



Monumental Processional Figure of a Lion Vahana

South India, Late 19th to early 20th century

Carved and painted wood, wrought iron, glass

149.9 cm high, 166.4 cm wide

Stock no.: A5683

Provenance: Spink & Son, London, 1980 (by repute);

Collection of Trammel Crow, Dallas.

A monumental carved processional figure of a lion vahana, the mount of a Hindu god or goddess. Statues like this are displayed outside temples and on holy days a statue of the corresponding deity is placed atop and taken out in procession (*ulā*).¹ The statues were replaced regularly due to the degradation of the wood in the hot and humid southern Indian climate. It is therefore rare to find such a well-preserved example.

The lion's face is modelled on that of a yali, a mythical lion-elephant-horse hybrid, typically depicted with bulbous eyes and gaping mouth. A wooden yali in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (accession no. [IS.140-2007](#)), made in Tamil Nadu in the early 20th century, has a very similar face. Believed to be a guardian, the yali often features on entrance pillars of South Indian temples. The yali is also the mount of Budha, the Hindu god of intelligence. However, at least 10 other deities, including Durga and Parvati, have a lion vahana. With Asiatic lions having been hunted to extinction by the middle of the century, the artist may have modelled the face on the ubiquitous yali instead.

A lion vahana attributed to Tamil Nadu is in the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore (accession no. [1995-01826](#)). Described as the mount of Durga or Parvati, it has a similar yali-style face but a rearing body with humanoid limbs. A figure of Kamadhenu made in Tamil Nadu, dated to the early 20th century, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (accession no. [IS.139-2007](#)). A related

processional vahana of Nandi was published in the 2025 Amir Mohtashemi catalogue.²

[1] Rajarajan, R. K. K. 'Processional vāhanas of the Hindu gods and goddesses', in *Kalyana Mitra: A Treasure House of History, Culture and Archaeological Studies*. London: Blue Rose, 2023, pp. 352–364; p. 345.

[2] See 'Processional Figure of Nandi', *Amir Mohtashemi 2025 Catalogue*, cat. 20, pp. 74–75.