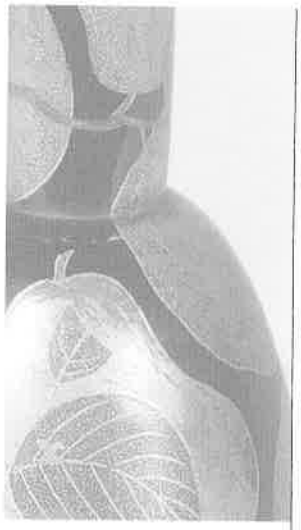

Hand Drum

17th century

Japan

(Momoyama Period, 1568–1615)

Kōdai-ji makie-e *lacquer*

Height 10 inches (25.4 cm)

This lavishly decorated carved wood object is a small hand drum that was used in Buddhist ceremonies and traditional Japanese theater. The lacquer artist created a bold design of pear leaves and fruit in varying shades of gold against a deep black background. The fruit and veins of the leaves are outlined in thin gold lines and filled in with a light dusting of gold powder called *makie-e* (ma-KI-ee), or "sprinkled picture." In some places, the powder is applied densely to give a deep gold color, and in other places more sparsely, showing a soft reddish glow. The designs crowd the surface of the drum, making it seem much larger than it actually is.

Originally, this drum had two circular drumheads made from horsehide pulled tightly against the ends by long cords. Players would hold the drum in their left hand with one end pressed against their right shoulder and strike the opposite end with their right hand. The horsehide drumheads and linen cords of this drum wore away long ago. The wooden drum itself has been protected from decay by its surface covering of lacquer, which was made from the sap of the Japanese *Rhus vernicifera* (lacquer) tree. Once refined to remove impurities, black color was added to the sap, and then it was applied to the wood surface in many thin layers. Just before the final layer was dry, the artist set in the gold decorations. Once dry, lacquer is resistant to water, insects, and other damaging effects, and gives the drum an elegant, shiny surface.

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