



Headdress frontlet

Date

c. 1825-50

Medium

Wood with paint and abalone

Description

In 1883, Hamilton College remodeled its Wunderkammer, or “Cabinet,” as the Knox Hall of Natural History, where collections of minerals and specimens of flora and fauna were exhibited in vitrines in two large rooms and used for the teaching of science. Ten years later, the Hamilton Literary Monthly noted that, in addition to that material, the Cabinet contained a large collection of “Indian relics” presented “from time to time” by Asahel Norton Brockway, Class of 1857. In addition to Brockway’s gifts, the Native American cultural objects contained in Knox Hall had likely been acquired by alumni—many of whom traveled west in a missionary capacity—over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The cultures of the American Southwest, Canadian Northwest, and American Plains were well represented through vessels, apparel, and tools. Some of the alumni noted as having given objects to Knox Hall are Henry Kendall, Class of 1840, who contributed a feast dish from the Northwest Coast;

Benjamin W. Arnold, Class of 1886, who donated a number of baskets; and James H. Glass, H1912. Upon the opening of the Emerson Gallery, a number of the divergent collections on campus were transferred there for safekeeping, including more than one hundred Native American objects that had formerly been displayed in Knox Hall, which closed in 1925, and were subsequently stored in the Anthropology Department. Several of them are reproduced here and on the following spread. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017) Worn on ceremonial occasions, this wooden headress frontlet would have been mounted on a cylindrical frame-work covered with fur or trade cloth and surmounted with sea lion whiskers and flicker feathers. An attached fall of ermine skins would have covered the wearer’s shoulders and back. The frontlet is carved of alder wood and features stylized animal figures with red, black, and blue-green paint, surrounded by inlaid abalone, which has been restored. Holes are drilled along all edges.

Dimensions

Overall: 7 1/2 × 5 13/16 × 2 3/4 in. (19.1 × 14.8 × 7 cm)