

Basic Detail Report



Walrus tusk drawing

Date

late 19th-early 20th century

Primary Maker

Artist not recorded

Medium

engraved walrus tusk

Description

This unique engraved tusk, from the Yup'ik community of Nunivak Island, features various figures with large, round heads that are in the style of yup'ik ellam iinga ("eyes of awareness"). "This cosmological circle," Ann Fienup-Riordan writes in *Boundaries and Passages: Rule and Ritual in Yup'ik Eskimo Oral Tradition* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), "is a recurring theme, both in social and ritual life as well as in material culture. The use of this decorative motif symbolizes both the vision of spirits and the creation of a point of contact between the world of humans and that of spirits." Often these circles are the figures' heads on this incised tusk. In other engraved ivory examples, the circles might appear in lieu of joints where bones meet. Also seen in this tusk is the "x-ray" view found in stylized animal drawings in wooden bowls from Nunivak Island. They appear as if you can see the rib cages, or other internal processes (such as digestion for the whales/fish on this piece). There are numerous "scenes" incised on this tusk, many of them with an element of humor.

Dimensions

18 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 3 x 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in.