Dutch Colonial Period Ceylonese Guardian Lion Sculpture - 18th Century



1 200 EUR

Period : 18th century
Condition : Bon état
Material : Solid wood
Length : 15 cm
Width : 18 cm
Height : 14 cm

Description

18th-Century Dutch Ceylonese Guardian Lion Sculpture with Inlaid Eyes
Sri Lanka (Dutch Ceylon), circa 1700-1790
Hand-carved Nadun wood (Pericopsis mooniana), inlaid eyes
Dimensions: 15 cm long × 14 cm high
Condition: Excellent with original patina, minor age wear consistent with 18th-century handling
A rare and finely carved guardian lion sculpture from Dutch Ceylon, dating to the 18th century, during the administration of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Executed in nadun, a dense tropical hardwood native to Sri Lanka, the figure is remarkable for its robust baroque stylization, compact proportions, and inlaid eyes -- a high-status feature typically reserved for elite commissions.

Dealer

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This lion is sculpted with powerful haunches, a spiraling mane, and a tail that arcs vertically in classic Sinhalese-VOC hybrid style. The facial expression is animated and protective, with the inlaid eyes enhancing its symbolic "watchfulness." The body is decorated with punctuated details, and the patina across high-relief areas reveals centuries of gentle handling.

Despite its modest scale, the sculpture demonstrates an advanced degree of craftsmanship, clearly intended as a freestanding symbolic object, likely for domestic display within a colonial residence. Guardian figures of this type were understood to offer protection, prestige, and status, blending indigenous beliefs with European aesthetics.

Notable Features

VOC-period craftsmanship with European and Sinhalese stylistic elements

Authentic 18th-century patina, undisturbed and richly developed

Inlaid eyes, likely of bone or shell -- rare and intact

Carved from nadun wood (Pericopsis mooniana), a prized cabinet wood of the era

Symbolically resonant, likely used as a domestic guardian figure, not a souvenir or toy

Comparative Notes

Related examples held in the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), Tropenmuseum, and National Museum of Colombo

Stylistically and materially aligned with 18th-century VOC furniture lions and altar ornamentation