



Pipe

Iñupiat, Alaska

ca. 1875-1925

Walrus ivory, pigment

2 3/8" h x 13 3/4 l x 1 1/4 w

T0224a,b

<https://collections.fenimoreart.org/objects/1574/pipe?ctx=93d7a5cca497f186049f2d5b53e98806b2121af5&idx=0>

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Mediation—between differing economies, modes of representation, and ways of knowing and being in the world—has often been a function of the so-called “souvenir arts.” [1] Yet, even as scholars now recognize commercial arts as manifestations of Native survivance, innovative manipulations of extant tools, materials, and techniques in new (and often structurally unequal) social conditions, what often gets lost in discussions of objects’ hybridity are the ways in which many *retain*, if not a sacred power, a fundamental ethos or worldview that long preceded contact with non-Native people. [2] As someone who came to this year’s Otsego Institute with an interest in precisely these processes of hybridization and transculturation, the ways in which objects changed within “contact zones” as their makers anticipated the desires of outside markets, I left with a desire to take them at face value, to interrogate them for their philosophical earnestness even as they were created for the purpose of exchange.

This was how I approached an Iñupiaq pipe, likely carved as a curio for a naluaḡmiu (white person/Westerer [3]) in the area between Sitḡasuaq and Taciq [4] in the last few decades of the 19th Century. [5] In some ways, the “hybrid” aspects of this pipe were fairly obvious: carved from oiled tuuaaq (walrus tusk) and filled with India ink, the pipe immediately revealed variations in texture and form that hinted at events in its “cultural biography.” Contrasts between the golden tone of the pipe’s main body and the greener hue of its mouthpiece, bowl and carved kayaker, for example, suggested those parts as replacements for others that broke or went missing over the course of the object’s life. [6] Other pieces are conspicuously absent: the kayaker’s paaḡuutik (double-bladed paddle) is marked only by a small hole in which an ivory component would once have fit, while the pipe’s removable bowl, a carved face with swollen cheeks, better resembles wind figures on European maps than any Iñupiaq precedent. Even the pipe form reveals itself as a result of intercultural exchange: mimicking that of wooden “chukch” pipes from Siberia, upon which Iñupiat modelled tobacco pipes, the object’s shape likely results from contact with Siberian Yupik people who had been carving ivory pipes for outside markets as early as 1849. [7]

Yet, the pipe’s figurative images, at least to my eye, preclude any reading of the object as easily detached from its maker or place of origin. In addition to kayaker and his prey (whether natchiq—seal—or aḡviq/sisuaq—bowhead/beluga whale remains unclear [8]) carved into the body of the pipe to form a grip for a smoker’s finger [9], it is covered on all sides with scenes of hunting, food storage, and community life, displaying its maker’s familiarity with—if not participation in—a long tradition of figurative engraving on ivory drill bows that stretched from the Thule through the 19th Century. [10] On one side, two groups of hunters in umiak hunt aivḡich (walrus) and aḡvak (bowheads). Below them in another register, human figures circulate within a townscape of ikiḡḡat (raised caches), ivruglich (sod houses), mangteghapik (a yurt), and a qagri with nappaqutaq (a memorial pole), with an affixed bird. [11] Beside it, a group of figures plays kickball. On the other side of the pipe, adults and children prepare qilḡich (dogsleds) beside a village of tupqich (houses or tents) and ikniptat (campfires). And above them appear a band of natchiich (seals) and other somewhat less immediately identifiable creatures that might be wolverines, another species of whale and a serpent, perhaps copied from maps or other prints circulating in Norton Sound during the period. [12] The bottom of the pipe shows an adult and a

child (identified by their relative size) in qayyak hunting waterfowl. Despite the diminutive scale of the engravings on this pipe, its artist nevertheless drew upon an established visual lexicon, popularized through decorated drill bows, to construct scenes that displayed the variety of Iñupiaq hunting technologies and the methods by which such knowledge might be passed between generations. Showing both land and sea fauna along with storage techniques and games that involved community members of all ages, the artist not only displayed the ways in which Iñupiat made use of the Arctic's natural resources, but also how they insured such knowledge would continue to be passed down.

Heather Igloliorte has recently argued for an approach to Inuit art history based on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit or living knowledge: “a respect for relationships: the relationship with the land; the relationship with Arctic flora and fauna; and, especially, the relationship between family members and community members as to their responsibilities to each other, as well as their responsibility to pass on knowledge between generations.” [13] While, as a non-Native scholar, I cannot claim to mobilize such a framework with a full understanding of what it means to Inuit people, I want to end by quickly gesturing at the ways in which an object such as the Iñupiaq pipe, despite being made for naluagmiut, nevertheless may have referenced and sought to teach such an outlook to its owner.

With a long history of depicting not only naluagmiut per se, but also of using ivory carving as a medium through which to explore contrasts between Iñupiaq and non-Native approaches towards hunting, [14] Iñupiat carvers had long addressed their artistic practices with a sort of selfreferentiality. Thus, the choice of this pipe's carver to frame aivvak (hunting walrus) on an object constructed by the spoils of that very activity—especially at a moment when Iñupiat were becoming increasingly aware of the commodity status of materials like ivory and whale oil—seems not simply an act of auto-ethnography meant to please a Western consumer, but perhaps also an attempt to call that viewer's attention to its own embeddedness in ecological networks, managed by longstanding forms of indigenous knowledge and resource management. By depicting not only aivgich, but also the ways that they shared the land, sea, and, pictorially speaking, their ivory ground with agvak, qipmich (dogs), and iñuich (people) both young and old, the pipe might be understood as sharing the value of what Igloliorte calls pilimmasarniq, “the principle of acquiring and sharing skills and knowledge through careful observation and practice—reflect[ing] an artist's complex knowledge of the interrelated land and sea mammals, fish, and birds that populate Inuit Nunagat.” [15] Making sure to capture characteristic postures and behaviors both of people and animals, one might argue that the pipe's artist embedded the object with such knowledge of how humans might live from—but continue to care for—the animals that enabled their continued survival in the Arctic, to understand hunting as based in inter-species respect and reciprocity. [16] If read in this way, the pipe, then, becomes impossible to treat, as scholars have, as a “secularized” version of previous carving practices; instead it becomes an emblem, to a viewer who chooses to recognize it, of enduring forms of care and respect for both community and land.

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[<https://www.theotsegoinstitute.org/uploads/1/3/9/6/139631595/silverman.pdf>].

Side 1



Side 2



Bottom



Endnotes:

[1] Ruth B. Phillips, Introduction to *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle : Montreal, Quebec: University of Washington Press ; McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), esp. page 18. This text has been absolutely crucial in correcting what was long a persistent characterization of these objects as somehow “inauthentic” or “corrupt.”

[2] I thank Heather George, a fellow Otsego Institute participant this year, for emphasizing this point throughout.

[3] For all Iñupiat vocabulary and spelling, I refer to Alaska Native Knowledge Network, *Kobuk Junior Dictionary*, adapted from the 1979 publication for the Alaska Native Language Center and hosted by the University of Alaska Fairbanks:
<http://ankn.uaf.edu/ANL/mod/glossary/view.php?id=20&mode=cat&hook=-1&sortkey=&sortorder=asc&fullsearch=0&page=-1>

[4] Nome and St. Michael, AK in Iñupiat and Central Yup'ik, respectively.

[5] While the museum dates the object between 1875 and 1925, Dorothy Jean Ray has suggested the production of engraved ivory pipes was limited to the 1870s and 1880s, after which they were quickly replaced by the demand for other objects such as cribbage boards and decorated

whole tusks. See Dorothy Jean Ray, "Happy Jack and Guy Kakarook," in *Eskimo Drawings* (Anchorage: Anchorage Museum of History and Art, 2003), 21.

[6] While we know that Eugene Thaw acquired this pipe from Larry Frank, a dealer in Santa Fe, its complete provenance is unclear.

[7] Amy Chan, "Quliaqtuavut Tuugaatigun (Our Stories in Ivory): Reconnecting Arctic Narratives with Engraved Drill Bows," PhD diss, Arizona State University, 2003, 364-6. Although Iñupiat had had access to tobacco since at least the 18th century, with both Native and non-Native figures depicted as smoking pipes on 19th -century drill bows, ivory remained, in the words of one historian, "beautiful but foul to smoke," suggesting this object's role as curio rather than functional device. I should note that I did not identify any residue on the object that suggested its use, but it's possible the object was cleaned before sale. For more on ivory pipes, see Robert E. Ackerman, "Ivory Carving in the Bering Strait Region," in William W. Fitzhugh et al., *Gifts from the Ancestors: Ancient Ivories of Bering Strait* (Princeton : New Haven, Conn. ; London: Princeton University Art Museum; Distributed by Yale University Press, 2009), 84.

[8] Thanks are due to Aldona Jonaitis for calling my attention to the ambiguity of the prey. Although its silhouette, tail shape, and seeming blowhole resemble that of a bowhead whale engraved onto the side of the pipe, its head shape and flippers more resemble a seal. Moreover, as Sven Haakanson noted at OI, whaling was too dangerous for a lone hunter and would only have been attempted from an umiaq.

[9] My ability to recognize the pipe's carved images for their functionality relied on my ability to hold it in my hand and to move it around as its owner would have. In other words, haptic interaction with objects is crucial to the work of art history, and I am grateful to the Otsego Institute for the rare ability to partake in it.

[10] See, for example, a drill bow handle from the Canadian Museum of Civilization, in Ingo Hessel, *Inuit Art: An Introduction* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 17.

[11] The task of identifying the activities represented on this pipe was eased greatly by Amy Chan's dissertation, which provides a comprehensive index of the motifs commonly represented on Iñupiaq drill bows. See Appendix F in Chan, "Quliaqtuavut Tuugaatigun."

[12] The incised images on the object's mouthpiece seem to have been done by a different hand. The fish do not conform to the conventions of drill bow imagery that characterize the object's other decorations, and although the other incised images of men in a qagri and a dogsled do, the method of engraving (eg. the linework) does not appear to be Iñupiaq, suggesting that a later owner copied the motifs from other objects in their possession.

[13] Heather Igloliorte, "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum," in *Art Journal* 76, 2 (April 2017): 101-3.

[14] See Chan 361-2 for more.

[15] Igloliorte 108.

[16] While I cannot get into it here, I am fascinated by how specific details on both this pipe and on drill bows represent a form of realism specific to Inuit hunting practices. As Dorothy Jean Ray wrote in her 1980 *Artists of the Tundra and the Sea*, "The carvers are convinced that their figurines are completely realistic...They are concerned only with the impression that results from merely a glance, an impression like that received by an experienced hunter who differentiates between a white and a red fox on a hillside with only a fleeting look" (143). The editors of the 2009 catalogue for *Gifts from the Ancestors*, invoking discussions with Kodiak hunters, also noted that Arctic hunting required what they called a "special kind of vision... not the vision of ordinary sight, for they also had to recognize the subtle forms of unseen spirits" (Ackerman 165). It would seem, then, that certain tools embedded within them gestures toward particular skills, knowledge and forms of visual recognition, which would have been recognizable only to those viewers familiar with hunting, despite being available for more widespread visual consumption. See Dorothy Jean Ray, *Artists of the Tundra and the Sea*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980).

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