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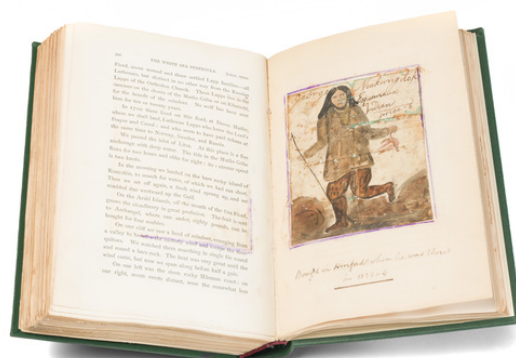
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(Inuit Self Portrait) [Original watercolor of George Niagungitok] George Niakungitok, Esquimaux, Indian, price 6d, Drawn by Himself [mounted in:] The White Peninsula, A Journey in Russian Lapland and Karelia by Edward Rae.

Stock#: 94266
Map Maker: Niakungitok
Date: 1823 circa
Place: [Hereford, England]
Color: Pen & Ink with Wash Color
Condition: Good
Size: 3.5 x 4.25 inches
Price: On Hold



Description:

Original Watercolor Self Portrait of Inuit Man

A truly remarkable and very rare original watercolor of George Niagungitok, an Inuit Man who was taken from his home in Greedy (now Grady) Harbor, Southern Labrador by Samuel Hadlock, an American sea captain turned showman who exhibited Niagungitok in New York and in other American cities, as well as in England and Europe. The present watercolor was acquired as a souvenir during Niagungitok's visit to Hereford, England in 1823 or 1824. It is believed to be a self portrait by Niagungitok and was purchased for a sixpence by an attendee of Niagungitok's exhibition at Hereford.

In October 1820, Maine whaling captain Samuel Hadlock Jr. (1792-1829), who was then trading ice with his ship *Five Brothers*, collected an Eskimo man from Greedy (now Grady) Harbor, Southern Labrador, and soon after, an Eskimo woman and child from the same coast. Hadlock arranged to exhibit the kidnapped Native Americans in several American cities, including New London, Connecticut, and later in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. After the threat of legal action in New York over these shenanigans, the sea captain managed to regain custody of the unfortunate Inuit man, setting sail for Liverpool and a four-year European show tour, apparently to escape an arrest warrant issued in New York, as reported in the London *Literary Gazette* of May 21, 1821:

One Hadlock brought back with him to New York an Esquimaux man and woman, and a child. Of these he made a show, and their exploits in a seal skin canoe, &c. were exhibited at so much per head to the natives of that city. Some rumours having got afloat, that he had kidnapped these poor



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Indians, he was indicted for a trespass and battery; but the mayor acquitted him.

An earlier report that appeared in the *New York Commercial Advertiser*, described how a Moravian minister named Mortimer called to see George in New York City and learned that Hadlock had detained George against his will. The mayor of New York purportedly issued a warrant for Hadlock's arrest.

Hadlock's peregrinations throughout England and Europe are recorded in his own journal, which is preserved by the Isleford Historical Society Museum in Maine. The Eskimo woman called Marie died while in Europe, and Hadlock initially replaced her with "a Jipsey that I drest up in sealskin and excibited as an Indian Woomern." He then replaced the Gypsy woman while in England:

Gut another woman which ansored my purpes better than the first, she being the same kuller and the same fetchers which pases without Dispute. She conducts herself better than the Jipsey... I rote this in Pickidilly.

This second imposter appeared in an illustrated broadside with portraits of George and Marie, housed in the Stadbibliotek in Austria.

According to Robin K. Wright, Capt. Hadlock was one of the earliest Americans to have toured with Native Americans in Europe, predating George Catlin's Indian Gallery by twenty years.

The Self Portrait

The watercolor, which is charmingly naive, and redolent of early American folk portraits, shows Niagungitok in native Labrador garb, in a running stance, wielding a spear in one hand while dangling a freshly killed bird in the other. The watercolor itself is inscribed in the upper part of the sheet in an early hand: "George Niakungitok / Esquimaux Indian / price 6d. / Drawn by Himself." Contemporary press coverage described George as a good artist who sold his drawings to patrons. The drawings usually depicted George paddling his kayak or, as in the case of our drawing, demonstrating his hunting prowess in spearing birds in flight.

This self-portrait by George Niagungitok captures a poignant and complex moment in early 19th-century cultural history. Niagungitok, an Inuit man from Labrador, was likely taken against his will by Captain Samuel Hadlock Jr., a whaling captain from Maine. As a rare personal expression from Niagungitok, it is a striking artifact of the era's fascination with exotica and the exploitation of indigenous people for entertainment and profit. Niagungitok's experiences stem from the 19th-century trend of "ethnographic



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zoos" or "human zoos," where indigenous people from various parts of the world were displayed for public viewing in Europe and America, often in settings that purported to replicate their native living conditions. This practice was part of a broader fascination with the exotic and the unfamiliar, which was prevalent in Europe at the time. This phenomenon is paralleled in William Bullock's exhibition of Mexican antiquities in 1824, particularly in that showman's display of live Mexican Indians at London's Egyptian Hall.

Niagungitok's image, depicting himself with a harpoon, alongside symbols of his native culture, serves as a haunting reminder of his involuntary journey from Labrador to Europe and his display as an "Esquimaux Indian" in Hadlock's "Museum." This traveling exhibition included a mix of North American Indian and Eskimo artifacts, natural history specimens, and related objects. Niagungitok's life and experiences, encapsulated in this watercolor, reflect the era's contradictory impulses: a curiosity for the unfamiliar and the often-exploitative means by which such curiosities were satisfied.

A lithograph of Niagungitok was issued to announce his appearance at 183 Piccadilly, opposite Burlington House, during his London visit. That portrait shows him wearing native clothing like that in our watercolor, similarly wielding a spear or harpoon, except in the lithograph the dead bird lies on the ground at his feet.

According to Hugh L. Dwelley, who published a well-researched article on Capt. Hadlock's Eskimo exhibitions, George Niahungitok was literate, having attended a school run by Moravian missionaries in Hopedale, Labrador: "He could read and write in his own language and he could speak English."

George would die of pneumonia in Strasbourg on November 18, 1825. Hadlock survived to return home, bringing back numerous knick knacks from European royalty as well as profits from his "museum."

The present watercolor has survived for decades, mounted inside a book about Russian Lapland, published in 1881: *The White Sea Peninsula, A Journey in Russian Lapland and Karelia* by Edward Rae (London, 1881).

A now very rare publication was printed to accompany Hadlock's "Museum," which describes 77 items, including North American Indian objects and Eskimo clothing and ethnological items. Hadlock also threw in a few New Zealand Maori things. Notably the pamphlet had a vocabulary of Esquimaux words compiled by Niagungitok:

An interesting account of those extraordinary people, the Esquimaux Indians, from Baffin's Bay, North Pole: to which is affixed a vocabulary of Esquimaux words, translated into English by George



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Niagungitok, and a catalogue of the Museum of Natural and Artificial Curiosities, which accompany the exhibition of the Esquimaux Indians (1824)

In sum, a unique survival of poignant artifact of exceeding interest, relating to touring Native Americans in Europe some twenty years before the more famous exhibitions of George Catlin's Indian Gallery.

Rarity

Original self portraits by George Niahungitok are very rare in the market. Only a handful of extant originals are extant, including one at the Linden Museum in Stuttgart and another in the Museum der Geschichte de Stadt Dresden.

Detailed Condition:

Original ink and watercolor drawing, 4 1/4 x 3 1/2 inches. Mounted on verso of a plate illustrating the book, facing page 300. With a later manuscript note underneath the mounted watercolor: "Bought in Hereford when he was there in 1823 or 4." Old folds, some surface dirt, but still in quite good condition. The book: Rebound in green cloth, with the original spine backstrip and gilt pictorial cover laid down over new binding. 347 pages plus plates and folding map in back pocket.