



CASVA

Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts

Mellon Anniversaries: 75, 65, 35

On the first Sunday in April 2016, shortly after the seventy-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Gallery, Vidya Dehejia, the Barbara Stoler Miller Professor of Indian and South Asian Art at Columbia University, will inaugurate the sixty-fifth A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts (fig. 1). Named in honor of the Gallery's founder, the ambitious program for the lectures was conceived and initiated by Andrew Mellon's son, Paul, who was supported in this effort by a remarkable group of advisors, including his first wife, Mary Conover Mellon, and the Gallery's first director, David Finley. When President Roosevelt first opened the doors of the Gallery, the institution was full of great promise, but not yet complete. In addition to preserving, collecting, and exhibiting of works of art, its mission included a serious commitment to fostering an understanding of those works through original research and to developing the enjoyment of art among the widest possible public. Indeed, the Gallery sought to be a leader in this field.

One key step in this new endeavor was the establishment of the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts on December 6, 1949, when the Board of Trustees accepted the proposal from Donald D. Shepherd, then vice-president of the Old Dominion Foundation and co-trustee of the Avalon Foundation (the creations of Paul Mellon and his sister, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, in 1941 and 1940, respectively, which would merge to form the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 1969). The original plan was for a trial period of five years, and the firmly stated intention was “to



Fig. 1. Vidya Dehejia, Barbara Stoler Miller Professor of Indian and South Asian Art, Columbia University, Photo by Ela Wolska-Wojda

bring to the people of the United States the results of the best contemporary thought and scholarship bearing upon the subject of the Fine Arts.”

Paul Mellon and Huntington Cairns—then secretary, treasurer, and general counsel of the Gallery—had been thinking of such a series for a while. Their plans developed very much in connection with the creation of the Bollingen Foundation by Paul and Mary Mellon in 1942 and its mission, inspired by the Mellons' serious interest in the ideas and writing of Carl Jung, “to stimulate, encourage, and develop scholarship and research in the liberal arts and sciences and other fields of cultural endeavor generally.” Eager to establish the lectures before any other

institution picked up the idea, Cairns worked closely with Paul Sachs, known for his museum studies course at the Fogg Art Museum, to develop a roster of appropriate speakers.

The A. W. Mellon Lectures were inaugurated in 1952, with the series *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* presented by the French Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), and the text was published the following year. From the beginning, it was determined that the volumes would appear in the Bollingen Series, with special attention paid to design and layout. In the postwar decades the illustrated book was, like the illustrated public lecture, still a rarity. After Paul Mellon decided to conclude the Bollingen Series in 1969, responsibility for publication of the remaining volumes, including the Mellon Lectures (continuing under number xxxv), was entrusted to Princeton University Press.

Vidya Dehejia's lectures will be the first to concentrate on Indian art. Her subject, however, fits perfectly into the Bollingen philosophy embraced by Paul and Mary Mellon. In 1939, at the Eranos conference in Switzerland on the “Symbolism of Rebirth,” the Mellons became friends with the German refugee scholar Heinrich Zimmer, who would eventually lecture on the art of India, Indian philosophy, and myth and symbol in Indian art and culture at Columbia University. Upon Zimmer's death in 1943, Mary Mellon arranged for the publication of writings by this brilliant scholar, edited for Bollingen by Joseph Campbell, and she paid for the education of Zimmer's children. The Bollingen Foundation also gave funds to the University of

Pennsylvania in 1950 to bring art historian Stella Kramrisch from India to teach and research. She remained in Philadelphia for the rest of her life, exerting an enormous influence on the study and curating of Indian art.

In the specific context of the Mellon lectures, when Paul Sachs and Huntington Cairns made lists of possible speakers in 1945, Sachs most definitely wanted the arts of Asia to be included. His list included A. K. Coomaraswamy and Ludwig Bachhofer to speak on India. But in the end, the first five lecturers, Jacques Maritain, Kenneth Clark, Herbert Read, Etienne Gilson, and E. H. Gombrich, all represented Western traditions and favored a philosophical approach. Commenting on Gilson's lectures, the poet Anthony Hecht, who gave the lectures himself in 1995, noted that resistance to coming to terms with works of art directly, to responding to the questions they ask rather than imposing a theory upon them, is not a recent phenomenon.

Born in India and educated both there and in Cambridge, England, Professor Dehejia brings some thirty-five years of teaching experience in the United States to the field. Her deep knowledge of the techniques of production and the purposes of sculpture is enhanced by her interest in gender and colonialism. Between 1994 and 2002 she served as curator, chief curator, associate director, deputy director, and acting director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries of the Smithsonian Institution. Unimaginable in 1949, especially in the field of Indian art, her career marks the fruition of investments made by Paul and Mary Mellon in the study of world art, its

meaning, and its function, during the Bollingen years. Professor Dehejia writes that the Zimmer-Campbell volumes on India were "career changers" for her, providing extraordinary insight at a time when "scarcely any university had the art of India on its radar." Contemplating her own series, she adds that the other two books that mesmerized her were E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* and Kenneth Clark's *The Nude*, both Mellon Lecture volumes.

Professor Dehejia's lectures are entitled *The Thief Who Stole My Heart: The Material Life of Sacred Bronzes in Chola India, c. 850–1280*. Among the bronzes she will discuss is the figure of *Queen Sembian Mahadevi as the Goddess Parvati* (fig. 2), one of the treasures of the Freer and Sackler Galleries. This masterpiece, together with a flanking pair of Shiva figures, will be on special view at the Freer and Sackler Galleries during the lectures. There can be no better way to celebrate CASVA's own thirty-fifth anniversary. • Elizabeth Cropper, *Dean, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts*

Fig. 2. *Queen Sembian Mahadevi as the Goddess Parvati*, 10th century, bronze, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase F1929.84

