



Model Totem Pole

Date

c. 1880-1900

Medium

Wood with abalone

Description

The house post, or totem pole (Gyáa'aang in the Haida language), is a form of heraldry and power traditionally produced by peoples of the Northwest Coast of the United States and Canada, including the Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian. A vertical grouping of figures (human, animal, and hybrid) that referred to individual clans or families and often explained how they acquired their names, social positions, or properties were carved into such posts, which were then erected prominently outside a residence. The production of full-sized house posts trailed off by the late 1880s, probably on account of the cumulative deleterious effects inflicted on these communities by missionary work and diseases such as smallpox. Around this time, however, artists began to carve miniature totem poles in wood or argillite (black shale); these did not replicate actual house posts but provided a forum for artisans to continue practicing their craft. The models were typically sold or traded to visitors and became popular souvenirs in the early nineteenth century. The carving and decoration of this example—specifically, the lack of painted elements and inclusion of abalone—have affinities with the carving style of John Robson (1846–1924), although he worked primarily in argillite and silver; the maker is thus currently unidentified. The donor of the work, Theodora Finks, was the daughter of the Reverend Delos Edwin Finks, Class of 1870. After graduating from Hamilton, Reverend Finks attended the Auburn Seminary and held a number of evangelical posts in Colorado. In 1887, he began to lecture widely about his pioneering missionary work, especially in relation to Native Americans. His daughter presented this work to the College in 1945. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) Carved wood model totem pole with abalone inlay. Clan members believed themselves to be descended from a common ancestor whose emblem they proudly displayed. Often these beings were supernatural in origin. The carving on this model bear totem depicts four figures with a smaller one emerging.

Dimensions

Overall: 26 1/4 × 7 × 2 1/4 in. (66.7 × 17.8 × 5.7 cm)