
Publication: The Art Newspaper

Date: May 03, 2014

Author: Aimee Dawson


INTERNATIONAL EDITION
THE ART NEWSPAPER

The Tefaf New York wish list: objects to suit every collector's taste

Prehistoric pottery, a ceremonial dance mask and a blue-chip rocking chair are among this year's gems



Complex Dance Mask (around 1890-1910)
Courtesy Donald Ellis Gallery

Complex Dance Mask (around 1890-1910)

Yup'ik, likely Goodnews Bay, Alaska, \$450,000, Donald Ellis Gallery

The Yup'ik is a group of Indigenous peoples of western Alaska and the Russian Far East. A Yup'ik mask such as this one would have been worn during dance ceremonies and presents the artist's vision of the universe. The masks and performances depict relationships among humans, animals and the spirit world. This wooden piece appears to be in the form of a fish with fins and flippers down the side, while the two faces on the front could represent a seal and some form of land mammal. According to a gallery statement, the top of the mask features a single willow-root hoop, or *ellanguaq*, "which places the mask within the known universe".

This work was obtained in Alaska by Joseph E. Chilberg in the late 19th century, according to Donald Ellis Gallery. Chilberg travelled there during the Gold Rush and, over a period of around 20 years, amassed a large collection of Yup'ik objects. In 1917, he established Chilberg's Alaska Museum of Arctic Antiquity and Curio Emporium in Long Beach, California, which remained in operation until 1935. This mask was later owned by the Surrealist artist Roberto Matta. "Collecting non-Western art formed an important aspect of Surrealist practice, and the present mask is one of the finest examples of its kind extant," says Donald Ellis, the gallery's founder.