Emmett & White
ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

Early 20th-Century Sri Lankan Gara Raksha Mask

£245

Emmett & White Ltd
Cross House, Waterloo Square, Alfriston, East Sussex BN26 5UD
01323 870 595 • info@emmettandwhite.com • emmettandwhite.com

REF: 5074

Height: 33 cm (13")

Width: 40 cm (15.7")

Depth: 15 cm (5.9")

Description

A striking early 20th-century Sri Lankan carved and painted wood Gara Raksha mask, representing the King of Demons. Richly expressive and vividly coloured, this powerful mask exemplifies the imaginative carving and theatrical visual language of Sri Lankan ritual and performance traditions.

The Gara Raksha is among the most recognisable of Sri Lanka's raksha, or demon, masks. Despite its fearsome appearance, it is understood as a protective figure, intended to repel harmful influences and restore balance. Its bold, animated features-typically including a wide mouth, prominent teeth, exaggerated eyes, and elaborately painted ornament-were designed to command attention from a distance when worn in ceremonial performance.

Masks of this type are closely associated with southern Sri Lankan traditions, including healing and exorcistic rites, as well as masked dance and drama. Within these performances, the Gara Raksha plays a dramatic role: at once intimidating, humorous, and protective. The richly painted surface and deeply carved details demonstrate the skill of the maker, while the mask's expressive character gives it a remarkable sculptural presence even when displayed independently of its original ritual context.

Now appreciated as a work of folk art in its own right, this early 20th-century example would make a compelling addition to a collection of Asian art, tribal art, masks, or ceremonial objects. Its vivid colour, powerful iconography, and connection to Sri Lanka's living performance traditions make it an evocative and highly decorative piece.

Originally acquired by Lieutenant-Colonel Sydney C. Lockyer-Nibbs during his service across the British Empire in the early to mid-20th century. Over this period, he assembled a notable collection of tribal art and ethnographic objects from Africa and the Far East.

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