

## OBJECT of the month

**March 2021**

### BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

Hello. I'm Susan, a Museum Guide at the Dayton Art Institute. In this talk, we will focus on an intricately carved work of art from our Asian Gallery. It is one of only a handful of similar examples in museums worldwide. Take a moment to really look at this piece.

We are looking at a beautifully carved work of art that was part of a required, daily devotional practice of the Jain religion. This house shrine would have been found in the home of a wealthy Jain follower in Gujarat, the northwest area of India. It would have served as a place for meditation, as well as a show of devotion to one of the 24 spiritually advanced role models called Jinas, or Tirthankara. Tirthankara are humans who have overcome the cycle of death and rebirth. The double doors of the shrine would have been opened during worship to reveal a Jina statue inside.

Based on the image, about how large or small do you think this is? Would it surprise you to know that the shrine is quite large, measuring over 5 feet tall, 4 and a half feet wide and 2 and a half feet deep? It is made of wood, possibly teak, and at one time, it would have been painted. Traces of pigment and inlay glass are visible in some areas. This home shrine is reminiscent of the beautiful Jain temples found in various parts of India and around the world.

Next, what caught your eye when you first looked at the artwork? What details did you notice? Let's take a closer look at different parts of the *Jain Shrine*. On each corner of the roof, you see an elephant and a mythical beast. The curious beast is made of three animals: a lion, a dragon and an elephant. It is intended to embody the powerful traits of all three animals. The round dome, representing the ceiling of the universe, is open to the portico below and probably contained a bell on a rope. The devotee would ring this bell as they began worship to call for the attention of the Tirthankara or Jina. Moving our eyes to the horizontal panel between the front pillars, we see the 14 Auspicious Dream Symbols. These symbols are seen in the dreams of the mother who will birth a Tirthankara. If you look above the double doors you will find the four-armed, seated goddess, Lakshmi, with her spirit helpers. She is the bringer of



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wealth, prosperity and pleasure. The four arms represent the four goals of human life: a moral life, ethical wealth, love, and self-knowledge used to attain liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Looking now at the base of the pillars, what more can we find? We see the door guardians, holding long rods or staffs, ready to protect the Tirthankara. Looking down to the center of the thick, floral carved base of the shrine, there is a drawer where items used in worship were kept.

Jainism is one of the oldest religions in the world. One of the most important tenets of Jainism is that of *Ahimsa*, or strict nonviolence to all living creatures. It is likely that Mahatma Gandhi drew some of his ideas from the Jain way of life.

Thank you for joining me in exploring this beautiful artwork. If you would like to learn more, this *Jain Shrine* can be found in our online tour, "What is a Masterpiece?" found on our website [daytonartinstitute.org](http://daytonartinstitute.org). You can also see it in-person at the museum in the Patterson-Kettering Wing of Asian Art, Gallery 115.

## END TRANSCRIPT

Click [here](#) to access the video presentation.

## ARTWORKS FEATURED IN VIDEO\*

Artist unidentified, *24 Tirthankaras*, about 1850, painting  
*Taranga Temple*, photographed by Kshitij Charania, 2017

*Vasai Jain Temple at Bhadreshwar, Kutch, Gujarat, India*, photographed by Nizil Shah, 2014

## IMAGE CREDITS\*

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## QUESTIONS?

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