

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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INDONESIAN SCULPTURE AT NATIONAL GALLERY

EXHIBITION IS FIRST IN NATIONWIDE FESTIVAL OF INDONESIA

Washington, D.C., May 14, 1990 -- The first major exhibition of ancient Indonesian art to be assembled in the United States from sources around the world will open in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art on July 1, 1990. The Sculpture of Indonesia, presenting more than 135 objects of the highest quality on loan from collections in Indonesia, Europe, and the United States, will be the first exhibition in the Festival of Indonesia, an eighteen-month nationwide celebration of Indonesian culture.

The exhibition is made possible by a grant from Mobil Corporation. Transportation between Indonesia and the United States has been provided by Garuda Indonesian Airways.

Buddhist and Hindu life-size stone sculpture, bronzes, delicate figural objects made of gold and silver, and ceremonial objects dating from the classical period of Indonesian art (the eighth through the fifteenth centuries) are the primary objects in the show. There are also four outstanding pieces dating from the Bronze Age. Some works, including a pair of small gold figures holding hands, have been recently discovered.

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"This remarkable group of important sculpture, ranging widely in size, material, and function, illustrates the breadth of Indonesian classical art to a degree never before seen by the American public," said Gallery director J. Carter Brown. "We are delighted that the Festival of Indonesia will open officially here in Washington in September during the showing of this unprecedented exhibition of Indonesian art from collections in many countries."

Mobil chairman and chief executive officer, Allen E. Murray said, "Mobil is pleased to be associated with this excellent exhibition, which brings to the United States some of the finest art from one of the richest cultural heritages in the world. Indonesia has much to be proud of in its long and varied history of artistic accomplishment and we are proud to be able to share these sculptures with the American public."

The Sculpture of Indonesia will include one of the 504 life-size Buddhas originally made for the world-famous monument, Borobudur, the largest Buddhist temple ever built. Perhaps the most intensive building campaign in the history of the ancient world took place between 730 and 930 A.D., when the people of central Java built three large temples and hundreds of smaller Buddhist and Hindu temples of local volcanic stone. The central Javanese temple sites were abandoned by the mid-tenth century, and kingdoms similarly distinguished by fine temple architecture arose in eastern Java. Adorned with carved relief scenes illustrating traditional epics such as the Hindu Ramayana and with sculpture in the round, the Javanese temples were showcases for sculpture as well as great architectural accomplishments.

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The greatest treasure in The Sculpture of Indonesia is a superbly carved and perfectly preserved thirteenth-century portrait sculpture of the Goddess of Transcendental Wisdom, thought to be the first queen of the Eastern Javanese dynasty of Singasari. Taken to the Netherlands in 1820, this sculpture was returned to Indonesia in 1978 and placed in the Museum Nasional in Jakarta from which it will be loaned for the first time in this exhibition.

A unique ninth-century bronze with precious metal inlay will also be in the show. The eyes of the four-armed deity Siva, including the third eye of the forehead, are inlaid in silver, while the lower lip is inlaid in gold. Found in a river, the piece displays fine workmanship and especially detailed execution of the figure's jewelry and hands.

Eighteen tenth-century statuettes from a Buddhist mandala found in 1977 in a buried earthenware jar are the smallest objects in the exhibition and some of the most interesting. Between two and four inches tall, the figures are cast in fine detail. Several, playing the flute or drums, represent goddesses of music. Another of the tiny figures represents the Goddess of Exuberant Dance. She balances delicately on one deeply bent leg and raises the other foot high.

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The guest curator for The Sculpture of Indonesia is Jan Fontein, former director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and currently its Matsutaro Shoriki curator for research in the Department of Asiatic Art. On view at the National Gallery through November 4, the show will travel to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, December 9, 1990 through March 17, 1991; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, April 21 through August 18, 1991; and the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, September 28, 1991 through January 5, 1992. The Sculpture of Indonesia is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The sumptuous scholarly catalogue for the exhibition will contain essays by Fontein and Indonesian scholars Mr. R. Soekmono and Ms. Edi Sedyawati, full entries on each object, and color photographs and duotones of sculpture and monument sites. The softcover edition is published by the National Gallery of Art. The clothbound edition is published and distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York.

The National Gallery is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. and on Sundays from 11:00 a.m. through 6:00 p.m.

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