



Handle in the form of a bird and snake

On display

Title/Description: Handle in the form of a bird and snake

Materials: Wood

Measurements: h. 165 x w. 33 x d. 40 mm

Accession Number: 872

Historic Period: 19th/20th century

The Sasak people of the island of Lombok, just east of Bali, have been subject to considerable Hindu and Muslim influences, as well as to Balinese invasion (De Hoog, 1981: 123; Barbier, 1984: 114). The sculpture shown here, the silver-mounted handle of a weapon or, possibly, of a betel spatula, demonstrates this Asiatic/Balinese influence in the art of the indigenous Sasak, in both the subject matter and the decorative style.

The bird and serpent motif, symbolising the upper and lower world, or heaven and earth, is widespread throughout southern and south-east Asia (Zimmer, 1960: I: 48; see also the Borneo hornbill, no. 69, UEA 868), and is here rendered in a particularly harmonious composition: the bird clasps the snake to its breast, while gripping the head in its beak. Frequent handling has given the outer surfaces a smooth dark patina. A split down the back has been filled by a previous owner; the wood pupil is missing from the left eye.

Steven Hooper, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, Vol. 2: Pacific, African and Native North American Art*, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997) p. 92.

Exhibitions

'Power Plants: Intoxicants, Stimulants and Narcotics', Sainsbury Centre, UK, 14/09/2024-02/02/2025
