

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Scrimshaw walking stick made from whalebone and ivory

Date

19th century

Medium

Whalebone, whale ivory, wood, tortise shell

Dimensions

Overall: 875 x 81 x 18 mm, 0.35 kg

Name

Walking stick

History

The hunt for the whale met different needs at different times. Whaling played an essential part in 19th century life. Industry and households depended on whale products for which there was no substitute. Whale oil was used for lighting and lubrication until 1860 when kerosene and petroleum started to gain popularity. The pure clean oil from sperm whales was a superior source of lighting and the finest candles were made from the whales wax-like spermaceti. Light and flexible, baleen - the bristle-fringed plates found in the jaws of baleen whales - had many uses in objects where today we would use plastics. Scrimshaw is a maritime folk art that developed onboard American whaling ships in the 19th century. It helped sailors deal with the isolation and loneliness of being on whaling expeditions that often lasted for more than five years. Scrimshaw is produced by engraving and carving animal material, such as whale bone, teeth and baleen, walrus tusks and shell. Using jackknives, saws or homemade files sailors would etch artistic images of women, whaling scenes and memories of home or carve popular functional objects, including walking sticks, needles, cutlery, cups or containers.