

Galerie Hioco

Lion-headed Vyāla (P691)



What do we like in this sculpture?

- Its fluid aesthetics and sensitive treatment of the figures.
- It is a magnificent example of Candella production, comparable to the sculptures in the famous Khajuraho shrine complex.
- The vigour and dynamism of this mythical battle scene.



I. Detailed description

Vyāla with lion's head (P691)

Sandstone

India

Circa 11th century

H. 24,8 inch.

A skilfully composed battle scene

The Vyāla, a mythical animal that is very present in Indian art, is a graceful and very powerful creature. With its contorted, curved body, this lion-headed Vyāla wears a beaded necklace and its mane of hair is clearly visible. The animal appears in motion, its position is dynamic, arched and proud. It seems to be fighting with the two figures present, one on its head and the other on its paws. Indeed, a small figure sitting on the lion's rump is facing it directly, while a second, larger figure is standing hunched over, face turned towards the sky, and grabbing the beast by the tail. This position also gives him a very graceful, almost dancing, movement and makes him look as if he too is participating in the fight.

The Vyāla, emblem of the Indian fantasy repertoire

This very beautiful piece appears complete and is quite comparable to the leogriffs of the Khajurāho temples. The hypothesis of the fight refers to a popular theme found on several occasions in Khajurāho. As Gilles Béguin reminds us in his study of the site, this undoubtedly refers to an unknown legendary context, a local tradition, reporting that the princes of the Candella family had to kill a lion in their sixteenth year.

A delicate aesthetic that magnifies religious architecture

Carved in very high relief, this Vyāla is a fine example of the ornamental sculpture of the period. The work gives an impression of fluidity and ease in the movements of its protagonists. This impression is reinforced by the play of light and shadow provided by the high relief, bringing contrast and vigour to the scene. We admire their undulating gestures which perfectly convey the power of the animal as well as the great agility of the small characters. This charismatic mythical lion would have adorned a pillar of a mandapa - a hall with columns - or a gallery of a Hindu temple.



II. Image of the piece – front view



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



IV. Image of the piece – left profile view



V. Image of the piece – back view



VI. Image of the piece – right profile view



VII. Image of the piece – right three-quarter view



VIII. Provenance: in all transparency!

- . This piece comes from a former French private collection and acquired in 1999.
- . 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.

IX. Condition report: our scientific approach

This stele is in a very good general state of preservation, except for a very slight gap in the paw, which is rare for an object of this period. The stone has a slightly eroded appearance, but the fine carved details are still very visible, notably the finery and the coat. On the ramp on the left, the treatment of the stone is different from that of the narrative scene. Indeed, it is certainly the traces of the cutting tools that we see. We can also make out traces of pink and red pigments in the recessed areas, which certainly testify to the ritual context of this piece. It is indeed customary for the faithful to coat the sculptures exhibited in the temples with ointments, pigments and many other substances during rites or celebrations. It is therefore hardly surprising to find this type of residue on an eleventh-century relief from a temple.

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 – The Walters Art Museum

An 11th century architectural fragment of a Vyāla, in the collections of the British Museum (London):



Description : Architectural fragment showing a leogryph (vyāla) carved in white marble.

The rampant griffin or leogryph (vyāla) is carved in a coarse white marble with veins of grey and stands on a base supported by an elephant. There is a kneeling figure below its raised rear paw; this figure once flourished a sword, but the point is now broken. The tiny rider on the griffin's back has his hands reverently folded (añjalimudrā). At the top is a band of jawless lion-heads (grāsapaṭṭī).

Production date : 11thC

Found/Acquired: India (West)

Materials : marble

Height: 108.70 centimetres / Weight: 70 kilograms

Width: 41.20 centimetres / Depth: 18 centimetres

Acquisition date : 1914

Registration number : 1914,0806.1



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

A 10th century Vyāla in the round in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York:



Title: Rearing Lion (Vyāla)

Date: 10th century

Culture: India

Medium: Stone

Dimensions: H. 33 3/4 in. (85.7 cm);
W. 6 in. (16.2 cm); D. 8 1/2 in. (21.6

cm); H. (incl. stand) 48 7/8 in. (124.1 cm)

Classification: Sculpture

Credit Line: Purchase, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Gift and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1964

Accession Number: 64.258.2



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.

