Dongson Rain Drum or Frog Kha Drum



An example of a rain drum with rounded edges · from the PRIMITIVE Collection

Although forged and found in Thailand, “rain” drums have been found in most other countries in Southeast Asia and as far away as Indonesia. These bronze drums are also called “frog” and “kha” drums, and the purpose behind their creation appears to be related to the idea of fertility. The drums are always decorated with frogs, symbols of water and rain, on the perimeter of the top (tympanum). Other decorations are included in concentric rings on the tympanum where a star pattern is found at the center. The designs range from zoomorphic to geometric motifs, but all are interpretable as fertility symbols, and the booming of the drum, whether set on the ground or suspended by its handles is likened to the roar of distant thunder or the bellow of a bullfrog, harbingers of rain. The bands incorporating short parallel lines are said to represent rice stalks; the single or double strands of interlaced undulating lines formed into ovals are rice grains; the concentric circle motifs are snails; the lozenges are paddy fields; and the central star is the life-giving sun.



In modern, western society these pieces have become celebrated as side tables

Other motifs employed include aquatic birds, fish, and rosette type flower patterns. All these are linked to a rich, watered earth and agricultural fertility, which tends to foster the belief that the drums were originally the product of a farming society. In fact, it is believed one of their original functions was as a magical means of calling down the rain.

As the rain drum made its way throughout Southeast Asia and China, it took on meanings unique to the assimilating culture. For example, among the Karen tribal people in Burma and Thailand, it was believed that the sounds produced by the drum pleased the “nats,” spirits who live in the trees, water, and other objects in their surroundings. In addition, the Karen are animists and the drums were also used in ceremonies to summon ancestors. It has been said that among this group, ownership of a rain drum brings more status to the person than would possession of seven elephants. Most of the rain drums in PRIMITIVE’s collection were created by the Karen people.



An over-sized rain drum from the PRIMITIVE Collection is 33 inches in diameter x 30 inches high, making it ideal as a table base sitting under a large piece of glass