

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

FOURTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215/842-6353

PRESS PREVIEW:

May 4, 1985

10am-1pm, East Building

THE SCULPTURE OF INDIA 3000 B.C. - 1300 A.D.
MARKS BEGINNING OF FESTIVAL OF INDIA 1985-1986

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 16, 1985. The Sculpture of India 3000 B.C. - 1300 A.D. presents for the first time in the United States a survey of the achievement of Indian sculpture on both a miniature and monumental scale. To mark the beginning of the "Festival of India"---a series of artistic events in 1985-1986 illuminating the history and culture of India---more than one hundred objects executed in stone, ivory, and bronze go on view in the National Gallery of Art's East Building from May 5 through September 2, 1985. Many of the pieces have never been outside India, and some have not been exhibited publicly even there.

During her official visit to the United States in 1982, the late Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, and President Ronald Reagan designated this year as a time for cultural, scientific, and educational exchanges between their two countries. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and First Lady Nancy Reagan are honorary patrons of the Festival of India.

Air India is providing international transportation. This exhibition received the support of the Hinduja Foundation courtesy of S. P. and G. P. Hinduja. Further support was generously made available by the following: The Boeing Company, The Coca-Cola Foundation, The General Foods Fund, ITT Corporation, The Lockheed Corporation, Roland International Corporation, Varian Associates, and Wyeth Laboratories. The Government of India is indemnifying the objects on loan to the exhibition.

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The National Gallery of Art is publishing a fully illustrated exhibition catalogue written by Pramod Chandra, The George P. Bickford Professor of Indian and South Asian Art, Harvard University. Professor Chandra is the guest curator of the exhibition. Daniel Ehnbon, an historian of Indian art, is helping to coordinate educational and interpretive aspects of the exhibition.

The earliest objects belong to the so-called Protohistoric Period (c. 3000-1500 B.C.) and are from the sites of the Harappan culture. Included from this period is a miniature bronze Chariot (c. 2000-1500 B.C.) driven by a bronze charioteer and drawn by oxen. Also significant are several seals, one to two inches square; of the approximately two thousand extant seals, these are exceptional for their motifs and quality.

There is much speculation about the circumstances that brought about the end of the Harappan civilization, which was succeeded by a number of essentially rural cultures. The Third Century B.C. represents an age of great social and cultural ferment, during which Buddhism rose to great prominence. Political struggles among city-states had led finally to the establishment of the great Maurya empire (c. 321-185 B.C.) which encompassed almost all of the subcontinent. A very rare sculpture from this period is the Didarganj Yakshi (probably third century B.C., Patna Museum, Patna). A life-size sculpture of a Yakshi, or fertility goddess, it is one of the earliest visual statements of the Indian ideal of female beauty.

On view from the next period of Indian art, which extends roughly over the first two centuries B.C., is A Dwarf Yaksa by the artist Kanhadasa (National Museum, New Delhi). Kanhadasa gave the figure a happy grin, making this perhaps the first time an Indian artist endowed an image with vivid emotional expression. The artist also inscribed his name on the sculpture, which was a very rare practice.

The greatest development during the First through the Third Century A.D. took place in north India at Mathura, an ancient city about eighty miles south of Delhi. The female figures of this period appear to be more unified, and coordinated, with emotions no longer confined to the face but expressed by the entire body. This more humanized style obscures the symbolism of the works, making it difficult to determine if they are sacred or secular representations. It was during this period that the Buddha was first depicted in human form. Previously, such symbols as a tree, an altar, a pair of foot prints, or a stupa symbolized the Buddha.

The Fourth through the Sixth Centuries A.D. marks the rise of what is often called the classical phase. 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.

The Seventh Century onward is often referred to as the medieval period. Regional idioms flourished and a more ornate style emerged as seen in numerous highly decorative sculptures created to adorn stone temples. This stylistic development progressed into the tenth century with forms that were tighter, flatter, and more angular. Ornamentation became increasingly ornate. This stylistic development culminates in the eleventh century, when geometric elements took precedence over sculptural ones and ornamentation overpowered form.

Bronzes from south India represent the artistic genius of the country. Included in the exhibition are nine magnificent examples from the south dating from the late Ninth through the Fourteenth Centuries A.D. Of the surviving works, many of the best have come to light only recently. Most of these bronzes are graceful depictions of deities and saints. The very

smooth surfaces of these figures are adorned with simple jewelry and clothing that enhance the flowing motion of the body. One exceptional example is Siva (1011-12 A.D., Thanjavur Art Gallery, Thanjavur) whose body bends in a sinuous curve, hip outthrust, feet crossed, and left hand resting at the thigh. Siva wears a short lower garment secured by a richly carved belt, and traditional necklaces, bracelets and earrings. A most unusual feature is Siva's hair consisting of wavy locks wound around the head in the shape of a flat turban.

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.

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.

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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.

In conjunction with Sculpture of India 3000 B.C. - 1300 A.D., the National Gallery of Art will present a film series by the internationally acclaimed filmmakers, James Ivory, director; Ismail Merchant, producer; and Ruth Praver Jhabvala, who has adapted many of her compelling novels about life in India for Merchant-Ivory screenplays. The retrospective provides vivid and often humorous insights into modern India. The films will be shown in the East Building auditorium as listed.

The Householder

Saturday, June 1 2:30pm

Sunday, June 2 6:00pm

Shakespeare Wallah

Saturday, June 8 2:30pm

Sunday, June 9 6:00pm

Autobiography of a Princess and

Mahatma and the Mad Boy

Saturday, June 15 2:30pm

Sunday, June 16 6:00pm

Hullabaloo Over Georgie and

Bonnie's Pictures

Saturday, June 22 2:30pm

Sunday, June 23 6:00pm

The Delhi Way and

The Sword and the Flute

Thursday, June 27 12:30pm

through Saturday, June 29 12:30pm

The Courtesans of Bombay and

Helen, Queen of the Nautch Girls

Saturday, June 29 2:30pm

Sunday, June 30 6:00pm

Heat and Dust

Saturday, July 6 2:30pm

Sunday, July 7 6:00pm