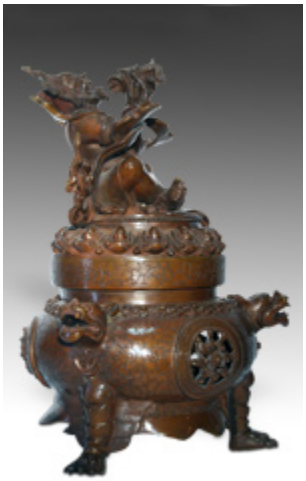
Mahakala Incense Burner



Bronze Incense Burner Depicting Mahakala (detail)

"*Mahakala is a fierce protector of Buddhism. Mahakala is most often depicted as a spiritual protector, who vanquishes fear, hate and jealousy. Mahakala is also known as 'the great black one,' or 'the lord of the wind*'"

The popular Mahakala was originally a demon tamed by Avalokitesvara, the God of compassion, and turned into a fierce protector of Buddhism. He is known as a Dharmapala, one of the great protectors of Buddhism. This important deity is also known as 'the lord of the wind' and 'the great black one.' He is a great guardian of the Dharma (the teachings of the laws of Buddhism) and is considered a fierce manifestation of Avalokitesvara. He helps beings overcome all negative elements, especially spiritual ones, personified and symbolized by the fearsome creatures over which he becomes lord.



This incense burner is a particularly fine example of 20th century lost wax casting

This bronze Mahakala is a particularly fine example of 20th century lost wax casting, and surmounts a tri-footed vessel which is itself guarded by three dragons and further incised. Mahakala is depicted on a lotus throne with strands of pearls. In his right hand he holds a vajra; in his left a ritual bell. In tantric rituals the vajra symbolizes the male principle and the bell the female principle—their interaction leads to enlightenment. The figure is adorned with necklaces, naga bracelets, coiled serpent ear ornaments with foliate pendants, and a billowing sash. Mahakala wears a five-leafed crown with ornaments fluttering behind his ears and strands of pearls suspended on his forehead. His crown of five skulls represents the five afflictions of anger, greed, pride, envy and ignorance. The protector's face is depicted with fierce expression, three bulging round eyes, broad nose, snarling mouth with fangs bared and with curly beard and mustache. In the center of the burner is a circle with eight spokes, which is called a Dharma Wheel and represents the laws of Buddhism.

Spiritual obstacles are not caused by external circumstances, but by inner defilements, such as fear, hate, pride and jealousy. The inner force of Mahakala is invoked to vanquish these problems; he appears in this superb bronze image as 'self assured', possessing an amazing amount of concentrated magical power. The figure is well modeled and cast, revealing striking positioning of his hands, perfect balance and a lively movement of all features. Portrayed with great imagination, Mahakala is depicted as a powerful god and spiritual protector. This piece was created as an incense burner, presumably because Mahakala could be invoked in a meditative state caused by the inhalation of certain types of incense. In this

state, he could vanquish anyone or anything interfering with the Dharma.



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