

The Virtual Coe *Being together while being apart....*

July 9, 2021

High-tech sunglasses?





If you have spent time with us in the Coe collection, you know that we privilege the power and impact of direct, hands-on engagement with the pieces that live with us. This is not a view reserved for certain visitors, but for anyone who crosses our doors, whether through a formal program or just a casual passerby. However, if you only follow us through reading *The Virtual Coe* or on social media, you might not always see just how we embrace engaging with our collection.

These two pairs of Alaska Native snow goggles serve as perfect illustrations for one of the many ways that folks have, and continue to, work with pieces in the collection.



Snow goggles like these have been created for centuries across arctic Alaska. These highly functional objects of adornment are necessary tools for living in a snow-covered landscape. Anyone who has experienced the extreme glare off the surface of snow or sand understands the difficulty of navigating, much less performing precise tasks like hunting for food, with reflected light blinding you. The narrower you squint your eyes, the more you are able to filter out some of that extreme light. Snow goggles, in all their **various forms**, are designed based on the same principle. The narrow slits, small eye holes, or even stacked **horizontal slices** carved into the surface of wood or bone provide a light-filtering effect for the glaring, snow-reflected light of the tundra.

Read more [here](#).



Left: Artist Unknown (Yup'ik), *Snow Goggles*, c. 1875. Wood and natural fiber string, 1.375 x 5.125 in. (3.4 x 13 cm). NA0619
Right: Artist Unknown (Yup'ik & Cup'ik), *Snow Goggles*, early 20th C. Wood, 1.75 x 6 in. (4.4 x 6 cm). NA1170

At first glance...



What figure may this represent?

At first glance, the figure could resemble that of a frog or turtle. But after seeing similar [jade work of other pieces](#), including that of the ancient Olmecs, one starts to see a pattern...that of a bird-man, a zoomorphic avian figure, with its piercing eyes, a large triangular beak, feet with toes that bend downwards like fins, and hands nestled along its stomach. Can you see it now?

Read more [here](#).

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