

# Galerie Hioco

Pala Stele depicting Visnu (P531)



## What do we like in this sculpture?

- The rich decorative forms all over the piece.
- The expressive power of faces.
- The subtle work on the various forms of relief and on the modelling.



## I. Detailed description

### **Viṣṇu (P531)**

*Phyllite stone*

*Northern India*

*Circa 12th century, Pala period*

*H. 61 cm*

### **An illustration of Visnute mythology**

This stele presents the characteristic iconography of the powerful Viṣṇu Vasudeva, supreme Hindu god wearing the royal tiara (kirīta), who is figured here.

One recognizes its attributes, finely represented in the respect of the classic iconographical codes: in his raised hands, the mace (gadā) and the discus (cakra). With his other hands he makes the gift-giving gesture (varadamudrā) and holds the conch (śaṅkha).

Contributing to the general harmony, Viṣṇu is surrounded by his two wives, carved in dynamic postures, contrasting with the formal rigidity of his figure.

On his right, the goddess of good fortune Lakṣmī holds a fly-whisk, the symbol of royalty and happiness. On the other side, Sarasvatī, goddess of knowledge, wisdom and the arts, can be recognized by the string instrument (vina). Two small figures next to the goddesses represent personified attributes of Viṣṇu.

### **Pala steles, a peculiar aesthetic**

The god is wearing many jewels and this abundance of details is found throughout the decor. Whether they are rampant lions (vyālaka) depicted on both sides atop elephants, the kīrtimukha prophylactic mask at the top, the two flying celestial creatures with garlands (Vidyādhara), or floral scrolls, all these decorative elements contribute to a rich, fluid and elegant composition.

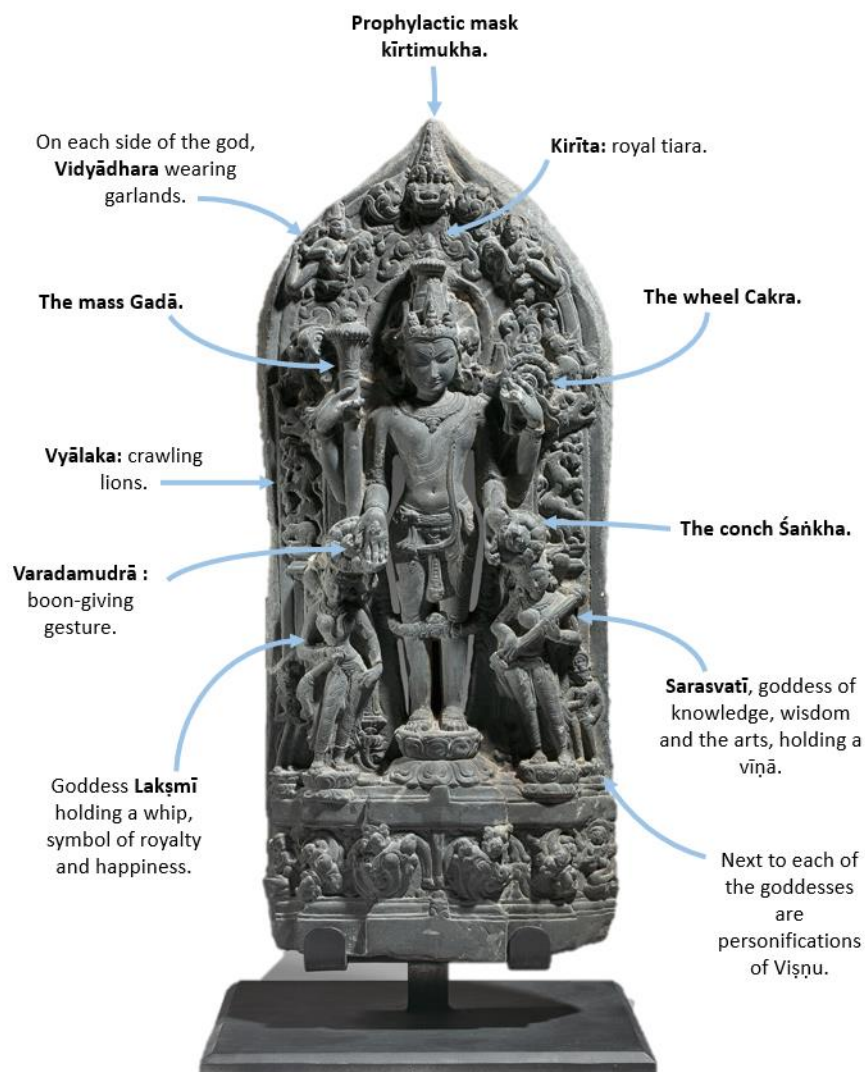
The multiplication of parts setting back from the central section in the lower part, the pointed top of the stele and the openwork behind the main figure are all stylistic characteristics specific to the stelae of the 12th century and made in North-Eastern India.



## II. Visual description

### VIṢṆU

This stele presents an iconography characteristic of the powerful Viṣṇu Vasudeva, the supreme Hindu god. We recognize his attributes, finely represented in the respect of the classic iconographic codes. The multiplication of details in the rich and elegant composition, the pointed top of the stele and the openwork background are all stylistic features that are increasingly sophisticated and specific to 12th century steles made in North-East India.



III. Image of the piece – front view



IV. Image of the piece – left three-quarter view



V. Image of the piece – front detail view



VI. Image of the piece – front detail view



## VII. Provenance: in all transparency!

- . This piece comes from a French private collection, and acquired during the 1940s and the 1960s.
- . We are always very cautious and diligent about the provenance of the artworks we offer. Ensuring the seriousness and reliability of the information given by the former owners is one of our priorities and we then guarantee this origin by engaging our responsibility.
- . In order to reinforce this guarantee, we systematically verify that these artworks have not been registered as missing or stolen. As Interpol has granted us the right to directly consult their database of stolen or reported items, we verify by ourselves and issue a certificate attesting to this.

## VIII. Condition report: our scientific approach

This 12th century stele is in very good condition. The three main characters' faces - Visnu in the centre and the two goddesses surrounding him - are in perfect condition. However, there are some missing parts on three of the four hands of the god, on his right shoulder, and on the upper part of the conch. A toe is also missing from one of the god's feet. A slight crack is visible at the edge of the makāra's horn on the right. The scrolls and decorative elements are also very well preserved. At the level of the nimbus of Visnu, a flaw in the stone is visible; similarly next to the makāra on the left. Slight concretions can also be seen in places, especially in the most recessed carved parts. Ochre traces are visible at the level of the ajours and could be related to ferrous elements intrinsic to the stone. No restoration has been detected.

*Please note that since we are not conservators or restorers, it must be understood that any condition report we made is a subjective qualified opinion, even if we do our best efforts. Prospective buyers should inspect the piece to satisfy themselves as to condition.*





## X. Comparable museum artwork – Brooklyn Museum

An 11th century Pala stele depicting Vishnu surrounded by his avatars and deities, in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum (New York):



Stele with Vishnu, His Consorts, His Avatars, and Other Deities

MEDIUM : Schist

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS :

- Possible place made: Bangladesh, India
- Possible place made: Eastern region, West Bengal, India

DATES : 11th century

PERIOD : Pala Period

DIMENSIONS : 48 x 20 3/4 x 5 in., 192 lb. (121.9 x 52.7 x 12.7 cm, 87.09kg) (show scale)

COLLECTIONS : Asian Art

EXHIBITIONS

- Vishnu: Hinduism's Blue-Skinned Savior

ACCESSION NUMBER 1991.244



## XI. Comparable museum artwork – Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET)

A 12th century Pala stele depicting Vishnu and his two wives, on display at the MET (New York):



**Title:** Vishnu Accompanied by Lakshmi and Sarasvati

**Period:** Pala period

**Date:** 12th century

**Culture:** Bangladesh

**Medium:** Black phyllite

**Dimensions:** H. 47 in. (119.4 cm); W. 25 in. (63.5 cm); D. 9 in. (22.9 cm)

**Classification:** Sculpture

**Credit Line:** Gift of Emily M. Goldman, 1991

**Accession Number:** 1991.406



## XII. Our guarantees: for a serene acquisition!

- More photos will be sent to you on request.
- In case of purchase, we will establish an invoice that you can pay by bank transfer.
- You will receive our certificate of authenticity with the photo of the artwork, its detailed description and the mention of the provenance.
- We will define together the shipping modalities and we will take care of all customs formalities if you live outside of France.
- If you do not like the piece, we give you the possibility to return it to us and we will assist you with the resulting terms and conditions.

