Collection Connections

RAÚL DE NIEVES: FINA

Permanent galleries self-guided tour
Raúl de Nieves is a multimedia artist and performer. His first solo museum exhibition, *Raúl de Nieves: Fina*, is on view at Transformer Station through April 27, 2019. Many of de Nieves’s works can be worn and performed in, but in this exhibition they are static art objects in a gallery space. Inspired by an ongoing dialogue with the artist, this tour explores seven objects from the CMA’s collection that relate to his interests and had lives and uses outside of the museum. Although all of these objects were created with a specific function in mind, we can continue to appreciate them for their artistic qualities today.

1. **Saluting Protective Spirit**
   
   Imagine approaching an impressive royal palace and being greeted by hundreds of large reliefs like this one. Adorned with a winged protective spirit, this monumental relief functioned as an ancient propaganda poster meant to intimidate visitors to the palace of King Ashurnasirpal II in present-day Iraq. The formidable figure holds a flowering date palm in one muscular arm as he raises his other hand toward us. The cuneiform inscription that runs across the center of the relief boasts of the military successes of the Assyrian king, making any visitor to the palace think twice about crossing him.

   ![Saluting Protective Spirit](Gallery 102a)

2. **Bush Buffalo Mask**
   
   Large horns curl upward, crowning this African mask and identifying it as a bush, or forest, buffalo. For the Bwa people of western Sudan, bush spirits can take on animal form. Represented on masks, buffalo typically have concentric circles as eyes, a prominent snout, and red, white, and black decoration. In this gallery we see this mask as a static object, but it was meant to be worn and danced. In the Bwa culture dancers wear masks like this one at special times throughout the year, such as funerals, initiations of girls and boys into adulthood, and annual rituals to protect the community.

   ![Bush Buffalo Mask](Gallery 108a)
Daniel in the Lion’s Den

Seven fearsome lions snarl and salivate as they surround the central figure, the prophet Daniel, who has been thrown into their den. An angel at top right, sent to protect Daniel from sharp teeth and claws, peers over the lions. This capital, or sculpted block that tops a column, once greeted Christian pilgrims inside the church of Saint-Aignan-sur-Cher in central France. As pilgrimages increased during the 1000s and 1100s, many new churches were built and filled with sculpture and paintings that illustrated important religious stories like this one.

Prayer Niche (Mihrab)

A mihrab, or prayer niche, is the focal point of the wall inside a mosque that is oriented toward Mecca, called the qibla wall. Dense, contrasting patterns of organic forms and geometric shapes cover the surface of the mihrab, while the border includes an inscription from the Koran in scrolling calligraphy. The brilliant color scheme including white, turquoise, cobalt, green, and dark yellow is typical of this type of ceramic mosaic decoration and resonates with the colors of paradise, where the faithful go after death.

Landscape with a Greek Temple

This stained glass window depicting a lush summer’s day once decorated a luxurious home in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Howell Hinds, a mining executive, purchased land in Cleveland Heights and began construction on his home in 1898. This window, designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany, was probably installed around 1900. Stained glass windows were popular in American interior design at this time because they resembled paintings and could be illuminated by sunlight.
Bell (Lai Zhong)
This bronze bell was never intended to be seen alone. It was originally part of a set of probably eight bells that hung together and were played with wooden mallets. The surviving bell’s oval shape allows it to produce two distinct notes when struck in different spots on the outside. The surface decoration of this bell includes spirals, bird-like creatures, and an inscription of 118 characters that tells us that a man named Lai commissioned this bell set as an offering to his father, Gongshu, who had served the kings of Zhou some 3500 years ago.

Miniature Stone Reliquary or Toilette Casket
Sometimes the most unassuming containers can hold the most marvelous things. This tiny stone vessel may have held the cremated remains, or relics, of the Buddha or another important holy person. Once the container was filled with remains, it was placed in the center of a stupa, a mound-shaped Buddhist monument. Because the historical Buddha had attained a state of enlightenment, or a state with no suffering or desire, followers of Buddhism believed that venerating a stupa was an act of good karma that would bring them closer to enlightenment themselves. Stupas were not worshiped until they contained a vessel like this one, with sacred material inside. This reliquary is in the form of a vessel that would hold sandalwood paste; one effect of enlightenment is that the body—even its cremated remains—has the scent of sandalwood.

Curious about these objects’ journeys to the CMA? Visit our website, cma.org, which now includes more information about the history of many objects in our collection.
Saluting Protective Spirit (detail), 883–859 BC. Neo-Assyrian, Iran, Nimrud, Northwest Palace. Gypsum; 229.9 x 137 cm. Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund, 1943.246

Bush Buffalo Mask (detail), early to mid-1900s. Western Sudan, Burkina Faso, Bwa people. Wood, fibers; h. 69.8 cm. Gift of Katherine C. White, 1969.2

Daniel in the Lion’s Den (detail), c. 1125–50. France, Saint-Aignan-sur-Cher. Limestone; 72.4 x 68.6. x 36.2 cm. Purchase from the J. H. Wade Fund, 1962.247

Prayer Niche (Mihrab) (detail), n.d. Iran, Isfahan. Ceramic mosaic; mihrab: 290.7 x 245.3 cm, frieze: 69.2 x 1563.5 cm. Gift of Katharine Holden Thayer, 1962.23


Bell (Lai Zhong) (detail), c. 800–700 BC. China, Shaanxi province, Western Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–771 BC). Bronze; 70.3 x 37 x 26.6 cm. Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Fund, 1989.3

Miniature Stone Reliquary or Toilette Casket (detail), AD 1–100. Pakistan, Gandhara, probably Sirkap, early Kushan period (AD 1–320). Gray schist; diam. 4 cm. Bequest of Elizabeth B. Blossom, 1977.64.a–b


Raúl de Nieves: Fine supporting sponsor
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