



Palace of the Protector Begtse

Date

19th century

Medium

Wood, pigments

Description

This fantastic creation carved from a single piece of wood, a common medium in Mongolian Buddhist sculpture, depicts the dwelling of the fierce protector and god of war Begtse. He is described as dwelling within a pavilion of bones surrounded by twenty-nine butcher-attendants cutting up human corpses. This example shows his palace constructed almost entirely from skeletons and body parts, with standing skeletons supporting the structure, squatting skeletons with jewels above their heads decorating the rooftops, and garlands of entrails and hearts hanging from the rafters. The frightening imagery closely follows visionary textual descriptions used for Begtse's propitiation: "The blood of human beings and horses stream together to form a lake... all around lie chains of mountains and on the peak ... is situated a leather castle ... with parapets of carnelian and pinnacles of skulls." This vividly carved panel likely served as a backdrop for a set of sculptures of the protector deity and his retinue.

Dimensions

20 3/4 × 30 3/4 × 1 7/8 in.