



Four-Faced Linga

Date

18th - 19th century

Medium

Silver Repoussé

Description

This is a protective silver sheath designed to cover a stone Shivalinga, the phallic symbol (linga) of the Hindu god Shiva. Such metal sheaths are modeled after stone images that they cover. Most of the time the linga has no faces. The four-faced linga is, however, more than a symbol. It is also the anthropomorphic representation of Shiva. As a cosmic god he represents the five cardinal directions and five elements. Only four heads, representing different forms of Shiva, are visible to us, with the fifth, the center, only implied. The linga is the

primary object of worship in temples dedicated to the god. Shiva personifies the renewal and destruction of existence, with the linga representing his regenerative and creative energy. The multi-faced form of the linga, common in the Kathmandu Valley, has four visible faces and an abstract, formless face on the top. The five faces represent five distinct aspects of the god and also correspond to sacred sites of Shiva in India and Nepal. A devotee would usually approach the linga with offerings and prayers, view it, and be seen through it by Shiva, thus receiving the god's blessings.

Dimensions

7 3/4 × 7 3/4 × 7 1/2 in.