

# **The Art of South and Southeast Asia**

A Resource for  
Educators

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Written by Steven M. Kossak and Edith W. Watts

Edited by Steven M. Kossak

Editor: Philomena Mariani

Creative and Production Manager: Masha Turchinsky

Designer: Christine Hiebert

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Front cover: *Krishna Battling the Horse Demon Keshi*, India (Uttar Pradesh). Gupta period, 5th century. Terracotta. H. 21 in. (53.3 cm). Purchase, Florence and Herbert Irving Gift, 1991 (1991.300)

Back cover: *The Goddess Durga Killing the Buffalo Demon Mahisha (Mahishasuramardini)*, Bangladesh or India (West Bengal). Pala period, 12th century. Argillite. H. 5<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (13.5 cm). Purchase, Diana and Arthur G. Altschul Gift, 1993 (1993.7)

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# Foreword

South and Southeast Asia has been the seat of great civilizations from time immemorial. From the Himalayan mountains to the vast island chains of the equator, from the Indian subcontinent to the Pacific, the peoples of this region have produced magnificent art for thousands of years. As an encyclopedic museum celebrating the finest human achievement in the visual arts, The Metropolitan Museum of Art presents these masterworks in the Florence and Herbert Irving Galleries and in the Islamic Galleries. *The Art of South and Southeast Asia: A Resource for Educators* assembles comprehensive materials for teaching and learning in the form of texts, slides, posters, and a CD-ROM. Included are examples of Buddhist and Hindu sculpture in stone and bronze, later Indian court art, miniature painting, and elegant personal possessions. These artworks demonstrate that the people who created and owned them keenly appreciated the things of this world—the luxury and fine craftsmanship that power can command—and at the same time probed deeply into spiritual and cosmic matters of great complexity.

This resource for educators contains both a summary of the history of South and Southeast Asia and background information about the major religions of the area—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam. You will also find descriptions of the style, function, and meaning of the art, and classroom activities that lead to art-making and writing projects. The suggested discussion points will help students understand what art reveals about South and Southeast Asian civilizations. Teachers and students can use these materials in the classroom, but we know that study and preparation are best rewarded by a visit to the Metropolitan Museum, or to another museum in your area.

We are fortunate indeed that these educational materials were made possible by The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Foundation. Their generosity underscores their high commitment to Asian art, to students, and to teachers. We are deeply grateful for their support.

Philippe de Montebello  
*Director*

Kent Lydecker  
*Associate Director for Education*

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Because works of South and Southeast Asian Art are represented in the collections of three other curatorial areas, the involvement of those departments was very important. Daniel Walker, Patti Cadby Birch Curator, Department of Islamic Art, gave generously of his time and knowledge, as did Stuart W. Pyhrr, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Curator in Charge, and Robert M. Carroll, armorer, both of the Department of Arms and Armor, and J. Kenneth Moore, Frederick P. Rose Curator in Charge of the Department of Musical Instruments.

Colleagues in Education were instrumental in the development of this project. We especially acknowledge the dedicated efforts of Edie Watts, whose many years of experience proved invaluable in making this resource. We are grateful to Christopher Noey, who at the very beginning of the project helped Edie clarify her ideas. Elizabeth Hammer-Munemura was a constant supporter, and Rebecca Arkenberg enthusiastically provided suggestions for the class activities and discussions section and wrote the lesson plan. Vivian Wick was responsible for the videography. Paul Caro and Vincent Falivene prepared the CD-ROM. Merantine Hens helped guide the text through its final stages. Throughout the process of putting the materials into a coherent and attractive format we relied on the good eye and common sense of Masha Turchinsky.

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Kent Lydecker

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# How to Use These Materials

South Asia encompasses the modern nations of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The subcontinent was the source of a great civilization which spread to Afghanistan in the northwest, to the Himalayan region (modern Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet) in the northeast, and eastward to Southeast Asia, a vast area that includes Burma (now called Myanmar), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia.

This study focuses on and introduces works of art selected from the rich South and Southeast Asian collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Art is vital to understanding India's ancient, complex, and enduring civilization which for more than four thousand years has embraced change without losing identity. Through the arts one can trace the development of India's great belief systems, Buddhism and Hinduism, and their spread to Sri Lanka, the Himalayan regions, and mainland and island Southeast Asia.

Educators may adapt this resource for students of all ages, interests, and abilities. It contains a wealth of visual and written material to enrich art, social studies, and language arts curricula, and to make interdisciplinary connections. Mathematics classes can focus on the canons of proportion in the sculpture and the geometric order in Islamic design. Science students can increase their observation skills noting the metaphors and symbols in the arts that reflect the environment and worldviews of South and Southeast Asian peoples.

## Goals for Students

- To understand that the arts of South and Southeast Asia are conceptual. They express ideas and beliefs about:
  - divine forces that control the universe
  - moral behavior
  - the search for spiritual peace
  - cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation
  - respect for all living beings
  - glorifying gods, kings, and emperors
- To discover that these ideas were communicated through a visual language of symbols and artistic conventions understood by people living in the time the art was made.
- To realize how important art is as a primary source for understanding civilizations.
- To become comfortable talking about art. As students describe what they see and share interpretations about the meaning of artworks, they will develop language and critical thinking skills.
- To understand that in a successful work of art, the content, form (i.e., line, color, shape, and arrangement), and materials together reinforce meaning and function. For example, finely crafted, luxurious materials with an emphasis on finish, detail, color, and pattern are ideal vehicles for praising a ruler's power, wealth, and elegant taste. Divine power and spiritual perfec-

tion are effectively expressed in idealized human bodies with serene facial expressions. Harmonious and balanced poses reinforce the idea of transcendent wisdom. To suggest divine energy, some deities are shown in active poses with fierce expressions.

- To understand that notions of the ideal human form differ from culture to culture.

### **Procedures for the Teacher**

Review the table of contents and leaf through the materials to gain an overview. The historical summary and timeline contained in section II, and contextual materials on the art of South and Southeast Asia in section III provide the background information necessary to help your students describe, interpret, and enjoy the art.

Section IV, "The Visual Materials," includes descriptions for the fifty-three works of art referenced in this resource, along with suggestions for looking at, discussing, and comparing the images. References to artworks in the text (i.e., "image 1") correspond to the numbered entries in the visual materials section. Digital images of all the artworks are provided on the accompanying CD-ROM, and forty are included here in slide format. The works of art can be located in the slide packet or on the CD-ROM by the number assigned to each in the visual materials section. Themes for linking the visual materials are listed on pages 50–51.

This resource is designed to be flexible. Depending on the age and interests of the class, and the time available, you may use all or only parts of the suggested discussion and activities.

### **For Groups Planning to Visit The Metropolitan Museum of Art**

The South and Southeast Asian galleries are located on the second floor and east mezzanine of the north wing, **with one exception**: the arts of Mughal India are in the Islamic galleries on the second floor of the south wing. Because of their sensitivity to light, the textiles and miniature paintings on view are rotated three or four times a year with similar works of art from the collections.

A few works of art from the Indus Valley civilization are displayed in the Ancient Near East galleries on the second floor in the south wing as well as in the South Asian galleries.

Examples of India's armor and hunting weapons are displayed in the Arms and Armor galleries on the first floor. A gallery of Indian and Southeast Asian musical instruments is located directly above the armor collection on the second floor.