

ASIAN ART COLLECTION

India, Mathura area

Vishnu as Vaikuntha

Late third–early fourth century

Pink Sikri sandstone

13 × 8 × 4 ³/₈ in. (33 × 20.3 × 11.1 cm)

Museum purchase, acquired with the generous support of Ed and Doris Wiener

S-82-1

Vishnu, the creator, preserver, and protector of the universe, embodies powers to ensure stability and order when followers face calamities. Rendered with vigor and fine attention to superb muscularity, the figure emerges assertively from the warm mottled sandstone. Although two of his upper hands are missing, the remaining two lower hands carry distinctive symbols: the discus and the mace. The heads emerging from Vishnu's shoulders are two of his avatars or incarnations, identified as Narasimha and Varaha. Narasimha is represented by the lion's head, Varaha by the boar's head.

This triune image thus depicts three figures in a single sculpture. It is one of the earliest known examples depicting Vishnu in one of his many guises. Here the central figure most probably can be identified as Vasudeva, an early form of Vishnu.

