

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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PRESS PREVIEW:  
April 30, 1985  
10am-3pm, East Building

## ADVANCE FACT SHEET

Exhibition: The Sculpture of India  
3000 B.C. - 1300 A.D.

Dates: May 3, 1985 - September 2, 1985

Location: East Building

Scope: This exhibition brings together approximately 110 objects which convey a sense of Indian sculpture as a whole and shows the rich diversity of styles that flourished in the ancient regions of India. It is the first time many of the sculptures have been outside of India. Executed in stone, ivory, and bronze, they range in size from the miniature to the colossal. This represents the first time such an ambitious survey of the old master achievement of Indian sculpture will have been in the United States. It is the most important exhibition of the sculpture of India since the Burlington House show in London in 1947-1948, commemorating India's independence from Britain.

Background: This exhibition inaugurates the Festival of India, a year-long, nationwide celebration of Indian culture, music, dance, science, art, and history. During her official visit to the United States in 1982, the late Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and President Ronald Reagan designated 1984-1985 as a time for cultural, scientific, and educational exchanges between their two countries. The exchange began in India in 1984 when major programs on American educational and cultural activities were sponsored by several cities. In 1985-1986, American universities, schools, theaters and museums across the United States will participate. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and First Lady Nancy Reagan are honorary patrons of the Festival of India.

India's links with the West are ancient---much of the country's heritage and many of her languages are Indo-European. India's material and intellectual wealth helped to fertilize Western civilization. She is the cradle of two of Asia's greatest religions, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Funding: This exhibition has been supported by grants from The Boeing Company, The Coca-Cola Foundation, The General Foods Fund, ITT Corporation, The Lockheed Corporation, Roland International Corporation, and Varian Associates. Air India will provide transportation for the

objects. The Government of India will indemnify the objects on loan to the exhibition.

Catalogue: The National Gallery of Art is publishing a fully illustrated exhibition catalogue written by Pramod Chandra, The George P. Bickford Professor of Indian Art, Harvard University. Professor Chandra is the guest curator of the exhibition. Daniel Ehnbon, historian of Indian Art, is also contributing to the catalogue.

Lenders: While the majority of the objects is being loaned by Indian federal, state, and private museums, works are also coming from British, European and American museums: Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Museum für Indische Kunst, West Berlin; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Asia Society, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; The Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City; Cleveland Museum of Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Seattle Art Museum.

Itinerary: After its Washington showing, the exhibition will be on view at The Art Institute of Chicago from October 19, 1985 through January 5, 1986.

Installation: It is now believed that the individual traditions of an area---rather than religious sects or political dynasties as earlier presumed---had the greatest impact in determining the character of a work of Indian art. The exhibition and catalogue are divided into six categories to show the regional stylistic development of Indian sculpture. A large number of pieces dates from the seventh century onward, a period loosely termed medieval, whose traditions continue in parts of India to the present day.

#### Chronology and Some Significant Works

##### Protohistoric Period (ca. 3000-1500 B.C.)

Many of the earliest pieces come from sites of the Harappan culture located in the Indus River Valley where archaeologists found a well-planned system of streets and houses. Excavation of this area was begun in the 1920s with the most recent discoveries in 1974. Over the years, the immediate site has been extended well beyond the Indus valley proper to include the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, and places as far afield as Alamgirpur, in the vicinity of Delhi, and Daimabad, some eighty miles from Bombay.

Included from this period are three seals, one to two inches square, inscribed with animal motifs indicative of the Indian artist's interest in depicting nature. Of the approximately two thousand extant seals, these three are exceptional for their miniature size, motif, and quality. Another significant sculpture is a miniature bronze Chariot (c. 2000-1500 B.C.) driven by a bronze charioteer and drawn by oxen. It was cast in the lost wax technique, the use of a wax model to form a mold into which molten metal was poured, and is a rendering in bronze after a wooden original.

### Third Century B.C.

There is much speculation about the circumstances which brought about the end of the Harappan civilization which was succeeded by a number of essentially rural cultures. The third century represents an age of great social and cultural ferment which witnessed the rise of Buddhism. Political struggles among city-states finally led to the establishment of the great Maurya empire (c. 321-185 B.C.) which encompassed almost all of the subcontinent.

A very important sculpture from this period, the Didarganj Yakshi, (probably third century B.C., Patna Museum, Patna), is a life-size sculpture of a Yakshi or fertility goddess which was accidentally discovered protruding from the banks of the Ganges River near Patna during a flood in 1917. Executed in sandstone, this object is extremely rare and is one of the few large female figures from the third century B.C. When it was first found, it was placed in a shrine. It is one of the earliest visual statements of the Indian ideal of female beauty---wide hips and full breasts---characteristics which find constant expression throughout Indian art and literature.

### Second through the First Century B.C.

The stupa, a spherical mound containing relics, was the primary monument of Buddhism. Many stupas were enclosed by a circular railing which demarcated sacred space. This period is best represented by a section of the railing from the famous Stupa of Bharhut. On view is part of the railing containing a Yakshi, or fertility goddess. This figure stands on a creature with a crocodile head and a fish tail, and is surrounded by lotus and flowers overflowing from a jar of water. They represent the water cosmology---the belief that all creation arises from water---symbolism found frequently in Indian art.

Other sculpture from this period includes a dwarf Yaksa from a cave in western India at Maharashtra, an area famous for its cave architecture. The sculpture is carved in the round and bears a happy grin. It is perhaps the first time in Indian art that an attempt is made to endow an image with vivid emotional expression. The sculpture's right hand is inscribed with the artist's name, which was a very rare practice.

### First through the Third Century A.D.

In North India the school of art centered at Mathura, an ancient city about eighty miles south of Delhi, was responsible for the greatest development during this period. Female figures appear to be more unified and coordinated. They are more humanized and emotions are no longer confined to the face but expressed by the entire body. For the first time the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha appears, an image adapted from the Yaksa divested of its adornments and presented now in simple monastic robes. Images of Hindu divinities, some with multiple arms, typical of later periods, are also found at Mathura from about the second century A.D. The humanistic strain in Mathura sculpture seems to have produced more portrait sculpture than was usually the case in any given period of Indian art.

Contemporary with the school of Mathura was the Gandhara school (in an area which is present-day Pakistan), whose naturalistic style is unlike any other. Inspired by Greco-Roman art, the Gandhara artist portrays the images of Buddha in far more humanistic, emotional terms.

#### Fourth through the Sixth Century A.D.

Considered to be the classical phase of Indian art, the works of this period focus on the inner realm of the spirit, adopting that contemplative and spiritual aspect with which Indian art is most frequently associated. The period from the fourth to the sixth century marks a clear watershed in the history of Indian sculpture, separating dramatically what has gone before from what was to come afterward, and represents one of those "golden ages" that appears in each of the great world art traditions. The rise of the Gupta dynasty in North India coincides with the dramatic transformation from the earthy, extroverted forms of early Indian sculpture to forms which are expressive of a meditative, inward spirituality.

A Standing Buddha (North India; Gupta period sixth to seventh century, The Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection) ranks among the great art treasures of the world and embodies the hallmarks of the classical Gupta style: a stable, harmonious composition based on geometric designs, a balance between decorated and plain surfaces, and areas of light and shadow all of which impart a rhythmic vitality.

#### Seventh Century Onward

The seventh century onward is often referred to as the medieval period. Regional idioms flourish and a more ornate style emerges as seen in numerous highly decorative sculptures created to adorn stone temples. This stylistic development progresses into the tenth century with forms that are tighter, flatter, and more angular. Ornamentation becomes increasingly insistent. This stylistic development culminates in the eleventh century when geometric elements take precedence over sculptural ones and ornamentation overpowers form.

Many of the most beautiful extant bronze sculptures are from South India. However, works in bronze also enjoyed a long history in North India. Beginning with the Harappan culture, artists employed the lost wax technique. The earliest cast sculpture comes from the Harappan culture with little surviving from the interim periods until the fifth and sixth centuries. The ninth century marks the high point of achievement which is represented by two works of great beauty in the exhibition: Avalokitesvara (c. mid-ninth century, Patna Museum, Patna), a four-armed Buddhist divinity, and Tara (c. mid-ninth century, Patna Museum, Patna), considered to be one of the finest sculptures from the 1930 discovery in Kurkihar, the site of an ancient Buddhist monastery.

January 22, 1985

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Amiot, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 (202) 842-6353.