



## Medicine Horn (Naga Marsarang)

**Date**  
early 20th Century

**Primary Maker**  
Batak

**Medium**  
Buffalo horn, wood, brass, and plant fiber

### Description

The Toba Batak people live in the northern mountainous highlands of Sumatra, one of the several islands that constitute Indonesia. A medicine horn (naga marsarang) such as the one pictured here would have belonged to a religious specialist who was able to communicate with the gods, conduct ceremonies, practice benevolent and malevolent magic, and provide assistance and advice in matters concerning daily life. The medicine horn functioned as a container for a highly potent substance considered magical and even deadly. The substance, called pupuk, was prepared, used, and handled only by Batak religious specialists. The carved container is a composite of buffalo horn and carved wood; these pieces are held together with two wooden pegs on opposite sides. Overall the medicine horn is incised with repeating bands of zig-zag lines and swirling patterns. The main body of the horn is carved in relief with elegant long lines terminating in round scalloped edges. The tip of the horn depicts a human form sitting atop a zoomorphic creature that has a curled tail and repeating triangular patterned skin; the horns of the creature are grasped tightly by the figure. The wood element of the medicine horn represents a singa, a mythological animal considered to have protective qualities and commonly incorporated into Toba house design and decorated objects of importance. Four human figures in kneeling position along the back of the singa’s neck hold each other around the waist; the front most figure holds the singa’s central and most prominent horn.

### Dimensions

12 1/2 × 2 1/4 × 21 in. (31.8 × 5.7 × 53.3 cm)