



Amulet Box (Gau or Gawu)

Date

19th to 20th Century

Medium

Brass, glass, and cotton

Description

This object is a Tibetan amulet box, called gau or gawu, which is commonly carried or worn around the neck by

Tibetan Buddhists. Gau tend to have glass windows of various sizes through which the central devotional objects can be seen. They usually contain votive figures called tsha-tsha or paintings of Buddhas, other protective deities, lamas, and teachers. In other cases, they instead contain handwritten prayers to address a specific issue of the amulet wearer, sacred cloth, or other artifacts from holy sites. They are often equated to mobile shrines and serve roughly the same function of symbolically protecting the wearer. Pilgrims wear these on long journeys, and people hoping to address a specific issue would usually wear a gau with a prayer prescribed by a lama in it. In many cases they are made of silver and decorated with coral and turquoise. The shape of many of these boxes is that of a single lotus petal which is symbolic of purity.

Dimensions

Box: 3 7/8 × 3 1/4 × 1 in. (9.8 × 8.3 × 2.5 cm) With Strap: 21 3/8 in. (54.3 cm)