



Fine Netsuke & Sagemono (NE0421)

Fri, 16th Apr 2021

Lot 82

Starting price: €30000

Estimate: €60000

Y KAIGYOKUSAI MASATSUGU: A MASTERFUL AND IMPORTANT IVORY NETSUKE OF A RECUMBENT OX

By Kaigyokusai Masatsugu (1813-1892), signed Kaigyokusai 懷玉齋 with seal Masatsugu 正次
Japan, Osaka, second half of 19th century

The ox (ushi) with its head turned backwards, the resulting skin folds on the neck are masterfully worked. The bulky stature of the animal is executed with a superior sense of realism, note the ridged spine, subtly incised rib cage, the tail which points downwards and swings over to the side, and the individual muscles and bones. The eyes are inlaid in pure amber with dark horn pupils. The rope halter which is attached to the ox's muzzle is very finely carved and extends into a rope which moves in sinuous lines over the body ending in a loop. The hairwork is slightly worn, revealing the beautifully gleaming, marbled ivory underneath (Kaigyokusai only chose the best pieces of ivory for his carvings, this being pure white tokata ivory), however what remains of the hairwork is truly a spectacular site, especially when viewed under a magnifying glass – not a single stroke is misplaced, each minutely incised line complements the other perfectly, adding to the sublime color, gleam, and overall feel of the material. The netsuke is truly a joy to handle, much owed to the compact design of the netsuke, which is ideally shaped. The legs are neatly tucked underneath the body, again extremely well-carved, and the 'natural himotoshi' is underneath the right haunch which also houses the perfectly incised signature KAIGYOKUSAI and seal MASATSUGU, both within a polished reserve.

LENGTH 4.2 cm

Condition: Superb condition, with associated wear to inked details.

Provenance: Important Italian private collection, sold at Van Ham, Asian Art, 7 December 2017, Cologne, lot 2260 (sold for 64,500 EUR).

Auction comparison:

Compare to an ivory netsuke of an ox and a goat by Kaigyokusai Masatsugu, sold at Sotheby's, The Katchen Collection of Netsuke, 8 November 2005, London, lot 31 (sold for 42,000 GBP, approximately 62,000 EUR at the time).

Literature comparison:

Kaigyokusai carved several of this type, however each different. The one in the Walters Art Museum, accession no. 71.961, depicts the ox in the classic, somewhat static posture. Nevertheless, it provides an excellent comparison to the color of the ivory, carving quality, and the yellowish underside. However, the present netsuke is probably best compared to

the ox in the Baur collection, Marie-Therese Coullery and Martin S. Newstead (1977) *The Baur Collection*, pp. 368-369, C 1175. Note the two legs folded underneath the body like in the netsuke here on offer. Also compare to the one featured on the back cover of INCS 8/4, which is has been stained yellow (because the material was not perfect tokata ivory, as in our example).