Artist/Maker: Yup'ik (Arctic region)

Title: Object: Bear Mask

Date: late 19th century

Medium: wood (probably spruce), pigments, string

Dimensions: 11 3/16 x 11 1/2 x 3 1/8 in. (28.42 x 29.21 x 7.94 cm)

Signed, marked or inscribed: "19/8765" "NAO26"

Country of manufacture: USA

Vendor: Tambaran Gallery, New York, NY

Present Location: MIA

Price:

2. Artist and Style:

Among the Yup'ik of the Arctic region, masks were made for ceremonial purposes, and their subjects were humans, animals, and spirits. Each mask is unique because its details are given to the carver in a dream. The masks are used for healing ceremonies or community based dance celebrations such as the Bladder Ceremony. This mask may have elements from both a human and a bear, which may show the transformation from one being into the other. The Yup'ik, like many Native American cultures, consider bears to be part human. Most Yup'ik masks had extensions along the perimeter of the object; these could be a large wooden circle, feathers, or both. The majority of masks in museum collections have lost these elements because of their fragility.

3. Condition:

Good overall with some slight pigment loss and wear appropriate to age and use. A full condition report is available in the Registrar's office.

4. Provenance:

No information about how the mask was collected exists, but it was purchased by the Museum of the American Indian (inventory number 19/8765) in 1938. It was deaccessioned in 1944, and acquired by Julius Carlebach (dealer), whose clients included Andre Breton, Max Ernst, George Duthuit, and other expatriates and artists. The mask was sold to Rene d' Harnoncourt (Director of the Museum of Modern Art, 1949-1967). In 1951 it was returned to Carlebach who sold it to the owner that Tambaran Gallery acquired it from.

5. Related Objects:

Each Yup'ik mask is unique, so the following listing is a survey of this object type in other collections. Seal Mask, circa 1860, Yup'ik, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, accession number 31-125/61; Mask, 1890-1910, Yup'ik, National Museum of the American Indian, accession number 5/941; Mask, circa 1900, Yup'ik, Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 15/4343.

6. Complements the existing collection:

The Native American collection currently has two Yup'ik objects, a mask and a sewing box. This mask will help strengthen our Yup'ik holdings through a visually engaging object that also offers insight into Yup'ik culture and belief system.

7. Plans for exhibiting:

The Bear Mask will be displayed in The Wallace Foundation Gallery (259) June 2011.

8. Why do you recommend the object?

Yup'ik masks are both engaging and powerful objects. This rare Bear Mask complements the other Yup'ik mask in our collection that portrays a female. It is a beautifully carved example with the animal's ferociousness conveyed through its carved spiked teeth. Conversely, a certain intimacy and gentleness is suggested by its downcast eyes. The ears are proportionally large because the Yup'ik believe that bears have an acute sense of hearing. In fact, they would be very careful what they said about bears because their conversation could be heard for miles and could anger the bears. It is unknown if the color of the paint is symbolic, but has been found on another mask collected in this same area.. This Bear Mask would make a great addition to our collection. It is visually striking, rare, and refers to traditional Yup'ik mythology.

7. Comparable market prices:

Signature and Date