

South and Southeast Asia Art Cart

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Art Cart Inventory

To come

Pronunciation Guides

Indian words and names pronunciation guide:

<https://geekmom.com/2016/06/pronounce-indian-names/>

Pronouncing Sanskrit guide (vowels and consonants): <http://www.visiblemantra.org/pronunciation.html>

Art Cart Interpreters

The lead guide for each Art Cart shift should inventory the contents of the cart before and after the shift. If this is not done and objects are missing or damaged, the lead guide may be held responsible. (The lead guide is the first guide listed on the tour confirmation form.)

As the Japan Art Cart has two themes, assigned partners together determine which of the two themes to present, the Tea Ceremony or Japanese Painting - Nihonga. Guides only need to inventory the materials used on the theme presented. Note: Neri-ko (incense) can be used for either theme and is listed on both inventory sheets.

If an object is missing or damaged, make a notation on the inventory and report it to the Tour Office.

If an object is suddenly missing during your shift, notify security immediately by alerting the guard in the gallery or by calling x3225.

Check to see if you are low on any supplies (paper, pencils, etc.). Let the Tour office know if you need anything replenished.

Please share! Record visitor questions that “stumped” you and comments or observations you would like to share with fellow guides and staff. If you know the answer to someone's question, please record the answer! Staff will also periodically review questions and try to assist with finding answers.

INTRODUCTION

Mia's Art Carts are hands-on gallery stations outfitted with art objects, props and visual aids related to the museum's permanent collection.

Staffed by Interpretation and Participatory Experiences (IPE) volunteers, Art Carts provide visitors with a unique art museum experience where "Do touch!" is the rule.

Guides use the objects on the Art Carts as tools for facilitating learning experiences that encourage careful looking, thoughtful conversation, critical thinking skills, and further exploration of Mia's permanent collections. And, they are lots of fun for all ages!

Art Cart Goals

The goal of each Art Cart experience is to provide a multi-sensory interaction with art objects during which guides help visitors deepen their interest in and experience with the museum's permanent collection. Each object on the Art Cart is thoughtfully selected for its connections to the collection and its ability to engage the senses and inspire questions and observations. Although there are limitless possibilities for each Art Cart, we are constrained by several factors including cost, availability, durability/fragility, and safety and security of art and visitors in the galleries (i.e. most paint/ink are not allowed, nor are sharp objects).

Each cart also has a general theme or focus to tie the selected objects together (e.g. Africa – pattern and decoration of everyday objects; China – artist as master craftsperson; Americas – adornment /dress, environment; Japan – tea ceremony; South and Southeast Asia – symbolism; Modern – how artists at the turn of the century challenged conventional modes of artistic expression.

Best Practices

A successful Art Cart-visitor interaction

- Sparks curiosity and inspires exploration in visitors of all ages.
- Involves the visitor in conversation about the objects on the Art Cart.
- Allows the visitor to direct the discussion/discovery and explore those things of interest to the individual.

South and Southeast Asia Art Cart

- Provides opportunities for visitors to handle art objects with care and to learn about the museum's role in collecting, preserving, and making accessible outstanding works of art from the world's diverse cultures.
- Stimulates as many of the five senses as possible/practical.
- Encourages visitor exploration in the surrounding galleries to seek out related objects (ideas provided in the "Collection Connections" section of each Art Cart object entry).

Each docent or guide is expected to

- Study the written Art Cart materials before each shift and be prepared to discuss all objects on the Art Cart.
- Arrive on time (20 minutes before the shift begins) and insure the cart is ready for visitors at the appointed time.
- Exhibit an outgoing, friendly and welcoming attitude while staffing the Art Cart.
- Be proactive and invite visitors to explore the Art Cart.
- Engage visitors in open-ended discussions about Art Cart objects rather than lecturing to them.
- Stress the fragility and authenticity of objects, where appropriate.
- Assist visitors in establishing connections between the objects on the Art Cart and the permanent collection.

Policies and Procedures

Refer to the Handbook for Collection in Focus Guides for detailed information concerning Art Cart assignments, arrival times, and responsibilities. Docents received this information as a handout during Art Cart training.

Object Storage, Handling and Security

Each Art Cart includes items that can be divided into two main categories:

1. Art objects
2. Props, visual aids and general supplies

The art objects themselves are the main focus of each Art Cart. They are generally the most fragile, costly and difficult to replace items. To protect these objects, each is assigned a designated storage container or space, usually on the top shelf of the cart. It is essential each object is returned to its appropriate storage place at the end of each Art Cart shift.

The props, visual aids and other supplies are intended to support the art objects on each Art Cart, helping volunteers and visitors to understand or explore certain aspects of the art objects. These ancillary items are usually more easily replaced or repaired than the art objects themselves.



South and Southeast Asia Art Cart

All items (art objects and supporting materials) must stay on or near the Art Cart at all times. Visitors and volunteers are not allowed to walk away from the Art Cart with objects and props. (Art Cart items are not to be used as tour props.) It is imperative that one docent or guide on duty is present at the Art Cart at all times to assist visitors in carefully handling the objects to insure object and visitor safety.

Should a visitor intentionally or unintentionally leave the Art Cart with art objects, props, or visual aids and the volunteers on duty are unable to recover these items from the visitor themselves, security should be notified immediately. (Locate the nearest guard or call Security Control via a gallery phone at x3225.)

Bringing Personal Objects

Guides must refrain from bringing personal items from home to use on the Art Carts. All objects used on the carts a) must be vetted by Museum Guide Programs staff to insure they are appropriate for the Art Cart and b) need to remain on the cart/in the museum, so that Security is not put in the position of having to judge whether or not items are guides' personal property or the museum's property. Additionally, the museum cannot assume responsibility for the loss or damage of guides' personal property.

IPE is happy to consider your suggestions for possible additions to any of the Art Carts.

Bringing Guests or Family Members

Guides must refrain from bringing guests or family members to their assigned Art Cart shift without prior approval of the IPE Staff. This is your time to share your knowledge and interact with visitors.

Art Cart Inventory

Each Art Cart is connected to an online inventory sheet, listing each of the art objects on the cart. (Not all supporting props, visual aids and general supplies are listed on the inventory.) To access the South and Southeast Asia Art Cart inventory, click on [this link](#).

A thorough inventory of the Art Cart should be conducted at the end of each shift.

At the end of each shift, any damaged or missing objects and/or depleted supplies should be recorded on the inventory and reported to a staff member in the Tour Office.

There is also space on the back of each day's inventory sheet to record any questions, comments or suggestions docents, guides or museum visitors may have about the Art Cart. Please take a moment to share your experience with fellow volunteers and staff!

GANESHA



What Is It?

This is a wood sculpture of Ganesha, one of the most popular and important gods in the Hindu pantheon. Ganesha is recognized easily by his elephant head.

Who Is Ganesha?

Ganesha is revered as the Lord of Beginnings, and beloved as the destroyer of evils and obstacles in the way of good opportunities and successful endeavors. As the Patron of Letters, his protection also is invoked when starting any writing activity, and he is venerated for his intellect, education, knowledge and wisdom. His disposition is gentle, affectionate and cheerful.

Who Worships Ganesha?

Worshippers of Ganesha are known as ganapatyas. They regard Ganesha as playing a major role in the physical world and spiritual realm where he is the pre-eminent deity who is a form of Brahma the Creator. For ganapatyas, Ganesha expresses the foremost universal principle conceptualized by Brahma.

Hindu literature links Ganesha to all the major deities of the Hindu pantheon. He is viewed as an incarnation of Brahma, the first figure of the Hindu trimurti (tree- moor-tee) or trinity, but who does not directly have a significant organized devotional following of his own. Thus, Ganesha is a non-sectarian god in the Hindu religious tradition. Because of his connection with Brahma, Ganesha also is venerated by some Buddhists and Jains.

Historically, Ganesha has been venerated at different times under various names wherever the influence of Indian religions has spread, particularly Southeast Asia, the Himalayas, China and Japan. Today, he is venerated by Hindus not only in India, but around the world wherever Hindus have settled, including the United States.

Who Is Ganesha's Family?

Ganesha's mother is Parvati, whose husband is Shiva the destroyer and re-creator, who also is venerated as Lord of Animals, and thus, animal spirits. Parvati created Ganesha without Shiva's involvement, and Shiva has another son named Skanda who was created without Parvati's involvement. The four figures, however, often are depicted together as a holy family-themed grouping such as in *Shiva's Family* (Uma-Mahaeshvara), India, Madhya Pradesh, about 1100, 97.36, in gallery 211.

What Are the Sources of the Stories about Ganesha's Creation?

Stories explaining Ganesha's creation are told in the Puranas (poor-ah-nas), a major genre of Hindu literature written between the 3rd and 12th centuries CE. This genre of literature is based on folklore and oral traditions whose composition may date back to the post-Vedic era (after 600 BCE). They describe the history of the universe in the form of stories told by one person to another, and from the perspective of a particular deity and the followers of that deity. There are several versions of the story of Ganesha's creation.

The Best-Known Story

This story is told in the Shiva Purana, which tells the history of the universe from the perspective of Shiva. It begins with Shiva's wife Parvati's preparations for a bath. To guard the entrance of her bathing chamber, she created a boy out of the dirt of her body. In other versions, they are traveling through a forest, and the young boy (whom she had created much earlier to keep herself company in the absence of Shiva) guarded the pool in which she bathed.

When Shiva returned home (or came upon them in the forest), he was surprised to find an unknown boy present and struck off the boy's head in a rage. Parvati was overcome with grief by what Shiva had done. In remorse, Shiva sent out his troops to fetch a replacement head. They discovered a sleeping elephant, severed its head, and brought it back to Shiva. The elephant head was attached to the boy's body and he came back to life.

Another Story

In the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Shiva asked Parvati to make offerings and observe rituals in honor of Vishnu the Preserver for a year with the hopes she would become pregnant with a son. After their son

Ganesha was born, the gods and goddesses gathered to celebrate the birth of a son. The powerful Shani, the son of the sun god Surya, refused to look at the infant for fear of harming Shiva and Parvati's son. Parvati insisted that Shani look at her son anyway, and when he did so, the child's head was severed instantly. Vishnu hurried away and brought back the head of a young elephant. When the elephant's head was attached to the infant's body, Ganesha was brought back to life.

A Third Story

In the Varaha Purana, Ganesha was created from Shiva's laughter. Thus, he was a cute and alluring child, which made Shiva jealous so he replaced Ganesha's head with an elephant's head and made his belly protrude. Despite these changes, Ganesha's inherent character remains cheerful and jovial, and he continues to attract a large and loyal following.

How Did Ganesha Become the Lord of Beginnings?

In the above stories, Ganesha is given a subordinate role to the other gods, a role rejected by devotees of Ganesha. In later centuries, as religious movements dedicated to Ganesha arose, additional puranas were composed to reinforce his pre-eminence.

In the Ganesha Purana and Mudgala Purana, which are volumes of the Upapurana dated to between 1100 and 1400 CE, Ganesha is the pre-eminent deity who is a form of Brahma the Creator. Although Brahma does not have a significant devotional following directly, he is venerated indirectly by ganapatyas who believe Ganesha expresses the foremost universal principle conceptualized by Brahma. This is what makes Ganesha the Lord of Beginnings.

According to these puranas, Ganesha has been incarnated in the physical world four times with the purpose of destroying powerful demons. These usually are male guardian spirits, dwarfs or animal spirits who challenged the gods and caused chaos in the world and universe. These puranas thus tell the stories of Ganesha's heroic victories over various demons in his implementation of Brahma's rule over the cosmos. Many of the features and symbolism associated with Ganesha's depiction as a universal ruler originate in these later puranas.

How Are Images of Ganesha Used?

As the Lord of Beginnings and the remover of all types of obstacles Ganesha is invoked at the beginning of new activities, undertakings and projects in everyday life as well as important endeavors including a project or journey, marriage and religious ceremonies, and construction of houses and buildings. His image appears on calendars, and dedications to him appear in the frontispiece of books.

In the Shaivite tradition, Ganesha was recognized for his courage in guarding his mother. Shiva gave Ganesha the guardianship of entrances and doorways, and to invoke Ganesha's guardianship, his image

is placed in or above the lintel of an entryway. Many worshippers of Shiva use Ganesha's image for devotional purposes in their households because of the link between the two.

The Art Cart Sculpture

The example on the Art Cart is carved from the wood of a tropical evergreen tree native to South and Southeast Asia called kadam wood (*neolamarckia cadamba*).

It was made by the sculptor Prithvi Raj Kumawat (b. 1964), who lives in the Indian state of Rajasthan. Kumawat began to learn the art of carving at age 10 from his cousin and has worked independently since 1983. He received the Rajasthan State Award for his work in 1986 and was the recipient of the 2004 National Merit Certificate for Master Craftperson, an award presented by India's Ministry of Textiles.

The Art Cart Ganesha was made for sale to worshippers, pilgrims, tourists and collectors of traditional arts and crafts. Sculptures like this one, in clay, plaster, metal or stone, can be purchased as devotional objects, particularly near temples and shrines, and as souvenirs at or near tourist sites.

What Festival Honors Ganesha?

Ganesh Chaturthi, the annual festival honoring Ganesha in India, begins on the fourth day of the Hindu calendar month of Bhadrapada, which typically falls between August and September. The celebrations usually involve four primary rituals: Pranapratishta or the production of a murti (idol) into which the deity is infused, Shodashopachara which refers to the 16 forms of paying tribute to Ganesha, Uttarapuja or the worship ceremony that permits the idol to be removed from the altar and prepared for immersion, and finally, Ganapati Visarjan or the immersion of the idol in the river. The most elaborate celebrations take place in the Indian state of Maharashtra in which Ganesha is seen as a particularly important deity.

For this festival, new unfired clay or plaster sculptures are made. Painted in bright, festive colors, these sculptures befit Ganesha's jovial personality. On an appointed day, the figures are placed on raised platforms in homes or in elaborately decorated outdoor tents for people to view and pay homage. Priests invoke life into the statues amidst the chanting of mantras. The figures are anointed with cinnabar or vermilion paste throughout the ceremony, and Vedic hymns are chanted.

Ganesha is worshipped for the duration of the festival (5, 7, 10 or 21 days). On the final day, worshippers carry the images through the streets in processions accompanied with dancing and singing. They then place the images in a living body of water, which dissolves them. Dissolution of the images of Ganesha symbolizes his ritual return home and the removal of misfortune until the next year's festival.

One explanation for ending the festival with the ritual dissolution of Ganesha's images is the belief that if one keeps an elephant in the house it will eat up everything and leave the household destitute. The dissolution of the images of Ganesha also reminds people of the transience of life.

What Does the Symbolism Mean?

Ganesha has an elephant head joined to a childlike human body. According to the rules of Hindu iconography, Ganesha must be depicted with more than two arms. As in the Art Cart sculpture, Ganesha usually is depicted with four arms and hands to indicate his divinity. Other figures have six, eight, 10, 12 or even 14 hands, and each hand carries a unique symbol. Although most sculptures of Ganesha have only one head, some have up to five to symbolize his divine powers.

The various features of Ganesha's appearance are symbolic, and each symbol has multiple interpretations. Here is a sampling of some of them:

Head

Ganesha's elephant head symbolizes the human soul, superior mental powers, and knowledge. He is well-versed in the Vedas and other scriptures and rules the universe wisely with his knowledge. Elephants are a symbol of fertility, strength, wisdom and royalty in all Indian religions and often are presented as worshippers of Hindu gods as well as the Buddha and Jina Mahavira.

Human Body

Ganesha's human body signifies maya or the earthly existence of human beings and his large belly contains the whole universe.

Multiple Arms

The four arms of the Art Cart Ganesha symbolize his status as the universal ruler and establish his power over the four categories of beings: (1) those who can live only in water (2) those who can live in water and on earth (3) those who can live only on earth and (4) those who can fly in the air.

Hand Gesture (Mudra)

Ganesha's raised lower-right hand in the gesture of reassurance, or abhaya mudra, which means, "Fear not: I am with you."

Hands

Ganesha's other three hands are raised to his three trunks as he eats from them with great pleasure. Ganesha is often depicted eating sweetmeats (orange laddoos) or clarified butter balls (ghee).

Trunks

Ganesha's three trunks each hang between two tusks, representing separation between the worldly and spiritual domains. His incredibly efficient trunk is viewed as capable of surpassing all human achievements. It is able to uproot a large tree, but at the same time can pick up a pin from the ground or pluck a blade of grass. The trunk is usually shown bent as it would be while working to remove obstacles, and this trunk position also represents the sound of cosmic reality.

Rat

Ganesha's vehicle (vahana) is a small rat. In this Art Cart sculpture, it happily sits at Ganesha's feet and nibbles away at his own tasty food. As Ganesha's companion, the rat helps illustrate the different approaches to defeating obstacles. The elephant tramples down everything in its path to achieve its goals, but the rat can creep through small holes and cracks to achieve the same goal. The rat also symbolizes a defeated demon (or animal spirit) of vanity and selfishness.

Throne and Adornments

Ganesha is seated on a lotus throne. The lotus flower represents purity and spirituality. Like most Hindu deities, he is richly adorned with fine fabrics, jewelry and a crown.

Cord

Across Ganesha's large belly is the sacred thread worn by Hindu deities and Hindu males who have undergone initiation onto the path of spiritual study under the guidance of a guru.

Sources and Additional Background

[Wikipedia](#) | Ganesha

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#) | Ganesha

[Denver Art Museum](#) | Ganesha Chaturthi: The Birth of the Elephant-headed God

[The Walters Art Museum](#) | Ganesha

[The Times of India](#) | The image of Ganesha and its meaning

[Khan Academy](#) | **VIDEO:** The making and worship of Ganesha statues in Maharashtra

Questions and Activities

1. What's going on in this sculpture? Describe what you see. What more can you find? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. What aspects of this sculpture look natural? Divine or supernatural? Describe what you see.
3. Based on what you see here, how would you describe Ganesha's personality? What do you see that makes you say (that)?
4. Ganesha is revered as Lord of Beginnings and worshippers call upon his aid when beginning an important new activity. What do you do when you begin an important activity?
5. Ganesha is venerated as the "remover of obstacles." Worshippers ask Ganesha for help in many situations. What do you do when you are faced with difficulties?

Collection Connections

(On view as of 5/22/19)

- [Uma-Maheshvara](#), 10th-11th century. Unknown artist, India, 97.36. (Together, Uma and Maheshvara represent an ideal married couple with arms draped around each other. Their two sons, Ganesha and Skanda, stand beneath them on either side.)
- [Elephant Attacking a Feline](#), late 4th-mid 5th century. Unknown artist, Turkey, 69.49.2.
- [Bowl Depicting a Lady Riding an Elephant](#), 12th-13th century. Unknown artist, Iran, 50.46.434.
- [Tusk](#), 1775-1777. Unknown artist, Edo people, Nigeria, 56.33.

Animal/Human composites

- [Winged Genius](#), c. 883–859 BCE. Assyrian, 41.9.
- [Tomb reliefs](#) (Guardian spirits, Tang Dynasty), early 8th century. Unknown artist, China, 49.1.1.
- [Theseus Slaying the Centaur Bianor](#), c. 1850 (modeled, cast c. 1891). Antoine-Louis Barye; Caster: F. (Ferdinand) Barbedienne, 55.11A,B

INDIAN MINIATURE PAINTINGS

What Are They?

These Indian miniature paintings illustrate two styles, Mughal (moo-ghall) and Rajasthani (ra-jas-tha-nee). Both were painted recently on cotton by contemporary Indian students of the miniature painting tradition whose work helps keep this royal art alive. They maintain popular appreciation of the art of Indian miniature painting through reproductions or reinterpretations of well-known types of classic scenes for the tourist and souvenir trade.

They were acquired by Debra Hegstrom, Senior Educator, Docent Program, in New Delhi, India, for the Art Cart.

What Materials and Processes Are Used to Create the Paintings?

Before the introduction of paper into the Indian subcontinent during the 14th century, cotton was used as the background for paintings intended to be hung on walls, and later included in books. Cotton has been grown and woven in India since the time of the Indus Valley civilization (3300-1800 BCE). Today, cotton is still used as the basis for paintings hung on walls and often is used for popular reproductions such as the Art Cart miniature paintings.

To create the paintings, artists may begin with a preliminary rough sketch in charcoal, or work from a collection of sketches serving as the basis of inspiration in creating a new painting. These sketches often are turned into stencils by being pricked with small, closely-spaced holes and either daubing wet color over the holes or smudging powdered charcoal into the holes to transfer the drawing to a blank cotton or paper sheet beneath. The dots then are connected into outlines with a watery tint, such as an impermanent red ink. The outline is then "fixed" with a black pigment of soot and gum Arabic, which is an edible substance derived from two Sahelian or sub-Saharan species of the acacia tree (today used in candies, chewing gums and the lickable adhesive on postage stamps).

Then, the whole surface is covered with a coat of white lead paint thin enough for the under drawing to show through. Next, the outlines of these drawings are filled in stages with successive coats of a brilliant, opaque, monotone watercolor (gouache), one color at a time. When each coat has dried, the painting is laid face down on a smooth marble surface and the reverse side of the cotton or paper is burnished with a rounded agate, rubbing first up and down, and then side-to-side to ensure the pigment particles have settled compactly and become enmeshed with the cotton or paper.

Details or modeling (depending on the style) then are added to the colors with a fine brush. If any gold is used, it is put on last. Raised details, such as to simulate jewels or pearls, also are applied when the painting is almost finished. The painting finally is burnished once again on the reverse.

In the modern era, commercial art materials are used in popular reproductions made as souvenirs. Miniature artists working on commissioned paintings maintain traditional techniques, using handmade pigments from mineral and organic sources (plants, animals and insects).

For popular reproductions, modern artists' tools and equipment are used, but some traditional tools are maintained. Clam shells traditionally were used as paint bowls. Paintbrushes were made with animal hairs mounted onto feather quills, and fine paintwork was done using hairs of the tails of young squirrels or kittens, with the finest details painted with a quill fitted with a single hair. Calligraphy and text accompanying the paintings was written by calligraphers using a reed pen and black ink.

Humayun's Scholarly Gathering: A Mughal Royal Court Scene



What's Going on in This Picture?

This is an outdoor garden scene at a Mughal royal court. It depicts a group of scholars gathered around a Mughal emperor who is the central figure of the painting. He is seated on a throne and is about to receive a book from one of the scholars.

The emperor may be Humayun, son of Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty. The time may be early in Humayun's reign, between 1530 and 1540, when he was forced to flee India before a rebellion led by Sher Shah Suri.

The place may be at his capital, Delhi, or at Babur's capital, Agra. Babur was a keen gardener who had designed and constructed the Garden of Felicity at Kabul. At Agra, he designed and constructed a new one he called the Garden of the Eighth Paradise (in the Qur'an, paradise has seven levels, so from the name it seems Babur intended his garden to be almost as good as heaven). Miniature paintings of Babur in these gardens share many features with the garden depicted in *Raja Bikram and the Angels*, c. 1700, India, Deccan, Golconda or Bijapur, 95.4.2.

Like his father, Humayun was a bibliophile and enjoyed the company of scholars. Perhaps in preparation for the Muslim congregational day of prayer on Fridays, Thursdays were devoted to scholarly gatherings where the emperor received learned guests such as philosophers, poets, historians, jurists, mystics and experts in religion. He took part in intellectual discussions, literary readings, and sharing information about new topics.

What Details About Humayun Can Be Identified?

Humayun wears a full and voluminous rounded turban commonly worn by Central Asian Turk-Mongol men of high status in his era. White feathers, possibly egret or heron feathers, distinguish his royal turban from the other similarly-turbaned figures. This rounded style of turban suggests the time was early in his reign, before he adopted a Safavid-style turban during his stay in Persia, and before a variety of turban styles and headdresses had developed at the Mughal royal court to indicate social status or changing fashions. The rounded style of his turban continued to be worn during subsequent centuries, primarily by scholars.

Humayun also is depicted wearing a double-strand pearl necklace to indicate his status as emperor. In his era, pearls were expensive because of their rarity. In India, some pearls were obtained from the southern coasts of India as well as Sri Lanka, but the best quality of pearls were obtained from Basra (now in southern Iraq), which was the main center of trade for Persian Gulf pearls. The very largest pearls, however, were obtained from the southern Philippines. Early in the Mughal era, a sumptuary law was in effect that did not permit pearls to be worn at royal courts by anyone but the emperor or by those who had received pearls from the emperor as a sign of royal favor, and indeed, none of the scholars wear pearls or any other type of jewelry.

Humayun is depicted slightly larger than the scholars surrounding him and is seated on a typical Mughal throne: a wide, hexagonal seat with four legs. He sits in a partially cross-legged position that suggests royal ease or even meditation, leaning back against a large blue bolster cushion propped against the three back panels of the throne. The back panel immediately behind Humayun reaches up behind his head and forms an almond-shape (mandorla-style) that is capped with a pineapple finial, providing a halo effect emphasizing his royal status.

What Details About the Setting and Other Figures Can Be Identified?

The carpeted platform upon which Humayun's throne sits is in a garden setting, and the scholars stand or sit on each side of the platform or stand before Humayun in the garden. Numerous grasses and flowers, along with artfully arranged large pebbles can be seen at their feet in the garden. In the background stands a long, tall, curtained partition above which hangs a broad fringed canopy.

The scholars wear relatively simple dress as befitting their scholarly status. Their clothing is a less elaborate version of court dress worn by nobility during the Mughal era, consisting of a full wrap-around overcoat (chapan, later developing into a voluminous over-dress called a jama), leggings (py- jama, from which the pajama derives), and a waist-sash (patka or kamarband, from which the word cummerbund is derived). Humayun wears a half-sleeved shorter jacket (choga) that is open in the front, on top of his overcoat. These garments are Central Asian styles of clothing for colder, dryer climates, and over time, were modified to suit India's hotter and more humid climate. Footwear can be seen on two of the scholars, who appear to be wearing leather slipper-style shoes with high backs, but Humayun himself is shown barefooted.

None of the scholars, or indeed Humayun himself, wears or carries a weapon. Two of the scholars, one in each of the lower corners of the painting, carry a black walking stick as a symbolic staff. This may indicate their membership in a Sufi mystic order as several of these include it as part of the symbolic accoutrements to be carried by male members in emulation the mannerisms of Prophet Muhammad.

The two figures in the top row on Humayun's left may be attendants. The one closest to the emperor is fanning him with a white fly whisk, an object long associated with depictions of royalty in Indian art. The other holds a long object wrapped in blue fabric, perhaps the royal standard.

Humayun extends his hand to the right, towards the figure dressed in a red chapan overcoat. Unlike the other scholars, this figure wears a shawl (shal) over his shoulders, which suggests he may be serving in some other capacity, such as master of ceremonies. Here he gestures towards a scholar dressed in a light blue turban and brown chapan overcoat who holds a book. The book may be new and thus may be the topic of discussion at this gathering. The scholar may be presenting it to the emperor for the royal library. The other scholars are taking a lively interest in the proceedings. The one standing next to the scholar with the book has his hand raised near his mouth, indicating his amazement. The others appear to be engaged in lively conversation, judging from the various positions of their hands and arms. The figure dressed in red at the bottom right of the painting gestures towards a young boy who may be his son. The boy seems to be distracted as he is looking away at another person in the left corner of the painting, and the father may be attempting to draw his attention back to the scholarly proceedings.

What Makes This Painting Mughal Style?

Several features of this painting suggest that the contemporary artist who created the painting is emulating the style of a late-16th century Mughal painting from the time of Humayun's son Akbar (ak-bar), often called Akbar the Great. The entire garden scene is modeled on illustrations of the autobiography of Babur, and these garden settings were emulated by artists depicting later rulers.

Many Persian features are evident in the painting, as was the case in earlier Mughal painting, since most of the master-miniature painters of that era had trained in Persia. One of these features is the garden setting, and the painting's highly-decorative and detailed emphasis on plants and floral designs, the carpet, the headpiece of the throne, and the canopy, as well as on the ornate border of the painting. Various styles of borders for miniature paintings can be seen on the Indian, Persian, Uzbek and Mongol paintings in the Islamic gallery.

The handling of perspective and a sense of flatness are other Persian features. Most of the scene is viewed slightly from above in a bird's eye view perspective, so that the canopy pushes down and the medallion in the center of the carpet stands straight up. The carpet, the partition behind the gathering of scholars and the depiction of all the scholars as the same size, whether in the foreground or the background flatten the painting.

Other Persian-derived features typical of Mughal painting of this period are the 3/4 perspective of the faces, the figures cut off at the sides to indicate the scene extends beyond what has been captured in the painting, and striking color contrasts, especially between the various garments of the scholars.

The Indian features in this work, which developed during Mughal times, include the variety of vivid, naturalistic (rather than symbolic) colors, and the sense of a 3-dimensional setting. This is provided by the suggestion of a recession into space using the steps leading up to the carpeted platform and the throne, the cushion in behind Humayun, and the two-part canopy above the scholarly gathering. The rounded bodies, faces and turbans of the scholars also create a convincing sense of volume.

This painting has a large and ornate border, which was typical of Mughal work. This feature was derived from the small and simple single borders of Persian miniature paintings. Mughal artists developed the use of borders, often presenting their paintings within two or more elaborate borders, at least one of which was relatively large and served to further highlight the painting.

Realism and Symbolism

Although the scene is formal and the composition static, the setting and the various gestures and activities of the figures portrayed gives us the impression we are looking at real people taking part in an actual event in an existing location. This is what makes this painting typically Mughal, as the depiction of human activities and behaviors in art was an innovation introduced into Indian art during this era.

The depiction of flowers and trees in Mughal art was a convergence of the arts of India, where they symbolized fertility, and the arts of the Muslim world, where various plants were used to depict the garden as a form of heaven on earth and in the form of abstract repeating patterns represent the infinity of God.

The activities of the ruler, and his depiction at the center of paintings, also was a convergence of Indian art and the arts of the Muslim world. Depictions of the Buddha, the Jina Mahavira, and various deities in the Hindu tradition emphasized the qualities associated with kingship, particularly as the just and universal ruler. Temporal kings often legitimized their rule by having themselves portrayed in ways that linked them with religious figures, and religious figures sometimes were modeled on kings.

In the case of this depiction of Humayun, he is presented in a way somewhat reminiscent of Indian religious figures, seated in a partially cross-legged position that suggests royal ease or meditation while the mandorla-shaped back panel suggests a halo. His central role as emperor is legitimized by surrounding him with various types of scholarly figures who support his rule by providing him with the knowledge he needs to govern with justice.

Krishna and the Gopis (Milkmaids)



Who Is Krishna?

Krishna, Sanskrit कृष्ण, one of the most widely revered and most popular of all Indian divinities, is worshipped as the eighth incarnation (avatar, or avatara) of the Hindu god Vishnu and also as a supreme god in his own right. Vishnu is one of the principal Hindu deities, and his followers are known as

Vaishnavites. During the past two millennia, they have come to focus on worshipping Vishnu as the preserver and maintainer of the established order, continuity of society, and love and emotion.

The stories of Vishnu's avatars build and elaborate on these roles, and the life of Krishna as Vishnu's eighth avatar has many different strands and episodes, including god-child, cowherd god, pastoral deity, conqueror of snake deities, philosopher, urban ruler, and tribal god.

As a youth, the cowherd Krishna became renowned as a lover, the sound of his flute prompting the gopis (wives and daughters of the cowherds) to leave their homes to dance ecstatically with him in the moonlight. The Art Cart painting of Krishna and the Gopis is a scene from one of the most popular episodes, Krishna the cowherd god. Another scene from this episode is depicted on the front of the Art Cart, and one of the Indian comic books on the Art Cart retells Krishna's story from before his birth, miraculous rescue, upbringing with his aunt and foster family, life as a cowherd and his defeat of his uncle King Kans.

What's Going on in This Picture?

This is another outdoor scene, but unlike the Art Cart painting of Humayun's scholarly gathering, the setting is not a garden but the rural countryside. There are flowers, grasses and flowering trees in the foreground, behind which is a field enclosed by a fence. In the background on the left is a very solid-looking building surmounted by a typical dome, which may be a section of a town or city. Behind it is a blue ribbon indicating the sky, flattened but rounded forms suggesting trees or hills, and above them are wavy lines suggesting stormy clouds.

The main figure of the painting is Krishna (krish-na), easily identifiable by his blue skin and peacock crown, in his cowherd role. He stands on a terrace surrounded by three milkmaids (gopis, go-pee-z). The yearning of the beautiful milkmaids, particularly the chief milkmaid Radha (Ra-dha), for the strong and handsome Krishna is one of the most popular themes in the Rajasthani School of Indian miniature painting.

While Krishna's face, neck, legs and feet are blue, his hands are white and the soles of his feet are pink. He wears the typical long orange-colored garment wrapped around the lower body (dhoti, dho-tee) and shawl with a garland of flowers around his neck, similar to his depictions on the front of the Art Cart and the Rajasthani paintings in the South Asian gallery. Unlike these depictions, in this Art Cart painting, he also wears a dark shirt.

Krishna is surrounded by the three milkmaids. The milkmaid standing on his far right wears the typical Rajasthani clothing: a three-piece outfit consisting of a fitted blouse or bodice (choli, cho-lee) which comes up above the bottom of the breasts, a skirt (ghagra, ghag-ra) and a long headcovering (odhani or orni, orr-nee, also called a dupatta, do-patta).

The two seated milkmaids on his left appear to wear loose pants (shalwar) instead of skirts. Two of the milkmaids wear red clothing and one wears blue. They wear bangles at their wrists and some type of ornamental jewelry over the front of their heads, but it is difficult to make out details.

All three milkmaids have red henna (mehendi, mehn-dhi) on the tips of their fingers and on their feet. The milkmaid seated on the left has a green circle on her left hand as well.

It is difficult to tell which one of the three milkmaids might be Krishna's favorite, Radha, but she may be the seated milkmaid on the left whom Krishna faces.

As in the Mughal style painting, the entire scene of this painting of Krishna and the Gopis is surrounded by a border decorated with floral designs.

What Symbols Can Be Identified in the Painting?

Krishna typically is depicted with blue skin. In the Bhagavad Purana (bha- ga-vad poor-ana) story about his early life, his blue skin is attributed the poison in the milk of the false nurse, the demoness Putana (poo-ta-na), a hostile female earth spirit figure who was sent to kill him by Krishna's evil uncle and usurper to the throne of Mathura (ma-thu-ra), King Kans.

Krishna's powers as an avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu the preserver and maintainer of the established order were such that even as a baby, he had the strength to ingest all the poison, all the milk and eventually all the life force of the demoness, resulting in her death, and also his skin turning blue.

The use of blue skin to indicate the effects of poison is a feature also used in paintings of the Hindu deity Shiva the destroyer and renewer, who prevented poison from entering a renewed universe by ingesting it. As a result, his throat turned blue, giving him the title Lord of the Blue Throat.

Krishna's peacock crown suggests both royalty and emotionality, and these symbols are reinforced by the peacock strutting in the foreground in front of Krishna. Peacocks symbolize the yearning of the beloved for the lover because of their characteristic sounds, and appear in many religious and secular scenes of romance and lovemaking in Rajasthani painting.

Another symbol of the beloved, the cypress tree, stands directly behind Krishna. All the figures in the painting are surrounded by flowers and flowering trees, which are additional symbols of love. Passion is further indicated by the stormy clouds in the background of the painting.

Krishna's other clothing, as well as the clothing worn by the milkmaids are typical styles of dress worn in Western India during the past millennium. His orange shawl may be dyed with saffron, and thus reminiscent of a monk's robe. The red color of the clothing of two of the milkmaids may suggest celebration as red is the color of bridal dresses in South Asia.

Garlands of flowers around their necks represent welcome, celebration and fertility. In everyday life, flower garlands are used to welcome guests, honor all members of a wedding party (especially bridegroom and bride), and venerate sacred images.

All three milkmaids have red henna on the tips of their fingers and on their feet, indicating they have spent time beautifying themselves in preparation for meeting Krishna. In everyday life, henna is used in beautification to celebrate special events such as weddings and holidays. The milkmaid seated on the left has a green circle on her left hand as well.

Behind the milkmaid seated on the left is a water jug, which indicates the milkmaids have dropped their work to follow their irresistible yearning to be with Krishna. This yearning symbolizes the longing of humans to be in the presence of or unite with the divine.

The arm gestures of the four figures almost look like they are striking poses from a dance. This scene may refer to the Rasamandala (rasa- mandala), a circular dance depicting Krishna dancing with each of the milkmaids at the same time, although the dance is not actually portrayed here. The Rasamandala is another very popular subject for Rajasthani paintings of Krishna.

What Makes This Painting Rājasthānī Style?

Rājasthānī painting (also known as Rajput painting) is the style of miniature painting that developed mainly in the independent Hindu states of Rājasthān in western India in the 16th–19th century. Each Rajputana kingdom evolved a distinct style, but with certain common features. The style evolved from Western Indian manuscript illustrations, though Mughal influence became evident in the later years of its development.

Rājasthānī painting differs from the Mughal painting in its bolder use of color as well as an abstract and conventionalized conception of the human figure. Also, a common motif found throughout this style of painting is the purposeful manipulation of space. In particular, the inclusion of fuller spaces is meant to emphasize the lack of boundaries and inseparability of characters and landscapes. So, in effect, the landscapes are often as expressive as the human figures within the painting, reflecting the emotions or action within the scene.

In keeping with the new wave of popular devotionalism within Hinduism, the subjects principally depicted are the legends of the Hindu cowherd god Krishna and his favourite companion, Rādhā. To a lesser extent, there are illustrated scenes from the two major epics of India, the musical modes (rāgamālās), and the types of heroines (nāyikās). In the 18th century, court portraits, court scenes, and hunting scenes became increasingly common.

Like Mughal art, Rājasthānī paintings were meant to be kept in boxes or albums and to be viewed by passing from hand to hand. The technique is similar to that of Mughal painting, though the materials are not as refined and sumptuous.

Sources and Additional Background

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#) | Mughal Painting

[The Getty Museum](#) | **VIDEO:** Exploring Color in Mughal Paintings

[ArtSy.net](#) | The Astounding Miniature Paintings of India's Mughal Empire

Metropolitan Museum of Art | [The Art of the Mughals before 1600](#) and [The Art of the Mughals after 1600](#)

[Khan Academy](#) | Illustration from the Akbarnama (with information on Humayun)

[Wikipedia](#) | Rajput painting

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#) | Krishna

[Auckland Art Gallery](#) | Krishna and the Gopis

[Encyclopedia Britannica](#) | Rājasthānī painting

Questions and Activities

1. Look at these two paintings. What is going on in each scene? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. What is each person doing? What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What is the same about these two paintings? What is different?
4. Describe the clothing worn by the people in each of the paintings. How is it similar? How is it different? How would you compare it with the clothing worn by other Art Cart figures?
5. Look closely at the floral patterns in the painting of Humayun's scholarly gathering? What do they contribute to the overall feeling of the painting?
6. Look closely at the flowers, trees, and sky in the painting of Krishna and the gopis. What do they contribute to the overall feeling of the painting?
7. Compare this painting of Krishna to the painting on the front of the Art Cart. How is the portrayal of Krishna similar? How is it different? Describe the painting on the cart and compare it to this painting of Krishna.

8. What do the borders contribute to these two paintings?
9. Compare each of the Art Cart paintings with the paintings on the cube. What you see in the Art Cart paintings that you see in the cube? What do you see in the paintings in the cube that is different from the Art Cart paintings?
10. Compare the paintings on the cube with each other. What do the paintings have in common? How are they different?
11. Compare the paintings on the cube with the other Art Cart objects. What features from the paintings do you see in the other objects?
12. If you were to create a miniature painting, what elements or details would you include?

Collection Connections

(Works on view as of 5/22/19)

- [Krishna and Radha](#), c. 1680. Unknown artist, India, 84.118.1
- [Portrait of Shah Jahan](#), 1700-1720. Unknown artist, India, 84.118.3
- [The Armies of Timur Combat the Forces of Nasir al-Din Mahmud Tughluq](#), from the Zafarnama, 1595-1600, Bhora, 2014.101
- [Raja Bikram Collecting the Clothes of the Bathing Fairies](#), c. 1710. Mulla Nusrati, 95.4.2
- [Jali with pointed arch frame](#), 18th century. Unknown artist, Near Agra or Delhi, India, 2000.78
- [Relief with a Floral Decoration](#), c. 1700. Unknown artist, India, 2000.65

RUDRAKSHA BEADS



What Are They?

This string of 46 reddish-brown rudraksha beads comes from India but likely originated in Java, Indonesia.

These beads are made from the dried fruits (sometimes referred to as berries or seeds) of the utrasam (oot-ra-sam) tree (*Eleaocarpus ganitrus*). This tree is native to the island of Java in Indonesia, and more than 80 percent of utrasam trees grow there. Some utrasam trees grow in the foothills of the Himalayas in Northern India and Nepal. The utrasam tree is a member of a genus of tropical and sub-tropical evergreen trees, and is of medium to tall height.

The white flowers of the tree produce green fruits one inch in diameter, which turn into a brilliant iridescent blue-purple color when ripe. In nature this color is rare and may have been a reason why the fruits came to be venerated. The seeds are removed from the fruit, which is cleaned in water before being dried, whereupon they turn reddish brown. To produce other colors, pigments are introduced before drying the fruits. After drying, the beads are strung temporarily through their naturally-occurring holes, as is the case with the Art Cart string of beads. These beads later are restrung into devotional garlands and rosaries.

What Stories Tell the Origin of the Utrasam (Rudraksha)Tree?

Several stories are told about the origin of the utrasam (rudraksha) tree in the ancient literature of India, the Vedas (Indo-European/Aryan religious scriptures) and later Hindu literatures known as the Puranas.

These stories link the utrasam tree with Rudra, the Vedic god of storms, and the later Hindu deity Shiva the Destroyer who makes way for renewal and a new cosmic order.

The Oldest Story

The oldest story is told in the Brihajjabala, a book in the Muktika Upanishad, which is part of the Atharva Veda, parts of which may have been composed as early as 1000 BCE.

In this story, Rudra opened his third eye with the purpose of destroying the world. When he closed it, a teardrop fell and became the utrasam tree. The tree became sacred to him and its fruit stones (and later the dried fruits from which the beads are made) were named after him (Rudra-aksha, with aksha meaning teardrop). The utrasam tree frequently is referred to as the Rudraksha tree.

Shaivites (worshippers of Shiva) view Rudra as a precursor of Shiva and in later Hindu religious literature they associate Shiva with Rudra. Thus, the Rudraksha tree is associated with the god Shiva, and its seeds are prized for their auspicious properties said to bring wealth, health, and a change of fate to their owners.

The Story of a Great Battle

In the Devi Bhagavata Purana, Brahma the Creator gave permission to a group of divine beings known as the Asuras to build three magnificent cities, one on earth, one in the sky and one in heaven. These three magnificent cities were known collectively as Tripura and were mobile, which made them virtually indestructible. The Asuras became more powerful than the gods (devas) and their power disturbed the cosmic order. In desperation, the gods approached Brahma who referred them to Shiva. Shiva devised a way to defeat the Asuras and destroy Tripura in a joint effort with all the gods. After this event, Shiva retired to the Himalayas to meditate for 1,000 years on cosmic order and universal welfare. When he opened his eyes again, several teardrops fell from them and produced the utrasam tree.

The Story of Penance and a New Cosmic Order

In the Shiva Purana, Parvati asked Shiva about the origin of the rudraksha. Shiva explained that he did penance for his destruction of the old cosmic order by meditating for 1,000 years. When he opened his eyes, teardrops of compassion for humanity fell from his eyes and produced the utrasam tree. The seeds of this tree were distributed around the earth and produced four different colored fruit representing the four varna or castes: white for the Brahmin or priestly caste, red for the Kshatriya or warrior caste, yellow for the Vaishya or merchant (previously agricultural caste, and black for the Shudra or laborer caste. The utrasam tree and the rudraksha thus formed the foundation for a new cosmic order.

How Are Rudraksha Beads Used?

Rudraksha beads like these are strung into devotional garlands (mala) and prayer rosaries (japa-mala), often using a saffron-dyed thread or black yarn. They are capped in silver or set in silver pendants and attached to silver chains, and sometimes gold also is used. They usually are stored in special boxes or bags.

Malas are used by priests, monks, ascetics, holy men, devotees and other worshippers in the Hindu religious tradition generally to count repetitions of prayers, mantras (meditative statements) or divine names during worship, as well as to keep track of breaths during meditation practices. The thumb and middle finger are used to handle the mala and count repetitions. The index finger is avoided for this purpose because it represents the ego.

The use of rudraksha beads generally is associated with Shaivites. Shaivite priests, ascetics and holy men, devotees and other worshippers often wear rudraksha garlands around their necks to enhance mental tranquility when they are not using them in worship or meditative practice. As sacred objects, rudraksha beads are handled with reverence, after a ritual cleansing of the body and a preparatory prayer.

During religious ceremonies and festivals, Shaivite priests wear ornate rudraksha garland-necklaces strung with gold beads and pendants set with precious stones like the 19th-century Gowri Shankaram Necklace, India, Tamil Nadu, 92.132.1, gallery 211. This magnificent rudraksha necklace features an elaborate gold locket-container encrusted with emeralds, rubies and garnets and depicting Shiva and Gauri atop Nandi. (Other necklaces may feature depictions of Shiva Nataraja.) This necklace likely was a lavish gift given to the temple by a wealthy person to gain religious merit. The locket-container typically holds a male lingam symbol as well as sacred ashes (vibhuti) obtained from cremation grounds or a ritual fire. Shiva smears his body with these ashes, a practice emulated by his worshippers.

Rudraksha garland-necklaces with very large beads are used in rituals to honor particular deities, especially to bedeck large temple images of Shiva and deities associated with him, in the same manner as flower garlands.

In popular culture, both the fruit and the stone are believed to remove sins, benefit physical and emotional health, protect from evil and enhance good luck. The bigger the beads, the more powerful they are believed to be. Smaller beads however are more valued because of their rarity, and also are preferred because of their greater ease of wearing and carrying them.

What Do Rudraksha Beads Symbolize?

Rudraksha beads are not smooth but have various textured patterns to them because they developed from up to 14 segmented divisions, each delineated by a ridge or groove extending from pole to pole. Each segment is called a mukha (moo-kha), or face, in Sanskrit.

Depending on the number of “faces,” a rudraksha bead represents a particular deity and is worn to honor that divine figure as well as activate the qualities of that deity for the worshipper. Information sometimes varies concerning which deity is honored by a particular number of “faces” on the bead, but all agree that beads with five faces symbolize Rudra (now taken to mean Shiva). All the beads on the Art Cart string of rudraksha beads have five faces except for one bead which has four faces (the eleventh bead from the end).

Specialists have not been able to find authentic (naturally-occurring) one-faced rudraksha beads but these represent Shiva. Some examples of divine figures represented by multi-faced beads are:

- two-faced beads: Shiva and Shakti;
- four-faced beads: Brahma the Creator;
- seven-faced beads: Ananga, a form of Kama, the god of love, who shot Shiva with his arrow of passion (a la the Greek Eros and Roman Cupid) and caused him to fall in love with Parvati);
- eight-faced beads: Ganesha;
- ten-faced beads: Vishnu the Preserver in his 10 incarnations.
- A 21-faced bead represents Kubera, king of the yakshas (male guardian spirits of the earth) and patron of unlimited eternal wealth.

What Does the Number of Beads on a Mala Symbolize?

Bead malas are made up of specific numbers of beads that symbolize particular meanings for Hindus. The number varies depending on the different Hindu sects but 50 is considered the ideal number for a string of Hindu prayer beads, because it corresponds with the number of letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. Shaivite prayer beads often use 32 or its double, 64, while Vaishnavite prayer beads used by worshippers of Vishnu are made up of 108 beads.

The number 108 is a sacred number in the Hindu tradition overall because deities have 108 names. Thus, a mantra will be repeated 108 times using a mala made up of 108 beads of the same size. Shorter versions are made with a multiple of nine beads. The 108 names of a deity also are recited using a bead mala, and this recitation is a sacred ritual known as the nama-japa (worship of names). Bharata Natyam, the classical Hindu dance form, also honors the 108 names of deities through its 108 distinctive poses. In addition, the number 108 symbolizes the universe because it is the sum of the nine planets multiplied by the 12 signs of the zodiac.

Historical Background

The practice of using prayer beads is thought to have begun in ancient India, and the earliest depiction of their use appears on sandstone sculptures dated back to 185 BCE. Hindu religious literature refers to the use of prayer beads and deities are depicted in sculptures and paintings with malas.

Rudraksha beads may have been sacred to followers of indigenous religions and worshippers of Hindu deities in Java prior to their adoption by Shaivites in India. The earliest reference to the use of rudraksha beads to indicate worship of Shiva appears in the 11th century CE, during the Chola dynasty in South India, whose principal deity was Shiva. The Chola dynasty ruled a land-and-sea-based empire which included much of present-day Indonesia. Rudraksha beads began to be imported from Java to India, and Java continues to be the main source of these beads today.

Vaishnavites use prayer beads and wear garland-necklaces made from small beads from the stem and upper root of the tulsi or holy basil (*ocimum sanctum*) shrub. This practice was first mentioned in the literary work *Bhakti Mala* (Sacred Garland), which dates back to 1650 CE.

Influence of the Mala on Buddhism

Prayer beads probably were introduced into Buddhism from Hinduism, and are made from seeds of the bodhi tree or lotus plant, sandalwood and lacquered materials. Inlaid animal or even human bones also are used, and in the case of the latter, bones of holy men or lamas are preferred. Semi-precious gemstones also are used, particularly agate and carnelian. Malas are used throughout Asia (and worldwide) by Buddhists in ways similar to Hindus and have the same number of beads, although strings made up of fractions of 108 (such as 54 or 27) also are used. The shorter malas are worn on the wrist to prevent them from touching the ground during prostrations.

The 108 beads help the worshipper to repeat the 100 sacred names of the Buddha, and the extra beads are included in case the worshipper becomes absent-minded while counting. The string that passes through the beads symbolizes the penetrating power of all of the five Buddhas. The number 108 also represents the number of worldly desires, human passions and negative emotions that must be overcome before reaching the state of enlightenment (nirvana). By saying a mantra or prayer with each bead, worshippers hope to be purified of each of these earthly failings.

Hollywood converts to Buddhism Richard Gere and Steven Segal are often seen wearing bead malas in Public.

Prayer Beads in Western Asia

Since ancient times in Western Asia and North Africa, various methods were used to count prayers by followers of many religions. It is not clear if the use of prayer beads arose independently in Western Asia or was influenced by South Asian religions, but scholars lean towards the theory that Buddhist practice influenced the overall Christian and Muslim adoption of prayer beads.

Early Christian ascetics in Western Asia and Egypt already had begun using strung beads by the beginning of the Islamic period (mid-600s CE). Christian priests, nuns and lay worshippers may have used olive wood, glass or semi-precious gemstone beads, although evidence is sparse prior to the late medieval period.

Muslim mystic Sufis adopted the practice of using prayer beads by the 10th century CE, and the first Muslim prayer beads probably were made of wood, although glass, shells, and semi-precious materials such as pearls, coral. Amber and ivory as well as gemstones also were used.

The Jewish tradition in general did not adopt the use of prayer beads, regarding the practice pagan, but other methods of counting prayers are used such as fingering the fringes of the prayer shawl.

Sources and Additional Background

A Strong & A Prayer: How to Make and Use Prayer Beads, by Eleanor Wiley and Maggie Oman Shannon. Boston: Red Wheel, 2002.

Traditional Jewelry of India, by Oppi Untracht. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997.

[Apple Podcasts](#) | **AUDIO:** Count Your Blessings: The Art of Prayer Beads in Asia. Rubin Museum of Art

[ArtDaily](#) | Exhibition showcases the tremendous aesthetic and material diversity of prayer beads from across Asia

[Himalyan Institute](#) | **VIDEO:** How to Use a Mala

Mia ArtStories: [Rudrakshamala Necklace](#)

[Rubin Museum of Art](#) | Count Your Blessings

[Wikipedia](#) | Rudraksha

Questions and Activities

1. Pick up this string of rudrasksha beads. How would you describe these beads? (Think about color, size, shape, texture, and surface qualities.) How do they feel?
2. This string of beads was intended to be made into a necklace or rosary for use by priests or worshippers to assist them in prayer. (Watch a bit of the video, showing the use of the Mala.) Does your religion have anything like this? If so, how is it similar? How is it different? Can you think of any other religions that have something like this?
3. These beads have symbolic significance for those who use them. What types of symbols would be appropriate for your culture, tradition, belief system or philosophy?
4. (If on view) Compare this necklace to the [Gowri Shankaram Necklace](#), India, Tamil Nadu, 19th century, 92.132.1. Compare the size of the beads and the costly materials that have been added such as the gold rings between certain beads, and the large, heavily-worked gold medallion.

Collection Connections

(To come after gallery reinstatement)

Representations of Shiva

SHIVA NATARAJA (LORD OF THE DANCE)



Who Is Shiva?

Shiva is one of the principal gods in the Hindu pantheon, and is associated primarily with destruction and re-creation. He is one of the major manifestations of the divine, along with Brahma the Creator and Vishnu the Preserver, who form the Hindu trinity (trimurti, tree-moor-tee). For his worshippers, known as Shaivites (shay-vites), Shiva is the supreme deity, and his titles are Mahadeva (ma-ha-de-va, "great god"), Maheshvara (ma- ha-esh-va-ra, "great lord") and Parameshvara (pa-ram-esh-va-ra, "supreme lord").

The worship of Shiva, as with Vishnu, became widespread during the first millennium CE, but may have many precursors in the various indigenous religious traditions of India. These precursors range from male fertility symbols in the Indus Valley civilization and the Vedic (pre-Hindu) deity Rudra to local male deities who began to be associated as husbands of pre- eminent earth goddesses and female patroness deities in the latter part of the first millennium BCE.

What Is Going On in This Sculpture?

In this sculpture, Shiva is Nataraja (na-ta-ra-ja), the Lord of the Dance, and is performing his endless cosmic dance of destruction and re-creation. This dance represents the universal cycle of birth, death and rebirth (through reincarnation), or samsara (sam-sa-ra), which is reinforced by the ring of flames surrounding Shiva. This ring of flames symbolizes the eternal cosmos in which Shiva dances to help his worshippers achieve moksha (mok-sha), or the blissful state of release of their souls from the continuous cycle of samsara. The dance occurs at the center of the universe, which exists within the heart of each believer.

Shiva's depiction as the Lord of the Dance illustrates his supernatural ability to reconcile contradictions and opposing actions. In a paradox typical of Shiva's dual nature, he simultaneously appears still and active, and is perfectly balanced. The dynamic gestures of his graceful limbs express effortless perpetual motion. As he dances, the matted cords of his hair fly out from either side of his head and they represent the frenzied destructive force of the cosmic process. The remainder of his elaborate hairstyle is held perfectly in place upon his bejeweled head, which appears still along with his torso.

The prevalence of Nataraja iconography in Indian art has several possible explanations. The dancing form of Shiva was said to dwell in Chidambaram, an important South Indian religious center. Around 900, South Indian royalty began founding temples with Nataraja images carved into the exterior, to align themselves with the powerful religious authority of Chidambaram. Another interpretation springs from the cobras that encircle Shiva's arms as living jewelry and from the name for his raised leg position: "frightened by a snake." Cobras are symbols of protection and fecundity, and Shiva is associated with cremation grounds, deserted places where venomous snakes are said to slither freely. Although it appeared in sculpture as early as the fifth century, its present, world-famous form evolved under the rule of the Cholas.

What Symbolism Is Present in This Depiction of Shiva?

Multiple Arms

Many Hindu deities are depicted with multiple arms to represent divine or superhuman powers, and objects carried in each hand represent powers specific to a deity. Shiva's four arms also are symbolic of the four directions: north, south, east and west. In his rear left hand, Shiva grips the flame of destruction and transformation. His rear right hand holds a double-sided kettle drum made of two human skulls whose beat brings forth creation.

Shiva's hand gestures (mudras) communicate messages to his worshippers. His right front hand with palm facing the viewer is the gesture of reassurance (abhaya mudra, ab-ha-ya) and means "fear not: I am with you." The front left arm, which stretches across the front of his body, indicates the mercy and favor

of Shiva. It shows the path to release of the soul from the cycle of rebirths, particularly through the hand which points downward towards his left foot, a source of grace and refuge, unlike his right foot, which is destructive.

Head and Crown

Shiva's round, tranquil face and large almond-shaped eyes, elegantly- arched brows and full lips reflect the sublime detachment of a yogi, or a person in meditation. A small, vertical third eye on his forehead is his principal weapon of destruction and symbolizes his awesome power.

His crown is made from a bunch of cassia leaves, which come from a tree whose bark is used to make a type of cinnamon. The crown is topped with a datura flower, which has hallucinogenic qualities and has a history of use by Shaivite ascetics to induce ecstatic states. The leaves and flowers may symbolize fertility. A lion's face surrounded by a mane is depicted at the base of the leaves just above Shiva's forehead. This may be the "face of glory," or *kirttimukha* (*kir-tti-mu-kha*). It is one of the most popular motifs in Hindu-style jewelry and protects the wearer by averting malignant influences. Shiva is shown wearing it in other sculptures, though usually on the clasp of his girdle. His earrings, male lingam on the right and female yoni on the left, emphasize the duality of his androgynous nature, and reflect his power to re-create.

Many Shiva sculptures include within Shiva's matted locks of hair the crescent moon and a cobra rearing his hood, which symbolize time and its renewal. The crescent moon does not appear in this sculpture but the cobra appears wrapped around Shiva's right arms. Snakes are ancient symbols in Indian art, representing earth spirits as well as symbolizing fertility, and when associated with Shiva, they represent regeneration. An abstract representation of another common feature appears just to the right within Shiva's locks: a flattened almond shape that may be the mermaid- like river spirit Ganga, goddess of the river Ganges. Ganga is said to have come down from heaven with such force that it would have been destroyed had Shiva not caught her water in his hair. In some Puranic literature, Ganga is a consort of Shiva.

Body

The sacred thread of learning winds around Shiva's upper body, over his left shoulder and across his chest and back to below his right arms. The sacred thread is first worn at initiation ceremonies for young boys when they begin their studies with a guru, or religious teacher, and it symbolizes the search for knowledge about the way the path to blissful release (*moksha*) from the continuous cycles of birth, death and rebirth (reincarnation) or *samsara*. A scarf around his waist and flying out to the left where it attaches to the ring of fire is used to emphasize the vigor of the dance. A tiger skin covers his lower torso and upper thighs.

Although depicted in human form, Shiva is distinguished from mortals by his perfect form. His broad shoulders, narrow waist and smooth, elegant limbs are the personification of eternal youth. His scant clothing reveals the beauty of his idealized form.

Who Is Shiva Dancing on Top of?

Shiva Nataraja and the surrounding ring of flames rests on a lotus pedestal. Most sculptures are based on a double-lotus flower pedestal but this reproduction features a single lotus. The flowering lotus symbolizes the soul's escape from ignorance and achieving spiritual understanding and purity.

Under Shiva's right foot is a childlike figure who, in previous times, was described as "dwarflike." The creature's identity is still debated. Some scholars believe it represents a dwarf, which turns up in early texts as an assistant to Shiva's dance. Others argue it is a vanquished demon, named Apasmara or Mushalagan, that personifies ignorance. Apasmara (ah-pas-maar-ra), the demon of ignorance, symbolizes the delusion of human or worldly life. Apasmara probably originated as one of many male guardian spirits venerated in the pre-Vedic, pre-Hindu indigenous religions of India, particularly that of the forest-dwellers.

How Did Shiva Become Lord of the Dance?

One story in the Shiva Purana about how Shiva became Lord of the Dance begins with the decision by Shiva and Vishnu to enter a dense forest in South India. This forest was the home of large numbers of sages of the indigenous pre-Vedic, pre-Hindu religious traditions. These independent shamanistic figures venerated animal and male guardian spirit figures, and had supernatural powers that posed a challenge to the gods, and Shiva and Vishnu wished to bring these sages under their control. The sages were angered by their efforts, and tried to destroy Shiva by invoking the aid of their spirit figures through sacrificial fires and offerings. Vishnu was not the target of their anger because he was disguised as a beautiful woman.

First the sages called upon a fierce tiger who rushed upon Shiva, but smiling gently, Shiva seized it and with the nail of his little finger, stripped off its skin, and wrapped it about himself like a silken cloth. Then the sages called upon a monstrous serpent, but Shiva seized the serpent and turned into a garland around his neck. To celebrate, he began to dance to express his power to destroy false knowledge. The sages then called upon a male guardian spirit of the earth, who appeared in the shape of a monstrous demon to attack Shiva. Seizing the demon and throwing him underfoot, Shiva broke the demon's back and upon it resumed his dance to express his power to destroy ignorance and create new understandings about spiritual knowledge.

What Is the Purpose of Sculpture in Hindu Art?

Deities are the single most important subject matter in Hindu art. Their depiction in sculptural form serves a distinct purpose: they provide symbolic places of residence for deities. The sculptures are not the gods themselves. In Hindu philosophy, the physical representation of deities serve as teaching tools to aid spiritual beginners (sometimes described in Hindu literature as the “spiritually unevolved”) to visualize the divine. Thus, they are made according to traditional iconographic guidelines that determine the proportions of the body as well as the symbolic meanings of the stance, hand gestures, and adornments.

The symbolism of the images, along with their corresponding stories, teach about the nature of the divine, how the universe came into existence, the purpose of life, and ways to achieve spiritual liberation. The goal is to learn to be able to achieve true understanding of spiritual matters without the aid of images.

The Art Cart Shiva Nataraja

This sculpture is a modern reproduction of Chola-style (9th-13th century CE) bronze statues of Shiva Nataraja, and similar reproductions are popular all over India. Reproductions are handcrafted by artisans using the lost-wax method of casting. The quality of the reproductions varies by the quality of the metal with which they are cast, and in some cases “imitation bronze” is used. This particular statue was cast in bronze by an artisan in the vicinity of Chennai.

How Are Images of Shiva Nataraja Used?

Worshippers of Shiva place Chola-style images of Shiva Nataraja in their homes on small altars for personal worship. The features of this representation of Shiva are a visual sermon for worshippers, who use them as a reminder of the particular meanings embodied in this form of Shiva, and as a guide in reaching their ultimate goal of devotion to Shiva: to find the dance within themselves in order to achieve liberation from the unending cycle of birth, death, rebirth (reincarnation), or samsara, and to attain blissful release (moksha) from samsara.

Sculptures such as this reproductions are made in large quantities for sale throughout India, and are sold near temples and tourist sites. They come in various sizes, ranging from very large to very small, and are purchased for devotional purposes by pilgrims or as souvenirs by tourists.

Sources and Additional Background

[Freer Sackler](#) | India: Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)

[Khan Academy](#) | Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja)

[Metropolitan Museum](#) | Shiva as Lord of Dance (Nataraja)

[Mia ArtStories](#) | Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)

[SmartHistory.org](#) | Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja)

[Wikipedia](#) | Nataraja



Shiva Nataraja in procession. (photo: Neil Greentree. Source: Smithsonian Institution)

Questions and Activities

1. Compare this smaller reproduction image of Shiva Nataraja to the sculpture in the gallery. How are they alike? How are they different?
2. Look at the two figures in both sculptures. Describe what the larger figure is doing. Describe what is happening to the smaller figure. Based on what you see, how would you describe the relationship between the two?

3. What do you see that suggests Shiva is supernatural or divine? What aspects do you see that are human? What do you see that makes you say that?
4. Look for other sculptures in the gallery portraying Shiva. Choose one and compare the different ways in which Shiva is portrayed. Look at his attributes, hand gestures, position and posture, attire and adornment, and surroundings (if applicable).
5. Imagine yourself taking this pose (or try it). How would it feel to be able to hold this position without faltering?
6. Look for other dancing images in the galleries. What do you see that is similar? What is different?

Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation.

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

What Are They?

Literally translated, Amar Chitra Katha means “Immortal Picture Stories.” These are popular comic books read by many school-aged children and adults alike in India as an entertaining way to learn about Indian mythology, history, politics and religion. Fully illustrated with English text, innumerable volumes of Amar Chitra Katha comics exist. A small sampling is available on the Art Cart. Like most comics, they are printed using inexpensive paper and inks, making them quite affordable for the general public.

The influence of the art of Indian miniature paintings is evident in the detailed and depictions of people, animals, objects, buildings and settings, which combine realism and symbolism. The clothing, buildings and means of transportation do not attempt to be historically accurate for the eras in which the stories are set, but rather combine styles from various periods of history. Such depictions reflect the social circumstances and norms as well as aesthetics and design styles of recent centuries, and also the influences of contemporary popular culture, both South Asian as well as international. Although Rajasthani-style miniature paintings occasionally used continuous narrative, the comic book format in India is adopted from modern European and European-American popular culture.

Which Volumes Are on the Art Cart?

There are five Amar Chitra Katha comics on the Art Cart. Here is a link to their [online store](#). See the attached descriptions from the inside cover of each volume for additional information:

- **Ramayana (RAA-may-ah-nah)** – An epic poem composed orally in South India, later said to be translated into the Sanskrit language by Valmiki between 400 and 200 BCE. Set in the India of about 1000 BCE, it is the story of Rama, the ideal Hindu man and king, whose wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, the king of Lanka (probably present-day Sri Lanka).
- **Mahabharata (Ma-haa-BHAAR-ah-tah)** – Considered to be the longest epic poem in the world, it was composed orally after 400 BCE and said to be written down by Bhagavan Vyasa between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Opinions vary widely as to the dates of the events detailed in the epic—anywhere between 3012 and 1500 BCE. It consists of a series of stories and poems woven together, and one of the main episodes is the appearance of Krishna (the eighth incarnation of Vishnu).
- **Krishna** – A series of stories describing the circumstances of his birth and upbringing, and highlighting Krishna’s humanity and divine heroics.
- **The Sons of Shiva**– A series of stories about three sons of Shiva: Ayyappan, Ganesha, and Karttikeya.
- **Dasha Avatar: The Ten Incarnations of Lord Vishnu**–Stories of the ten primary avatars of Lord Vishnu.

INDIAN GARLANDS



What Are They?

Garlands are hung around the neck and over the chest like a necklace, and are known as mala in North India, and malai in South India. The word mala has become almost a generic term in India for almost any long necklace, and when made of other materials, the word is modified to include the word for the material, such as moti-mala, meaning a pearl necklace. The word haar also is used to designate a necklace, and another common term for a flower garland is p'hool haar (flower necklace).

How Are Garlands Used?

South Asians of all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds enjoy making, wearing and giving others a variety of types of garlands.

Flower garlands have been used since ancient times in South Asia for personal adornment and to honor others. They are used in similar ways in many other cultures around the world, such as the Hawaiian lei.

As items used in self-beautification, flower garlands may have been amongst the earliest forms of personal adornment. In South Asia, flower heads are strung to make head, neck, wrist and other flower ornaments, and flowers are woven together to create wreaths for the hair. The cooling effect of fresh flowers, as well as their beauty and fragrance, imparts to the wearer an intoxicating feeling or mood of contentment and pleasure.

Flower garlands are used by hosts to welcome visitors and guests. They also are given to indicate respect for dignitaries at public events, and are presented to award recipients as well as performers at cultural

events to show recognition and appreciation. They also are used to distinguish members of wedding parties, particularly brides and grooms, for whom they represent symbols of good luck as well as fertility.

What Flowers Are Commonly Used?

Most garlands are made with fresh flowers and other plant materials found in the immediate environment or cultivated for their beauty, fragrance, symbolism and marketability. They can be made of a single kind of flower or a combination of several flowers, alternating in type, color and size.

The most commonly-used flowers are:

- the golden-colored marigold (geynda)
- the yellow-colored champak (blossoms of the michelia, an evergreen tree which is in the magnolia family, and the basis of the French perfume Joy by Jean Patou, created in 1935)
- the pink or yellow lotus (padma or kanwal)
- the white or yellow jasmine (chambeli or yasmeen)
- the rose (gul or gulab) in all pink and red shades.

What Other Materials Are Used?

Many artificial flower garlands are now used, as are garlands made with other materials. These materials include:

- shola pith, a milky-white sponge wood, elaborately carved with floral designs
- sandalwood shavings
- cloves
- silk cocoons
- various kinds of handmade and colored fancy paper tinsel and metallic ribbon
- cotton fabric

Plastic or glass beads are used, often to replicate pearls, and sequins are used to replicate gold and silver. Unused banknotes, folded and joined in decorative arrangements, sometimes are used in garlands, especially those worn by bridegrooms.

What Do Flowers Symbolize?

In many cultures, flowers are a general symbol of creation, fertility, life and regeneration, and that is the basis of their use in South Asian cultures. The earliest depictions in art are found in ancient Buddhist sculptures, where flowers and flower garlands hang from venerated, sacred trees or decorate domes of stupas.

What Do Flowers Symbolize in Hinduism?

In the Hindu traditions, flowers are seen as an appropriate offering to honor, appease and enlist the aid of feared and revered ancestors, spirits and gods. Flowers are ritually and sacrificially pure, and thus are suitable for adorning an image of a deity, and decorating temple shrines during ceremonies. Flowers brought into a Hindu home are first offered symbolically to the household deity. Petals or flower heads used in worship are scattered over the object of veneration from cupped hands, and flower garlands are used to adorn the image of the deity. When flowers fade, they are consigned to water because of their association with the sacred.

For Hindus, flowers symbolize the blessings and favor of deities. Their spirits are believed to reside in flower garlands, particularly that of Shridevi, the goddess of wealth and knowledge, whose main symbol is the lotus. Shridevi generally is identified with Lakshmi, consort of Vishnu the Preserver, and personifies beauty, prosperity, good fortune and victory. Divine figures, whether in traditional sculptures or modern posters, generally are depicted wearing flower garlands.

The Hindu god of love, Kama, who is identified with the Greek Eros and Roman Cupid, is said to tip his arrow of passion with one of his five favorite flowers: gigantic swallow wort, jasmine, mango, cobra's saffron, and champak. These five flowers represent the five senses, and the Kamasutra (the famous Indian manual on the art of love) provides many recommendations on how to use them. One recommendation to wives is that they welcome husbands home with garlands made with these five flowers.

What Do Flowers Symbolize in Islam?

In Muslim culture, heaven is presented as a garden lush with vegetation and flowing with streams of clear water. Earthly flowers therefore are reminiscent of the heavenly garden, and the rose in particular has mystic symbolism: the flower represents perfection and the thorns represent the obstacles a person must overcome to perfect her or his soul. The jasmine flower also is popular in Muslim culture, and is the official flower of Pakistan.

How Are They Made?

Flower garlands can be and are made by anyone. In India, most garlands are created by men and women of the mali caste, which specializes in this craft. The name of this caste is derived from the word mala, and it is a pan-Indian hereditary caste, low in the social hierarchy of Hindu society. Traditionally, members of the mali caste cultivated vegetable crops, and a sub-caste phulmali (p'hool mali) grew and sold flowers.

Members of the phulmali likely developed the specialized skill of making garlands as well as many other forms of fresh-flower ornament and decoration. They provide flowers for use in Hindu temple worship,

and make garlands to be used as offerings to deities. They are found outside any temple or shrine, no matter how isolated or small, making and selling fresh flower garlands, although some of the larger, wealthier temples, where elaborate daily rituals are performed, employ staff malis to make garlands needed for ceremonial use. Otherwise, malis display their floral creations for sale in the flower bazaars of towns and cities.

A long, sharp pointed needle threaded with strong cotton string is used to make flower garlands. Some flowers are held by a knot to the string while others are pierced through their densest part, the ovule.

What Designs Are Used?

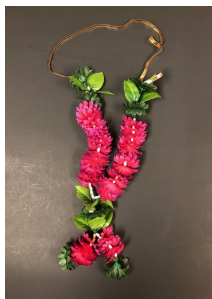
The design of flower and other types of garlands are limited only by the imagination and creativity of their makers.

Generally, a large decorative and symbolic element hangs at the front, such as a larger flower or tinsel tassel. This element corresponds to the placement of a terminal bead of a rosary prayer bead. It also may take various amuletic shapes to serve as symbols of protection from evil. A common shape is the arrowhead which, since prehistoric times, has symbolized defense because of its actual usage as a weapon against powerful predatory animals. Symbolic arrowheads were thought to have the power to protect against spirits as well as other humans. The Art Cart pearl garland features an arrowhead amuletic shape made of fancy paper, tinsel and fabric trimmings. This amuletic shape frequently appears in jewelry.

The Art Cart Garlands

These garlands were purchased for the Art Cart by CIF guide Nahid Khan at an Indian handicrafts shop located in the “Little India” retail area on Gerrard Street East in her second hometown of Toronto, Canada.

Art Cart Flower Garland



This is an artificial flower garland made with cotton flowers, plastic greenery and beads strung on cotton and hung on a ribbon. Artificial flower garlands are used by members of the South Asian immigrant community for their convenience and kept as keepsakes after the special event. The dark pink cotton

flowers are generic enough to represent either the lotus or rose, and thus are suitable for use by people of various religious or ethnic backgrounds.

Art Cart Pearl Garland



This garland is made with plastic pearls, fancy paper, fabric trimmings and tinsel, and also hangs on a ribbon. It is used by members of the South Asian immigrant community primarily at weddings, and typically is worn by Muslim bridegrooms. (Muslim brides, like brides of other religions in South Asia, wear elaborate gold and gemstone jewelry.)

The use of this type of garland is said to have been inspired by a famous royal Mughal wedding, in about 1616, between Prince Khurram (the future emperor Shah Jahan, son of the emperor Jahangir) to the lady Arjumand (whose royal title upon the accession of her husband to the throne was Mumtaz Mahal, “the chosen one of the palace”).

At the wedding of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, her grandfather who was variously titled I’timad Khan or I’timad ud-Daula (the ‘pillar of the state’) and was the emperor Jahangir’s prime minister, presented his new grandson-in-law with a magnificent garland of the world’s best Basra pearls, with the special permission of the emperor. The sumptuary court tradition of the time was that only the emperor wore pearls of that caliber, certainly at court and other official events, and pearl dealers generally reserved such pearls for sale to the emperor. The bridegroom Shah Jahan would have appreciated such a fine gift as he was a trained gemologist.

The magnificence of the pearls given to the prince and the exception made for the occasion of this royal wedding, and the later fame of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal through the romantic story of the Taj Mahal, inspired the development of the custom of wearing pearl garland necklaces by Muslim bridegrooms. The Taj Mahal was commissioned by Shah Jahan to honor Mumtaz Mahal after she died giving birth of their 14th child in 1631, and construction took place between 1632-52. Shah Jahan actively participated in the design of the marble mausoleum (in which he also is buried) and contributed his knowledge (as well as wealth) in gems, which were inlaid into the building along with semi-precious stones.

Sources and Additional Background

[Garland](#) | Mitraja Vyas, “Mala: The floral garlands of India,” December 2017.

[Little India Directory](#) | Razy Shah, “The Ultimate Guide to Indian Flower Garlands,” May 2015.

Traditional Jewelry of India, by Oppi Untracht. New York: Harry J. Abrams, 1997.

The Great Moghuls, by Bamber Gascoigne. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

India and the Mughal Dynasty, by Valerie Berinstain. New York: Harry J. Abrams, 2001. Originally published in Paris by Gallimard in 1997.

Questions and Activities

1. Look at the garlands. How would you describe them? How are they similar and how are they different?
2. Try on the flower garland, or have someone put it on you. How do you feel wearing it? How might a fresh flower garland feel in comparison to this artificial flower garland?
3. Now try on the pearl garland, or have someone put it on you. How would you compare how the pearl garland feels with the artificial flower garland? How might a real pearl garland or large necklace feel in comparison to this artificial pearl garland?
4. Does your culture, or another culture you know, have traditions similar to the South Asian use of flowers, flower garlands and other types of garlands such as the pearl garland? How are these traditions practiced?
5. What would you use to design your own garland?

Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation.

BANGLES



What Are They?

The word “bangle” is thought to derive from the Hindi word “bungri,” meaning glass. The bangles on this Art Cart were purchased in India in 2018 by Pujan Gandhi, Assistant Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art. They come in three colors: pink, purple, and blue. (The purple bangles have been opened, but keep the pink and blue bangles in their plastic packages.) Each bangle set has three distinct designs and widths. They are encrusted with colored and gold glitter to provide an eye-catching display to the wearer.

Where Did They Originate?

Bangles originated from the Indian subcontinent as early as the 3rd century BCE, and beaded jewelry in India has been found dating back to the Indus Valley civilization. Early bangles were made of sea shells, stone, bone, and wood, and then copper, bronze, and ivory.

The ownership of elaborately jeweled objects by people in positions of power in India can be traced back to the Mughal empire, which is considered the “golden age” of jewelry in the region. Objects with gems not only included jewelry, but also daggers, clothes, hookahs, and other items. They denoted the power and divine rule of the royalty who owned them. It was during this time period that India became the center of gem trade worldwide, which included diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires. In fact, India was the only source for diamonds in the world until the 1700s. Trade ports in Goa and elsewhere allowed gems to be transported to the West, creating a connection between the production of these gems in India and the value increasingly placed on the Indian jewelry aesthetic in Europe.

Styles and traditions of bangles vary depending on the region. Historically, women would wear bangles upon getting married. They are typically worn in pairs, one on each arm—traditionally it is rare for one to be worn by itself.

How Are They Used?

Jewelry can be seen as a form of adornment in both weddings and in Indian dance, such as bharatanatyam (major genre of Indian classical dance that originated in Tamil Nadu) and kathak (the Hindi name for one of the eight major forms of Indian classical dance).

Traditionally, this type of jewelry is heavy, large, and usually made of gold, sometimes with diamonds or other gems. The jewelry and clothing are reflective of each other—elaborate, intricate, sparkling, and meant to signify wealth and prosperity. It is common for families to buy their daughters gold jewelry as children and upon getting married, as the gold itself holds lasting value. Some families considered this jewelry a form of “insurance” in the case of divorce or the death of a woman’s husband in an age when women were banned from owning property. There are similarities between how women adorn themselves for weddings or dance and how idols are adorned in temples as part of religious ceremonies.

Bangles like those on the Art Cart are most commonly used during weddings and engagement ceremonies, when brides wear stacks of multiple bangles on their arms, often in addition to more expensive gold bangles. The colored stacks you see on the Art Cart are how these bangles would typically be worn. There are a few bangles in each set that are larger and more intricate than the others, and these are often worn at either end of the stack.

Glass bangles like those found on the Art Cart tend to be relatively inexpensive, so if they break they can be thrown away or replaced. It is increasingly common for these types of bangles to be made of plastic instead. Some bangles are more expensive and elaborate; they are often made of gold or silver and may be encrusted with gems and pearls.

The traditional colors for these types of glass bangles are red and green, but today a wide variety of colors are available. Here are how bangles are worn in different parts of India:

In Maharashtra

The bridal chooda is made of green glass bangles in odd numbers. These are worn along with solid gold bangles called patlya and carved kadas called tode.

In Southern states

While gold is considered most auspicious in southern states of India, some communities see the brides wear green coloured glass bangles along with the gold ones, since green signifies fertility and prosperity.

In Gujarat and Rajasthan

In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the bride's mother gifts her a pair of ivory bangles and only after wearing these ivory bangles, the bridal couple can perform the 'saptapati' ritual or saat phere to complete the marriage ceremony.

In Punjab

The red and white chooda worn by Punjabi brides is quite popular and you can see young brides enthusiastically flaunting them even in western wear. The chooda is basically 21 slender ivory bangles in white and red decorated decorated with stones. In fact the bangle-wearing ceremony is held in the morning on the day of the wedding.

A puja is performed by the pandit wherein the bride's maternal uncles give her a set of chooda after washing them in milk. As per tradition, the brides are supposed to wear them for minimum of 40 days and then continue to wear them for a year; in some communities even for 15 months. These bangles are usually worn in larger size as the newly married girls are going to wear them till one year. Another interesting ritual associated with the chooda ceremony is putting the 'kalire' or tinkling bells. These dome shaped streamers with tinkling silver and gold bells are tied to the chooda by the bride's cousins and friends. They are like blessings for the bride as she starts a new life and also to remind her of her old friends.

In West Bengal and Odisha

Bengali and Odiya woman wear white bangles made up of conch-shell known as shaka, while pola are red bangles made up of red corals. In earlier days, the affluent ladies used to wear shakhas made of elephant teeth.

Sources and Additional Background

[Cultural India](#) | History of Indian Jewelry and its Origin

[Culture Trip](#) | Mughals, Myth and Murder | 500 Years of Indian Jewelry

[Met Museum](#) | Jewelry and Power: Notes from a Friday Focus Lecture

[Met Museum](#) | Rites of Passage in the Indian Jewelry Tradition

[National Museum, New Delhi](#) | Jewellery Gallery

[New York Times](#) | India's Influence on Jewelry Endures

[Times of India](#) | The role of bangles in a traditional Indian wedding

[Utsavpedia](#) | Glass Bangles

Indian bangles over time, from the Met collection:

1. [Met Museum](#) | *Bangle*, 1500–500 B.C. (copper)
2. [Met Museum](#) | *Bangle*, 9th–10th century (bronze)
3. [Met Museum](#) | *Bracelet*, 18th–19th century (jade (nephrite) with gold, enamel, and stone inlays)
4. [Met Museum](#) | *Bracelet with Makara Head Terminals*, 19th century (enamel, gold; set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and agate)
5. [Met Museum](#) | *Pair of Bangles (kada) by Bhagat*, 2012 (platinum, set with diamonds and pearls)

Other Indian bangles, various collections:

[Dallas Museum of Art](#) | *Elephant-head bangle*, 19th century (enamel, diamond, ruby, amethyst, gemstones, and pearls)

[Indian Museum, Kolkata](#) | *Bangle*, 20th century (brass)

[Indian Museum, Kolkata](#) | *Bangle*, 20th century (wood)

Questions and Activities

1. What is one or two words you would use to describe these bangles?
2. What pieces of jewelry do you associate with celebrations like weddings or other milestones in life?
3. How do you think of fine jewelry versus inexpensive/“fashion” jewelry? How do you place value and worth on pieces of jewelry that you own?
4. How would you feel about wedding jewelry breaking and only being used temporarily?

Collection Connections

(To be updated after gallery reinstallation.)

- [Bracelet](#), c. 1000 BCE. Unknown artist, Thailand, 2001.6.5.1

- [Bracelet in the Shape of a Conch](#), c. 6th-2nd century BCE. Unknown artist, Thailand, 2001.6.6
- [Bracelet](#), c. 1950. A'shiwi (Zuni), 90.58.55

INDIAN TEXTILES

Introduction

The popularity of Indian textiles is evidenced in the number of words that have made their way into English: calico, pajama, gingham, dungaree, chintz, and khaki.

Textiles played a critical role in the birth and development of Indian civilization. It was almost certainly in that subcontinent that cotton was first spun into thread and woven into cloth, some 8,000 years ago, and it was the textile industry that formed the basis of the expansion of India's economy and population. Even today, two centuries after the Industrial Revolution, more than 10 percent of the cloth produced in India is woven on hand looms, employing over 4 million people...

There is evidence that Indian textiles were being exported as early as the 5th to 4th centuries B.C. But with the maritime expansion of Europe, this outflow turned into a flood, reaching a peak between 1795 and 1799 when the East India Company was exporting around 1.5 million pieces of cloth per year...Bengal silk handkerchiefs with checks, spots and other patterns became known as "bandanas," from the Hindi "bandhana" meaning to tie — a reference to the tie-dyeing process used to pattern them. Increasingly high tariffs were imposed on all Indian cloths coming to Britain in the 18th century to protect the domestic textile industry. As these printed handkerchiefs became a must-have accessory at all levels of society, from aristocratic ladies and gentlemen to farm laborers and sailors, their sale was banned between 1701 and 1826 — although tens of thousands of them were smuggled into the country.

Checked cotton cloths from Madras were also exported by the East India Company in huge numbers and found particular fortune when they were re-exported to West Africa and the Caribbean, where they became essential fashion accessories as headties for women and now form part of traditional dress in some Caribbean islands. These fabrics are a rare example of a classic Indian fabric that remains popular both at home and overseas

On the Art Cart, we have six examples of textiles or outfits from India.

Block-Printed Textile



Block printing is known to have been used in India since at least the 12th century, although this method of decoration is thought to be around 2,000 years old. Printing designs on to fabric most likely originated in China about 4,500 years ago, it was on the Indian subcontinent where hand-blocked fabric reached its highest visual expression. Indians possessed unparalleled expertise in the secrets of natural plant dyes, particularly with mordants (metallic salts that both create color and allow it to adhere to fabric). The Art Cart block-printed textile is black, with gold floral designs printed on it.

A series of combinations of mordant and resist stamping and dyeing enabled Indian printers to create uniquely complex designs, coveted from Southeast Asia and palaces of Mughal emperors to the capitals of Western Europe. Between outside influences and the diversity of the subcontinent's own indigenous communities and tribes, India has yielded one of the most magnificent pattern vocabularies ever.

Block prints are done by eye, and telltale signs of the human hand, even imperfections, are part of the ineffable humanity and beauty of the craft. Here is a summary of the process to block print fabric:

1. Cotton fabric is purchased at the market and soaked in water for 24-48 hours. This removes some of the starchiness of the fibers.
2. The artisans beat the wet lengths of cotton on river stones worn down by years of use to make them softer, and then lay them out to dry and be naturally bleached by the sun (if printing on white fabric).
3. A design, either traditional or modern, is drawn onto paper and then transferred to a perfectly smooth block of wood. The block can be sourced from many types of trees (mango wood is a popular choice), but it always needs to be 2-3 inches thick to prevent warping. A separate block must be made for each color incorporated into the design. Only the most experienced carvers can work on the complex designs. And the most intricate details are always saved for last to avoid damaging the delicate lines in the process.

4. After the fabric has been cut to size, the colors have been prepared, and the blocks are all ready, the artisans can start to print. They will lay the fabric out across a long table and draw a chalk reference line.
5. They dip the block into the dye, press it firmly onto the fabric, and then hit it with a mallet. This process is repeated over and over again, by only the steadiest hands, until the pattern has completely covered the length of fabric. If there are multiple colors in the design, the artisan lets each color dry before applying the next, each with a new stamp. It is extremely time consuming and requires precision so that there are no breaks in the motif.
6. Once the printing is complete and the color has set, the fabric is thoroughly washed and dried.

Boy's Kurta and Dhoti



A kurta is a long loose-fitting collarless shirt-style originating in the Indian subcontinent and worn in many regions of South Asia. A dhoti is a traditional men's garment. It is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually around 4.5 metres (15 ft) long, wrapped around the waist and the legs and then knotted at the waist. This kurta and dhoti are a more formal style that a boy might wear at a wedding, for example.

The kurta and dhoti on the Art Cart are a vivid yellow, with red, gold, and green trim. The outfit is accompanied by a headband with a peacock feather and a wooden flute. Both the peacock feather and the flute are references to Krishna, so the outfit may also be intended as a Krishna costume to be worn in a performance. Krishna is an avatar of the god Vishnu. As a youth, the cowherd Krishna became renowned as a lover, the sound of his flute prompting the gopis (wives and daughters of the cowherds) to leave their homes to dance ecstatically with him in the moonlight.

The kurta was donated by CIF guide Manju Parikh, who purchased it in India.

Boy's Kurta and Salwar



This outfit is not as formal or fancy as the boy's "Krishna" outfit. This outfit is for an older boy. A kurta is a long loose-fitting collarless shirt-style originating in the Indian subcontinent and worn in many regions of South Asia. This kurta is red and pink, popular colors for boys in India.

Salwar is the generic term used to describe the white cotton lower garment. These pants developed in different regions. The earliest form of the salwar originated in Central Asia; then its use spread to Afghanistan, India, Iran, the Arab world, Turkey and wherever the Turks established their empires. The Ottomans spread the use of the salwar throughout their empire. The use of the salwar in the Punjab region has been the result of influences from the Middle East, Central Asian Turks, and finally, the Afghans. In India, the term salwar includes the Sindhi suthan, Punjabi suthan, Dogri pajamma and the churidar.

Both men and women wear salwar.

Pashmina



A pashmina is a woven shawl, typically made of cashmere. Woven shawls in South Asia have been worn as early as the Indus Valley Civilisation. A famous example is the statue of a priest-king found at Mohenjo-Daro, who is draped in a shawl decorated with trefoil patterns. The Art Cart pashmina is machine-made, rather than handwoven, and it is decorated with a paisley design.

Pashmina is a type of cashmere wool coming from cashmere goats—‘cashmere’ is an old spelling of ‘Kashmir,’ the region near the Himalayas. The wild goats whose fur is used for pashmina originate in a region in the Himalayas that is part of Tibet. Their undercoat is shed in the spring and is collected by combing them. The procedure of making handloom pashmina includes three processes—spinning, weaving, and dyeing.

The nomadic Changpa people are the traditional producers of pashmina. The vast majority of cashmere is currently produced in China, although only a small fraction of this is pashmina, which is considered a particularly fine and soft type of cashmere.

In the West, pashmina is simply known as ‘cashmere.’ Shawls and scarves commonly sold in the West are often called pashminas, whether they’re made from pashmina wool or not. This difference in common usage has led to a bit of confusion outside Asia over what pashmina actually is and how it is valued differently from other types of cashmere. The pashmina industry is considered to be founded by those with connections to Central Asia, where it is thought weavers came from and used the wool they found in the Kashmir region.

Worn by elites for centuries, Kashmiri shawls are fascinating documents of style, craft, and meticulous labor. Their construction involved a complicated chain of command, including government inspectors, merchants, workshop owners, pattern makers, and finally, weavers. Weavers sat on the ground at their looms and followed the instruction of an individual who read aloud from a written pattern code that described each line of weaving, which in this case produced a design dominated by paisley, palmette, and blossoming tree motifs. Many shawls from this period have multiple pieces of cloth that have been woven separately and stitched together to create the overall design.

In the early 18th century, as the British East India Company began engaging in regular trade with the Indian subcontinent and China, soldiers returned from the colonies with cashmere shawls. Originally the weavings were worn by men in Kashmir, but once imported to England and Scotland the shawls immediately became a fashion statement for wealthy ladies.

As Josephine Bonaparte began to sport “les cachemires,” the trend expanded through France and across the ocean to America. The shawls, however, were astronomically expensive. A biographer of Sir Walter Scott records the bridal trousseau presented to Scott’s French bride in 1797, including a Kashmir shawl that cost 50 guineas (about \$100), a huge sum at the time. The high costs of imported shawls encouraged European textile manufacturers to imitate Kashmiri designs, sacrificing quality for low costs.

Paisley Design

Most Kashmiri shawls were adorned with botehs, or buta. Boteh, literally meaning “flower,” refers to the motif of a tightly-packed pyramid of flowers above a vase. A kidney-shaped teardrop, the boteh is believed by scholars to be a fusion of a stylized pine, fern, or cypress tree. While the motif originated as plant-inspired, in Europe the design was thought to be a protective charm to ward off demons.

In the early 19th century, when weavers of the town of Paisley, Scotland, began manufacturing shawls en masse, the boteh became known as “paisley.” Scotland took weaving from a cottage industry to an industrialized process with the advent of the jacquard loom, a mechanical loom invented by Joseph Marie Jacquard in 1804 that simplifies the process of manufacturing textiles with complex patterns. The fashion for paisley shawls first peaked in Europe around 1800, and by the mid-19th century it had spread throughout America.

Salwar and Kameez



Salwar (also Shalwar) are loose pajama-like trousers. The legs are wide at the top, and narrower at the bottom. They are pleated at the waist and held up by a drawstring or an elastic belt. The salwar on the Art Cart are black cotton, with very long legs and narrow bottoms. According to CIF Guide Nahid Khan, the legs narrow purposely to bunch up around the ankles, giving an impression of wearing bangles or rings around the ankles.

The kameez is a long shirt or tunic. The side seams are left open below the waist-line (known as the chaak), which gives the wearer greater freedom of movement. The Art Cart kameez is decorated with beading.

This outfit is typical of women's everyday wear. These are more commonly worn than saris today, especially by middle-aged and younger women. Salwars and kameez can be casual or formal, again depending on the materials used and the amount of work put into it.

Woman's Sari



What Is It?

A sari (also spelled saree) is a garment worn by women living in South Asia or of South Asian ancestry, and is widely recognized throughout the world. It is a rectangular piece of woven cloth, measuring about 4 feet wide and between 12 and 27 feet long. It is unstitched and uncut, and can be worn in many different ways by draping it around the body. A sari is usually worn over a petticoat and a tight fitting blouse.

The sari is worn regardless of religious background of the wearer and is not associated with any specific religion.

A Brief History of the Sari

The word sari is believed to be an anglicized form of the Prakrit word *sadi*, possibly derived from the Sanskrit word *sati* meaning, "strip of cloth." Saris are thought to have originated in the Indus Valley as early as 2800 BCE. For millennia, Indian history was passed down through an oral tradition, which includes the famous epic poems of the Vedas, rather than through writing. Because these spoken histories evolved over the centuries, the origins of the sari are obscure, but they may be up to 5000 years old. Some clues to the garment's derivation may be found in ancient sculpture and Mughal illuminated texts, which depict both men and women in various kinds of draped clothing.

The sari may have developed from an older style of Indian dress called the *dhoti*, which is another simple, unstitched garment still worn by Indian men today. Relief sculptures at Buddhist sites dating from the 2nd or 3rd century BCE depict both men and women dressed in *dhotis* wrapped around their waists and legs and held in place with elaborate belts. It appears that wearing *dhotis* fell out of favor with Indian women beginning in the 14th century CE, and a new garment appear, which was comprised

of a wrapped veshti around the lower half of the body, and a second shawl-like garment known as a mundanai that covered the torso.

Some argue that the sari as we know it in modern times became fully developed during the British colonial era (mid-1700s – 1947), when the European conception of standards in personal dress was introduced to India. It is also debated whether the choli, a blouse worn under the sari, became widespread in response to the tastes of the British colonial government. Around the 19th century, the lower and upper garments were mostly replaced by a single piece of cloth wrapped, folded, and draped around the entire body. Worn over the choli and a plain, long petticoat, this is the modern sari.

Today, the sari is the preferred mode of dress for 75% of Indian women, and saris can be made from any fabric and draped in countless styles for any occasion, from heavily embroidered silk for weddings, to breezy cotton for housework on a hot summer day, to regional styles of fabric and drape for state affairs.

How Is It Made?

Saris are from a variety of fibers, most frequently cotton and silk. Saris are sometimes made with muslin or wool, and in the 20th century synthetic fabrics came into widespread use. Although mechanical looms now often used, traditional hand weaving and decorating methods are still sought after. Kahdi, or homespun, cotton cloth owes some of its sustained popularity to Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian independence movement, which stressed resourcefulness and self-sufficiency.

There are millions of sari weavers throughout India, and many of them work on large handlooms. A weaver will begin by purchasing or hand-twisting his or her thread. If the weaver specializes in ikat or patola fabrics, he will stretch out the warp and weft threads before stringing them onto the loom and dye them. When he weaves these colored threads together, they will produce a carefully planned floral or geometric pattern. To make zari fabric, a weaver will incorporate thin strands of gold or silver into her design, while simpler fabrics may feature checks, stripes, or small motifs woven into the ground of the sari. In different parts of India, saris may be woven plain and decorated through a precise tie-dyeing process known as bandhani, the wax-resist batik method, block printing, or sewn with appliqués.

Generally, as a sari is woven, one end is left plain, while the long borders and the other end are elaborately decorated. When the sari is worn, the plain end is tucked into the petticoat while the borders and the pallu at the other end are proudly displayed. These decorative portions of the sari may be embroidered with colored silk threads (known as resham work), or with luxurious zardosi work which uses raised gold and silver threads, beads, and in the most elaborate saris, pearls and precious stones. The borders and pallu may also include detailed weaving, producing intricate patterns with animals, flowers, architectural designs, and even scenes from mythology and folklore. The end of the pallu might also be fringed, knotted, and strung with beads.

Sari weaving is an extremely labor-intensive process, and it may take an experienced weaver up to 15 days to finish a single piece of zari before it can be taken off the loom and further embellished.

How and Where Is It Worn?

There are many ways to drape a sari, some based on regional tradition, others on the latest Bollywood movie. For women accustomed to wearing veils, several draping styles allow one end of the sari to hang free over a shoulder, ready to serve as a head covering. (See photo prop with illustrated instructions.)

The sari on the Art Cart is more formal, but some women, especially older women, wear saris on an everyday basis. Those are more likely to be made of cotton so they are less heavy and more breathable, which is especially important in hot climates. Silk saris are the typical attire for women attending formal events in India, including weddings, business events, and government functions. Men are more likely than women to wear Western business attire in a formal work setting. While red is the most typical color for wedding saris, there has been more variation in wedding attire in recent years.

A sari is an incredibly versatile garment, and women have developed countless ways of wrapping, folding, and tying saris around themselves to suit different occasions and personal tastes. There are many different regional styles of draping, including the Bengali style in which the pallu hangs across the front of the body or is pulled up over the head, and the Gond style of central India in which the sari is first draped across the right shoulder rather than around the waist. There is also the Bharatanatyam “fishtail” style sported by classical dancers; the mundu style from Kerala that uses two pieces of cloth; and the Kaccha style, where the sari is wrapped between the legs and tucked into itself at the back to create loose-fitting pants. Most women in modern times wear a petticoat and choli, a close-fitting, cropped, short-sleeved blouse, underneath their saris, but in some rural areas the women simply wrap the sari snugly around the neck and chest.

One of the most popular ways of wearing a sari is known as the nivi style. This is the method of drape most widely recognized outside of India, and begins by wrapping the sari once around the waist from right to left and tucking it into the petticoat. The wearer then folds several large vertical pleats that are also tucked in at the front of the petticoat. The remaining length of the sari is wrapped once more around the waist, drawn up over the left shoulder, and left to hang down the back, often with a pin at the back of the shoulder to secure it.

Because a sari is so easily worn in different ways, certain drapes are considered more or less formal, and particular drapes are frequently used for weddings, parties, and religious or state events, while others are worn for work and normal daily activities. Some occasions and styles of drape require the sari used to be of a certain length or type of fabric. In many areas, the colors and motifs used in a sari may be religiously or culturally symbolic.

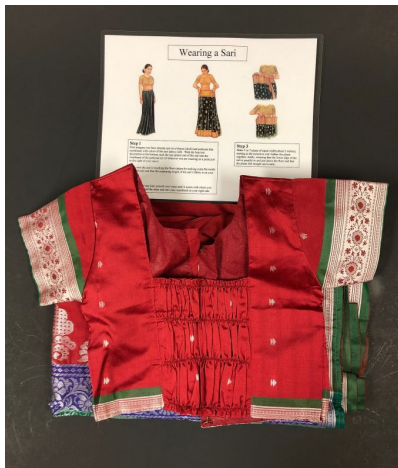
Saris also lend themselves to many uses other than clothing; old cotton saris may be hung from a tree and used as a cradle, strung up to catch and filter rainwater, or recycled into bags, quilts, or towels.

The Art Cart Sari

Our blue silk sari comes from the city of Cochin in the southern Indian state of Kerala. As is common, it includes extra cloth at the plain end, which would normally be cut and stitched into a choli.

It features intricate zari work in the borders and pallu, and sprinkled across the ground. The gold- and silver-colored threads weave geometric and floral designs along the border, which are enlarged and elaborated in the pallu. There is also a subtle lattice-work pattern woven into the ground, and an inspection of the ends of the sari reveals that the weaver used different colors of thread in the warp (which runs the full length of the sari), namely purple and pale green, than in the weft, which is a solid, vibrant blue. In the sari on the Art Cart these various colors are not readily apparent, but there are many beautiful silk saris in which the use of contrasting threads produces an iridescent or “split color” effect.

“Beginner’s” Sari



A sari can be complex to wear, especially for young girls. Also on the Art Cart is an example of a girl’s sari that is “pre-folded” and can be worn like a skirt.

If interested, you could show visitors the laminated photo with sari wrapping instructions on the side of the Art Cart. This is just one example of how a sari might be worn. There are many different ways to drape the cloth, although it’s usually wrapped around the waist a few times, pleated and tucked into the waistband, with the remaining fabric draped over one shoulder. The knowledge of how to drape a sari is mostly held by older generations. Younger women often receive assistance from older women when they wear saris, or they consult video tutorials such as [this](#).

Sources and Additional Background

[Met Museum](#) | Indian Textiles: Trade and Production

[Met Museum](#) | Indian Block-Printed Textiles: Past and Present

[Ten Thousand Villages](#) | Block Printing in India

[ARTFIXdaily](#) | The Fabric of India art exhibition makes U.S. debut at the Cincinnati Art Museum
October 19, 2018–January 6, 2019

[The National](#) | The evolution of the sari: from ancient India to international runways

[New York Times](#) | India's Rich Tapestry

[Wikipedia](#) | Shalwar Kameez

[Wikipedia](#) | [Kurta](#), [Dhoti](#), [Sari](#) and [Pashmina](#)

[New York Times](#) | The Ancient Art of Jaipur Block Printing, and What It Means to India

[Medium](#) | Brief History and Manufacturing Process of Pashmina

[Bruce Museum](#) | Kashmir Shawls from the Bruce Museum Collection

Questions and Activities

1. What types of clothes were worn at weddings you have attended? How do you think traditional wedding attire varies across cultures?
2. Hindu wedding ceremonies tend to be very colorful, including colorful clothing. Why do you think this is, and how does this tradition differ from Christian wedding ceremonies?
3. Describe your favorite piece of clothing. How is it different than this sari?
4. How do your clothes make you feel? Laid-back? Athletic? Stylish? Do they keep you warm or cool? Do your clothes let you move freely, or do they restrict movement? How do you think it feels to wear a sari?
5. If you were to design a sari, what motifs or patterns would you put on it? What colors would you use? Why?
6. Wrap the sari around yourself (it's very long, so you might need some help). Is it easy to put on? Do you think it would be easy to wear for your daily activities?

7. Find other pieces of clothing in the museum, and think about the people who might have worn them. How are they different than someone who might wear a sari? Why do you think people in different parts of the world dress differently?
8. A sari can be used for many things besides clothing. What ways can you think of to use a sari?
9. Indian women proudly wear saris as symbols of their nationality and cultural identity. How do you display your nationality? As you walk through the galleries, look for other objects and motifs that people use to symbolize their cultures.

Collection Connections

To be updated after gallery reinstallation

- [Sash](#), 18th century. Unknown artist, Iran, 30.23.10
- [Portrait of Shah Jahan](#), 1700-1720. Unknown artist, India, 84.118.3
- [Processional Portrait of Prince Bhawani Singh of Sitamau](#), 1855. Attributed to Pyara Singh, 2010.5
- [Annapurna Giving Alms to Shiva](#), 19th century. Unknown artist, India, 64.65.9

GOLDEN SUKHOTHAI-STYLE BUDDHA (THAILAND)



What Is It and Why Is It Important?

This seated golden figure of the Buddha was acquired in New Sukhothai, a city in northern Thailand by docent Sharon Hayenga for the Art Cart. It was made of bronze in the Sukhothai (soo-kho-thai) style of Thai art during the late 20th century.

The golden Art Cart image closely-resembles a highly-venerated golden Buddha image enshrined at a temple complex in Phitsanulok (p'hit-sa-nu- lok), which is about 25 miles south of New Sukhothai and about 30 miles southwest of the historic city of Sukhothai.

This gold-plated image is known as Phra Phutta Chinaraj (Sanskrit, Buddha Jinaraja, jee-nah-ra-jah) or King Buddha, Victorious King. It symbolizes the Buddha's spiritual victory, resulting enlightenment, acquisition of universal knowledge, and subsequent role as wise, just and virtuous ruler of the cosmos.

The Buddha Jinaraja is the presiding image at the main chapel of a temple complex named Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahâthât, dates from the 14th – 15th centuries; that is, during the later Sukhothai (1238-1438) or early Ayutthaya (1350-1767) eras. These periods are considered the classic and glorious eras of Thai civilization. Kings reigning during these periods supported the creation of royal images of the Buddha to communicate to their subject that their kingship reflected the universal rulership of the Buddha. During the past two centuries, during the Rattanakosin (ratta- no-ko-sin) dynasty, new meanings have developed for this image, resulting in its becoming the modern symbol of Thailand.

What Distinguishes the Sukhothai-style of Buddhist Sculpture?

The style of this image was influenced by the classic Sukhothai (soo-kho-thai) style of Thai art. A distinguishing feature is the finial rising from the top of the Buddha's cranial protrusion (ushnisha), representing the flame of enlightenment (rasmi).

How Did the Buddha Jinaraja Come to Reflect the Thai Identity?

During the reign of King Mongkut (also known as King Rama IV, r.1851 – 1868), the visionary king made famous in the mid-20th century by the book, musical and films based on the fictionalized memoirs of English governess Anna Leonowens, the golden Buddha Jinaraja began to be associated with the identity of the Thai kingdom. During the 19th century, Thailand (then known as Siam) was confronted with expanding European colonial empires, and the major concern of the Thai kings was to maintain the independence of their kingdom while embarking on projects to modernize the country. The Buddha Jinaraja came to symbolize the faith of the Thai people, their spiritual strength and worldly independence, and their ability to rule themselves wisely.

Through this blend of traditional and modern thinking, King Mongkut and his descendants of the Rattanakosin dynasty (still ruling today) were able to maintain Thailand's independence. Thus, it was the only Southeast Asian country not to succumb to European (and American) colonial occupation. The association between the Buddha Jinaraja and Thailand continued as the idea of Thai nationhood developed in the modern era, and national leaders worked to build the basis for a modern nation-state.

The Buddha Jinaraja is the most-reproduced Buddha image in Thailand, and its style is often used as a symbol and representation of "Thai-ness" in contemporary Thai society.

The Art Cart Buddha Jinaraja

This figure of the Buddha Jinaraja is depicted in a form of the Buddha Maravijaya (see the files in the tour office for more information). This form depicts the Buddha's spiritual victory over the demonic male guardian of the earth spirit Mara, thereby achieving enlightenment (nirvana).

Our golden figure sits meditating in the lotus position (padmasana, pronounced pad-ma-sa-na) with his legs folded and crossed underneath him, and his left heel exposed. The Buddha's left hand faces upward in the meditation gesture (dhyana mudra, pronounced dhee-ah-na), while his right hand extends down over his right knee in the "calling the earth as witness" gesture (bhumisparsha mudra, pronounced bhoo-mee-spar-sha). This gesture symbolizes the Buddha's spiritual victory over the temptations and distractions brought on by Mara, and the aid given by the protective female earth spirit Toranee, resulting in the Buddha's achieving enlightenment.

The pointed, flame-like gold patterns around the Buddha's head spread upwards in an aerial manner and are part of the aureole (full-body halo) that represents his heightened intelligence and wisdom. When surrounded by an aureole, the figure is considered an Enshrined or Enthroned Buddha. This style may have originated with the Indian tradition of niche sculptures set within caves or on rock walls, which were carved to provide an elaborate surrounding.

The Buddha's hair is presented as detailed raised bumps, and rising from the Buddha's head is the cranial protrusion (ushnisha), representing his greater capacity for spiritual knowledge. The ushnisha is capped by the flame of enlightenment extending upwards, and is mirrored in the aureole.

His two eyes are half-closed, to indicate his meditative state, and there is a circular indentation on his forehead representing the urna. In this figure, the urna is prominent and this may be an influence of Mon- Dvaravati/Lopburi eras preceding the Sukhothai kingdom, which often placed a red stone in the urna to indicate heightened spiritual awareness, almost as a "third eye."

The Buddha wears a slightly-outlined robe with a prominent fold down the left shoulder, which also was a typical feature of earlier Mon- Dvaravati/Lopburi Buddhas. Although the Buddha wears no other form of ornamentation, his skin is golden to depict the radiant glow of enlightenment.

The Buddha is seated on a pedestal, commonly-used in Sukhothai sculpture – literally and figuratively – to elevate the Buddha. A scrolling lotus design surrounds the highest level of the base of the lotus-shaped pedestal. Because the lotus grows in muddy waters, with a stalk that rises straight up to flower high above the water, it symbolizes spiritual growth beyond the temptations and muck of the world. The lotus flower itself symbolizes the spiritual purity of enlightenment above and away from the world.

At each side just below each end of the aureole, two serpentine beasts curve upwards, extending outwards from the Buddha. These animals are snakes, dragons or sea monsters, which all have similar symbolic value as protective figures and are a Khmer influence. The beasts protect the Buddha from rain and fire, and their powers aid him in his final meditation before enlightenment.

The two primal figures on each side of the Buddha's pedestal, below and behind each knee, may be guardian spirits similar to those found at the entrances to temples throughout Asia. The guardian on the Buddha's right raises his arms and makes an "a" shape with his mouth, which symbolizes the beginning of life. The guardian on the Buddha's left makes an "m" shape with his mouth, symbolizing the end of life. Together, these two guardians make the sound "Om," the sacred sound of the universe.

How Was It Made?

This figure was made of bronze, with the lost wax casting technique. In this process, the sculptor first makes a core out of clay and other natural materials. After the core dries, he covers it with a thin layer of

beeswax mixed with enamel, which makes the wax harder in hot temperatures. Sometimes artists add red dye to the beeswax in order to differentiate it from the core. What appears as wax on the figure will be the final metal detailing on the Buddha image, so sculptors use stamps, carving tools, or smaller pieces of wax to create intricate designs, such as the curls in the Buddha's hair, all in wax. Finally, an investment, or outer mold, is put over the wax, first in thin and then in thicker layers of clay and sand.

The image is now ready for metal casting. Because many people believe that Buddha figures have spiritual powers, an all-night ritual often accompanies the figures' metal casting. In this step, the sculptor puts the image upside-down in a fireplace or oven to melt the wax. It pours out and is collected in holding pans for future use. The area where the wax once was is now an empty space between two clay molds, in which molten metal – bronze in this case – is poured.

After the metal cools, the sculptor breaks the investment and removes the core. The sculpture is not completed, however, until the artists file, burnish, and polish the image. This step is very important for a finished image, as it makes the Buddha shine like gold, radiating in his enlightened state.

How Was It Used?

This modern reproduction was made for sale to pilgrims as well as tourists. Pilgrims buy reproductions of highly-venerated Buddha images for use in personal meditation in the home, but also as spiritual souvenirs of pilgrimages to important temples. Tourists are able to buy the same reproductions as cultural souvenirs. (It should be noted that, in order to protect the sacredness of Buddha images as well as to protect its national heritage, the government of Thailand does not permit the export of any image of the Buddha other than modern reproductions made for sale as souvenirs.)

Buddhists believe one can gain spiritual merit (karma) by commissioning a Buddha image, and that the larger and richer the image, the more merit will be gained. Thus, Thai craftspeople have produced replicas, large and small, of the country's most-venerated and historically-prestigious images.

Because of the small size of this image, it probably was made for use on a home altar. Buddha sculptures, however, may be donated to a temple or shrine as permanent testimony to the piety of the donor. They also may be placed at a stupa (shrine containing relics of the Buddha) as well as at burial grounds.

Regardless of its size and placement, a statue of the Buddha is considered alive, standing for the Buddha and the dharma (the nature of life as the basis of his teachings and law).

Sources and Additional Background

[BBC](#) | Theravada Buddhism

[Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) | Sukhothai style

[Unesco](#) | Historic Town of Sukhothai and Associated Historic Towns

[Victoria and Albert Museum](#) | Video: Lost Wax Bronze Casting

[Wikipedia](#) | Wat Phra Sî Rattana Mahâthât

[Wikipedia](#) | Buddhist symbolism

Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe this golden sculpture of the Buddha? How would you describe his pose, facial features, head and body? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Compare this sculpture to the Mandalay-style Jambupati Buddha on the Art Cart. What are the similarities? Differences?
3. Look for evidence about how this image of the Buddha was made. Turn the figure over and look in the hollow center: this is where the core would have been. As the guide explains the process of lost wax casting, see if you can find any signs of that process in this figure.
4. As you look at these images of the Buddha, look for designs that indicate the attributes of the Buddha or the 32 marks of spiritual greatness (lakshana). How many of them can you find? (For example, the lotus motif, golden skin, ushnisha, urna, rasmi, long ears, long fingers, etc.)

Collection Connections

(S/SE Asia connections to come after gallery reinstallation.)

Buddhist sculptures currently on display in the Buddhist Court, especially [Walking Shakyamuni Buddha](#), 15th century, Unknown artist, Thailand, 31.115.

MANDALAY-STYLE JAMBUPATI BUDDHA (BURMA)



What Is It and How Was It Made?

This ornate sculpture of a seated Jambupati Buddha statue was carved from wood in the Mandalay style of Burma (also known as Myanmar) during the 20th century. Mandalay is Burma's second-largest city, and is located in the center of the diamond-shaped country. It is the main center for Burmese art and culture.

This ornate sculpture was carved from a Burmese hardwood, hollowed out, and covered with red lacquer. It has been gilded with gold leaf and then encrusted with shiny pieces of colored glass and mirrors above the Buddha's forehead and along the borders of his garment.

What Is Mandalay Style?

Mandalay style is a recent development in the artistic history of Burma. The style coalesced during the reign of the last independent kingdom in Burma, which was ruled by the Kombaung (kom-bong) dynasty (1752- 1885) from central Burma. The city of Mandalay was the dynasty's final capital and was established in 1860.

The main concern of the Kombaungs was to resist colonialist encroachment, particularly from the British empire, which annexed the country in three stages during the 19th century. The arts of this period, as well as the establishment of a new capital, were intended to symbolize the Buddha and the Buddhist cosmos (hence the basis of the name of the new capital in the word mandala) as the country's source of spiritual strength and divine favor as well as worldly wealth and political protection.

Mandalay-style Depictions of the Buddha

Theravada Buddhism is dominant in Burma, and thus, Buddhist sculptural traditions are based on certain rules for depicting the Buddha. One of the main depictions of the Buddha in Theravada Buddhism is the Buddha Maravijaya form, which depicts the Buddha's spiritual victory over the demon Mara, thereby achieving enlightenment (nirvana). (See files in the tour office for additional information on Theravada Buddhism and the Buddha Maravijaya.)

Generally, a Mandalay-style Buddha has a rounded face and head, which is disproportionately large compared to the torso. His hair may be arranged in a rounded top knot or in a way that culminates in a rounded point, to indicate the cranial protrusion that houses an extra lobe of the brain (ushnisha) to symbolize his greater spiritual knowledge and understanding. It may or may not include the finial to indicate the flame of enlightenment.

There is a highly decorative, ornamental quality to the Mandalay style, and sculptures of the Buddha often are crowned and bejeweled. This reflects artistic influences from several earlier Southeast Asian styles that originated in what is today Thailand and Cambodia as well as later styles in Burma. His elaborately-draped robe may be derived from the Greco-Roman toga-clad sculptures of the Gandharan civilization, which was the first one to depict the Buddha in sculptural form.

This gesture or mudra has the left hand held in the lap while the right hand touches the pedestal. Called the bhumisparśamudra, this pose was especially popular in Burmese and Thai sculpture while it is encountered far less frequently in the Chinese and Japanese sculptural traditions.

How Is the Jambupati Buddha Depicted?

The Jambupati Buddha is seated on a base with a graceful, linear scrolling pattern built up from red lacquer. His legs are folded in the lotus position and form an exaggerated upside-down V, further lightening the image. There are traces of a wheel of the law (chakra) on the sole of the upturned right foot. The wheel of the law represents the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth as well as the teaching of the Buddha, which is in constant motion and provides a path towards spiritual enlightenment and eventual release from this cycle of existence.

He has a round face and head, and a rounded cranial protrusion at the top of the head but there is no finial emanating up from it. The eyes have been inlaid with colored glass, making them appear to be open and staring straight ahead, to show he is looking at the spiritual world beyond the physical one. The nose is relatively flat, and the ears are rounded on the top and so elongated that they actually are attached to the shoulders. There are three folds in the skin around his neck.

His arms are elongated and tubular, and his hands are large, drawing attention to his meditative state, his spiritual victory and his achievement of enlightenment. The torso is relatively thin and straight, and the waist is elongated. There is little sense of the body underneath his robe, whose pleats follow a simple, fan-like pattern that falls into a very graceful, curvilinear design below the left knee and on the pedestal. The drapery on the back of the figure also falls in delicate, curvilinear lines and fan-like pleats that complement the scrolling designs on the base.

A band of circular discs of colored glass decorates the Buddha's forehead, directly below his hair. Similarly, on both the front and back of the figure, the fringe of the simple robe is lined with circular discs of broken mirror to reflect the light and add greater brilliance as well as opulence.

What Is the Story of Jambupati?

Jambupati (jam-bu-pa-ti) was a powerful and wealthy prince who lived during the time of the Buddha. He was disobedient to the humble and devout Buddhist ruler of the northeastern Indian kingdom of Magadha (ma-gad-ha) and rejected the guidance of Buddhist sages. The Buddha sent the Vedic god Indra (now a Buddhist disciple renamed Vajrapani; see Art Cart entry on Tibetan bell and scepter) to summon Jambupati to present himself before the Buddha to do homage.

The disciples of the Buddha (superhuman or supernatural beings such as the Vedic gods and animal spirits such as the nagas (snake spirits) and garudas (winged spirits), as well as others) created a majestic palatial setting, and attired themselves as well as the Buddha in sumptuous dress and bejeweled ornaments. This form was meant to befit the raja-dhi-raja, or "king of kings" and the chakra-vartin, or "universal monarch" (literally "wheel-turning king;" in Sanskrit, referring to the symbol of the wheel as representing the wheel of Buddhist law that maintains the universe).

The arrogant Jambupati was overwhelmed by the Buddha and his disciples in this lavish royal and courtly form. He still held back from doing homage because of his arrogance until threatened with the dangers of hell and a close-up view of hell-fire by a Buddhist sage. This caused him to submit himself in homage, convert to Buddhism and become a monk.

Why Are Burmese Buddhas So Ornate?

In most Buddhist countries and cultures, the depiction of the Buddha is relatively plain to emphasize his renunciation of the material world. Since the 14th century in Burma, however, the Buddha has been portrayed dressed and adorned in a lavish manner, like a worldly monarch.

This rich depiction of the Buddha, particularly with a crown, has precedents in other Southeast Asian countries. Generally, the Buddha was portrayed as a royal figure to associate him with the current monarch (or dynasty) who was indirectly or directly identified as the earthly representative of the "universal monarch." Art historians speculate that some depictions were modeled on actual kings.

In Burma, however, the royal portrayal of the Buddha is derived from a Buddhist story (the story about Jambupati) about pride and humility that may have become popular in the centuries after the end of the first unified Burmese kingdom. This kingdom was centered at the city of Pagan (pah-gahn, also spelled Bagan) in central Burma (about 90 miles southwest of the modern-day city of Mandalay) and lasted from the 11th to 13th centuries.

The ornate materials used in Mandalay-style sculptures of the Buddha, such as lacquer, gold, gemstones, mirrors and colored glass, are inspired by Jambupati's story. They convey reverence for the Buddha, depicting and reflecting the Buddha's universal glory and his status as spiritual royalty. The overall social and spiritual message in this sculpture is that the rank of the Buddha far outranks any earthly prince or monarch. In patronizing this type of sculpture, rulers and royalty may have been indicating their identification with the reformed prince and conveying the message to their people that they recognize their proper relationship before the Buddha: one of humility, responsibility and accountability. Thus, this ornate style of depiction is called the Jambupati-type Buddha, because the reformed prince is part of the symbolism even though he does not appear directly in the sculpture.

What Is Lacquer?

Lacquer (yun) is refined from the sap of the Burmese lacquer tree *gluta usitata*, which is related to the Chinese lacquer tree *rhus vernicifera*. The Burmese tree is not cultivated, and the sap is collected from lacquer trees in forests. Cuts are made in the bark, and the sap is drawn out with tubes. The sap is straw-colored but turns black after collection. Refining methods result in various shades of red to brown.

Lacquer is light, durable and resistant to heat, liquids and insects. It sets as a natural flexible plastic, and thus aids in the preservation of objects made from wood. It is often used to cover wooden sculptures to provide a hard, smooth surface on which to apply gold leaf.

In Burma, lacquer is often mixed with the ash of animal bone or sawdust to create a putty (thayo) which is then sculpted. It also can be manipulated to form designs in shallow relief, as was done in the pedestal of this sculpture. The scroll designs on the pedestal have been built up with lacquer and the lines drawn in black ink by the artist to show him where to apply the lacquer are visible.

The main center for the manufacture of lacquered objects today is at the modern town of Pagan where there has been a government-run lacquer school since the 1920s, but lacquered objects also are made at Prone and at Mandalay.

What Is Gold Leaf?

The city of Mandalay is the country's main center for the production of gold leaf, which involves taking nearly pure gold foil sheets and hammering them by hand in several stages to achieve a microscopic

level of thinness. While gold was panned in the rivers of northern Burma, it was not enough to supply the considerable demand in Burma, and so most gold has been imported from the island of Java in Indonesia, and China.

Gold leaf production takes place in family-owned and operated workshops, and all members of an extended family from children to elders take part in the work, although individual members perform specific tasks. Fans and air-conditioning cannot be used to keep the workers cool in the windowless workplace because of the delicacy of the product.

The process begins with tabs of paper-thin gold foil sheets stacked into bundles of about 400, with each sheet separated by a layer of bamboo paper lightly powdered with rice flour. This paper is made from dried bamboo pulp fiber in the same workshop. The bundles are wrapped in deerskin and hammered with a six-pound sledgehammer for 30 minutes, which flattens and enlarges the gold sheets to about four times the original area. The sheets are cut into quarters with a pencil-length, flat edged tool made of buffalo horn, restacked and bundled again into one stack, and then hammered again for another 30 minutes. After cutting the flattened and enlarged gold sheets into two, each half is hammered for five hours to achieve the desired thinness. Then these sheets are cut into perfect squares and packaged between tissue-thin paper sheets. They are then placed inside decorative paper envelopes and sold.

Gold leaf is purchased and used primarily by Buddhist worshippers in Southeast Asia to adorn temple statues of the Buddha, and the resulting golden effect depicts the glow of the Buddha's enlightened state. This practice is a form of offering to the Buddha along with other traditional offerings presented as forms of reverence, such as flowers and food items, and also a spiritually meritorious action.

Worshippers apply the square sheets of gold leaf directly from the paper sheets without handling the gold leaf itself. Gold leaf easily adheres to the images without any additional adhesive substance. Much of Burma's gold leaf is exported, particularly to Thailand, where it is used in the same way by Thai Buddhist worshippers.

Some food-grade gold leaf also is produced and is used to decorate candies, sweet dishes, coffees and teas for special occasions in Burma and many Asian countries. Edible gold leaf is widely used to cover sweets served during South Asian weddings. Gold leaf is not considered toxic because gold is a chemically inert substance.

Gold leaf has been made by European artisans and used in European Christian art since the medieval era. More recently, and perhaps inspired by Asian cuisines, it also has been used as an ingredient in upscale liquors and luxury chocolates in Europe, and chefs at exclusive restaurants in Europe and North America have added food-grade gold leaf to their culinary repertoire.

How Was This Sculpture Used?

This statue may have been produced for sale to pilgrims visiting a temple or pagoda. It likely was used for personal devotions in the home setting. While it was treated with reverence, it was handled frequently, and thus some of the lacquer and gilding wore off. It likely was given away or sold, and replaced it with a new image, in keeping with personal and temple practices in Burma.

Buddhists in Burma consider it an act of devotion to make or commission new images of the Buddha, and frequently patronize Buddhist religious artists to create new images. This action confers great spiritual merit upon both the artist and patron and so countless copies have been made of Mandalay-style images (as well as of other sculptural styles) of the Buddha. Typically, such images are made from various hardwoods such as teak as well as bronze and white marble. These new images replace old ones that have worn out, or are used to furnish new Buddhist religious institutions, both in Burma and in other countries.

New images of the Buddha may be small and made for personal use at home or they may be large for donation to shrines, temples and monasteries. The older images being replaced by the newer ones may be sold, often to dealers in arts and crafts or antiques, from whom they find their way to the international art market. From there they enter museum collections, as teaching objects such as this Art Cart sculpture, or as gallery exhibits such as MIA's Enshrined Buddha from Burma (see below).

As a teaching object, this sculpture is handled frequently, and as a result its condition has continued to deteriorate. This process of deterioration allows us to see what happens when even recently-created art objects are touched and, by extension, the reason for the "please do not touch" policy for the objects in the museum's permanent collection and special exhibitions.

Sources and Additional Background

[Asia Society](#) | Buddhist Art of Myanmar

[Khan Academy](#) | Buddha image and dry lacquer technique

[Khan Academy](#) | Throne for a Buddha image

Mia | [Seated Buddha](#), 18th century, Unknown artist, Burma, 96.54.1.

[Myanmar Times](#) | RJ Vogt, Gold leaf: a look behind the scenes, August 2016

[Northern Illinois University](#) | Dr. Richard M. Cooler, The Art and Culture of Burma

[Northern Illinois University](#) | Center for Burma Studies

[Wikipedia](#) | Buddhist Art

[YouTube](#) | VIDEO: The Traditional Making of Gold Leaf in Mandalay

Questions and Activities

1. Have visitors look at the Mandalay-style Buddha. (It is rather fragile, so if they want to pick up the sculpture or touch it, have them put on the white cotton gloves to protect it.) How would you describe the Mandalay-style Buddha? How would you describe his pose, facial features, head and body?
2. Compare the Mandalay-style Buddha to the large example of the Enshrined Buddha from Burma in the Southeast Asian collection in gallery 213. How are they similar? How are they different? Look at their pose, hand gestures, facial features, attributes, ornamentation and materials(s) from which they are made.
3. Compare the Sukhothai Buddha (Thailand) sculpture. How are these two Buddhas similar? How are they different? Notice their positions, decoration, color, shape, size, condition, etc. What do you see that makes you say that?
4. As you look at these images of the Buddha, look for designs that indicate the attributes of the Buddha or the 32 marks of spiritual greatness (lakshana). How many of them can you find? (For example, the lotus motif, golden skin, ushnisha, urna, rasmi, long ears, long fingers, etc.)
5. If you were to commission a Buddha image, which one of these would you commission and why? What designs, attributes or marks would you arrange to have put on your image of the Buddha? Why? Try drawing your ideas for your own Buddha image.
6. What thoughts, emotions or moods do each of these sculptures of the Buddha figure express to you? What do you see that makes you say that? (Notice details such as his pose, facial features, and body language that suggest thoughts, emotions or moods.) If you wanted to depict this Buddha with other thoughts, emotions or moods, how would you change these sculptures?

Collection Connections

(Additional S/SE Asia connections to come after gallery reinstallation)

- Buddhist sculptures currently on display in the Buddhist Court.
- [Enshrined Buddha](#), c. 1800. Unknown artist, Burma, 89.55.
- [Seated Buddha](#), 18th century. Unknown artist, Burma, 96.54.1.

TIBETAN VAJRA BELL AND VAJRA SCEPTER



What Are They?

This bell and scepter are used together in worship rituals and spiritual practices of the Tibetan Vajrayana (vaj-ra-ya-na) tradition of Buddhism. They are the most frequently-encountered and most essential ritual objects of this tradition. When blessed or consecrated, they are imbued with spiritual power.

The Art Cart bell and scepter were made in Dharamsala, India, by a Tibetan artist, and purchased locally for the Art Cart. They are teaching objects and have not been consecrated for use in worship rituals or spiritual practices.

As teaching objects, the Art Cart bell and scepter are relatively simple in style and made from bronze. When made for sacred purposes, the bell and scepter usually are sumptuous in style. They typically are made of iron that has been gilded or covered with a thin layer of gold. Iron from meteorites is preferred because of its connection to lightning and thunderbolts. In ancient times, before the Iron Age, meteorites were humanity's only source of iron.

What Is a Vajra Symbol and What Are Its Origins?

A symbol called the vajra forms the handle of the bell, and two interconnected vajras joined together form the scepter. Some scepters are made with only one vajra, which forms the finial for the handle of a scepter. The vajra symbolizes lightning or a thunderbolt as well as a diamond.

The vajra symbol was adopted from the Vedic religious tradition in India, which is derived from the Indo-European (Aryan) civilization originating in Central Asia, and is the precursor to the Hindu religious tradition. The vajra originally represented lightning or a thunderbolt, and was the attribute of the god Indra who used it as a weapon. Indra parallels the Norse god Thor and other Indo-European thunder-gods, and has parallels with Greco-Roman mythology. Indra's father, the god Dyaus-Pitar, parallels the Greek Zeus and Roman Jupiter, king of the Olympian deities. In Vedic mythology, Indra superseded his father and became the king of the gods (devas), similar to Zeus/Jupiter who superseded his father Chronos/Saturn. Zeus also was a thunder-god and thrower of thunderbolts, and in another parallel with Zeus, whenever Indra had to punish a wrongdoer, fight a superhuman figure such as a demon, or help his followers overcome their enemies and their cities, he threw his thunderbolt.

The veneration of Indra and most of the Vedic deities declined because of the rise of Hindu traditions focusing on the worship of the female deity Shakti Devi as well as the male deities Shiva and Vishnu. In Tibetan Buddhist mythology, however, Indra became a devoted and powerful disciple of the Buddha.

Indra was transformed into a bodhisattva named Vajrapani, who later became one of the three deities protecting the Buddha. In ancient Gandharan and Central Asian civilizations, which were infused with Greek influences and began the artistic tradition of depicting the Buddha and Buddhist figures in sculptural form, Vajrapani was depicted in the form of Hercules. The thunderbolt was retained and became a symbol of the power of enlightened beings. This power came to be seen as indestructible, and the symbolism shifted from the thunderbolt to a diamond, because diamonds are the hardest known substance in the universe.

What Does the Bell Symbolize?

The bell (Sanskrit, ghanta; Tibetan, drilbu) symbolizes sacred sounds and voices, such as the speech of one of the five Buddhas (male or female), or the vibrations generated by the repetition of mantras (sacred syllables). It represents intuition because it inspires and activates the enlightenment of the heart, but because its sound dies away quickly, it represents impermanence.

The top of the handle of a bell generally is adorned with a vajra, as in the Art Cart bell, although the handle may terminate in a representation of a stupa (a building that houses a relic of the Buddha). The top, middle and bell sections of this object represent the three zones of the world: the heavens, earth, and underworld. The open space within the bell represents the empty void, and the clapper in the bell represents bliss. When the clapper strikes the bell, the action represents the union of bliss and void and the sound expresses this cosmic union, which is a celebration of the omnipresence of enlightenment.

What Does the Scepter Symbolize?

The scepter (Sanskrit, vajra; Tibetan, dorje, meaning lord of stones) is one of the most important of all Tibetan Buddhist symbols and usually is referred to as the vajra itself. As such, it has come to symbolize

the indestructible nature of the diamond which, because it cannot be cut, and is impenetrable and incorruptible, symbolizes three features of Buddhism:

- (1) it is the truth that no force and no weapon can destroy;
- (2) it is the victory of knowledge and law over ignorance;
- (3) it is the mastery of spirit over the poisons and passions that tarnish existence.

Some of its symbolism retains its original association with lightning and the thunderbolt: as an irresistible force that destroys the enemies of Buddhist law.

The scepter generally has a shaft or handle that has one to nine points at one end or, as in the Art Cart scepter, has a central shaft that has points at each end. This type of scepter is known as a “double dorje” or “intersected vajra,” and sometimes is interpreted as the Wheel of the Good Law. It symbolizes the indestructibility of the essence of all worldly and cosmic phenomena, and the most complete understanding of diamond-like truths.

The rounded section of the middle of the scepter’s shaft that joins the two vajras together represents Vajrasattva, the primordial Buddha who has been awakened from the very beginning. As such, he holds the position of Supreme Being in Tibetan Buddhism and often is referred to as the Adi-Buddha. Vajrasattva purifies and protects all the other Buddhas, and therefore all the bodhisattvas, and thus all spiritual seekers.

At each side of the middle section is a lotus from which springs, at each end, four prongs. The lotus flower represents spiritual purity. Together with the projecting and pointed central shaft each end becomes five-pronged. The upper set of spokes of a five-pronged scepter symbolizes the five male Buddhas, and the lower set represents the five female Buddhas.

Depictions of Scepters in Mandalas

The scepter often appears on mandalas (mystic circles representing the spiritual cosmos). In the MIA’s sand mandala in the Himalayan collection, the scepter in the central blue square represents Yamantaka, the terminator of death who ends the cycle of births, deaths and rebirths (reincarnation), or samsara. It represents the spiritual goal of meditation and devotional practices, and thus, the place where enlightenment is reached.

What Does the Paired Bell and Scepter Symbolize?

The bell and scepter have meanings both as individual objects and as a unified pair. When paired, they represent an inseparable unity of female energy (the bell) and male power (the scepter), and serve as an emblem of the dual unity of absolute and relative truths. They mirror the idea of interdependent

opposites united in combinations that are indispensable for the understanding that needs to develop in order to attain the state of enlightenment.

The bell symbolizes the female sexual organ, female cosmic energy, the immediate wisdom of intuition, and impermanence. The scepter symbolizes the male sexual organ, male cosmic power, the compassion of method and practice to achieve eventual understanding through reflection, and stability.

The bell and scepter may have been adopted from Indian religious traditions focusing on fertility. Symbols of female and male reproductive organs, abstracted into representative forms known as the yoni (female) and lingam (male), have been venerated since ancient times. The vajra-topped bell and scepter may have developed because of their resemblance to the yoni and lingam shapes.

How Are They Used?

The bell and scepter are used in virtually all solitary meditation, worship rituals and large gatherings of monastic life and activity, as well as in religious ceremonies in public contexts.

Buddhist worshippers are encouraged to have their own set. Each day, worshippers hold the scepter in their right hand and the bell in their left, and unify the two objects by crossing their arms over their chests. This ritual represents the union of female wisdom and male compassion, which is the basis for reaching the understanding necessary to develop an enlightened mind. The bell and scepter also are held during various devotional practices, including the creation of mandalas.

The bell is rung as a musical offering, and the richer the sound of a bell, the more auspicious it is considered to be. It is especially important in rituals for exorcising evil spirits. The sound of the bell sends the message to evil spirits that they must stay away from the consecrated area where the ritual is being performed.

Esoteric spiritual figures of the Vajrayana tradition of the Himalayas (as well as Japan) are often shown in thanka paintings holding a bell in the left hand and a scepter in the right hand. This depiction shows these figures uniting the two forces of female and male, and the complementary nature of wisdom and compassion. The Vajrabhairava, 89.52,, and the Art Cart thanka depicting Vajrasattva are two examples of such depictions.

Sources and Additional Background

[Brown University](#) | Basic Concepts of Tibetan Buddhism

[Khan Academy](#) | Asian Art Museum, Thunderbolt and bell

[Khan Academy](#) | VIDEO: Sacred Arts of Tibet

[Metropolitan Museum](#) | Dril-Bu and Dorje, 19th century

[Tricycle.org](#) | Himalayan Art 101 (The Tricycle Foundation is dedicated to making Buddhist teachings and practices broadly available, with many brief and informative articles on Himalayan Art.)

[Wikipedia](#) | Vajra

[Wikipedia](#) | Vajrayana

Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe these two objects? What do you see that makes you say that? What shapes and designs do you see?
2. Listen to the sound of the bell. How would you describe the sound? What kinds of sounds do you find calming? What kinds of sounds do you find energizing?
3. How are bells used in rituals or ceremonies with which you are familiar (personal or family celebrations, religious observances, political activities, etc.)?
4. What are some other instruments you are familiar with that are used for religious (or other) rituals? What is their function in these rituals?
5. What do diamonds, lightning and thunderbolts symbolize in your culture or cultures with which you are familiar?

Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation

[Ruyi Scepter](#), late 17th-early 18th century. Unknown artist, China, 95.89.

[Bo bell](#), late 6th-5th century BCE. Unknown artist, China, 97.81. (Other Chinese bronze bells are also on display.)

[Zheng ritual bell](#), 5th century BCE. Unknown artist, China, 50.46.115.

TIBETAN HOME SHRINE BANNER



What Is a Shrine Banner?

Altar banners adorn shrines in Tibetan Buddhist homes or temples where they are used for devotional purposes. They usually are made in pairs and are placed on either side of an altar.

The Art Cart Home Shrine Banner

This brightly colored silk banner probably was made for use during personal devotion in the home setting because of its modest size. It likely was made as one of a pair to be placed on either side of a home altar. (Examples of larger temple banners can be seen in the Himalayan collection).

In many Tibetan Buddhist homes, small altars or shrines are placed in the corner or in a quiet room where family members can meditate and pay homage to their personal guiding deities, who have been selected for them by their lama (monk or priest). The worshipper offers flowers, food, candles, and incense to the guiding deity on the household altar. This altar is an important place in Tibetan Buddhist worship because it is where the worshipper makes a connection with the Buddha, bodhisattvas, or their personal guiding deity.

The banner was made by Tibetan artists in Dharamsala, India, to support themselves and the Tibetan exile community.

It presents eight Buddhist symbols that are considered auspicious, or imbued with the promise of success. These symbols have been embroidered onto the banner with brightly colored thread.

Artistic Influences

The Art Cart banner illustrates the impact that both China and India have had on the art of Tibet. The silk material, dragons and clouds all show the influence of China, while the bright surfaces, where color is foremost, is closer to the Indian aesthetic.

How Was It Made?

The creation of a ritual object like this banner is considered a divine act; and the artist is seen as serving as the mortal instrument. To intensify the sense of devotion as well as increase spiritual merit (karma), ritual objects often are made of luxurious materials, such as the colorful silk fabric of this banner.

Silk in Tibet

Tibetans have had access to silk for centuries because of their long political and religious association with China. Silk was brought to Tibet beginning in the 7th century CE from China. By the 15th century, a great deal of silk had been brought into Tibet by members of the nobility, as well as by Dalai and Panchen lamas returning from visits to China. The Ming emperors in particular, presented the leaders of Tibetan Buddhism with lavish gifts of silk.

Silk thus came to play an important role in Tibetan Buddhist ritual. Images of the Buddha, bodhisattvas (those who have achieved enlightenment but choose to remain in the physical world to guide others to enlightenment) and deities were dressed or draped in costly silks.

Buddhist meditative chanting halls were furnished with a dazzling variety of silk banners, pillar coverings, ceiling cloths, thankas, valences, and altar cloths. Every available surface was covered with silk fabric, or painted in patterns imitating these opulent decorative textiles.

In addition to adopting silk, Tibetans also borrowed some Chinese symbols, such as the five-clawed dragons and clouds seen on this banner.

What Do the Symbols on the Banner Mean?

The Art Cart banner displays the Eight Auspicious Symbols of Buddhism. These symbols represent objects that originally were offerings presented to kings in northern India at their investiture, and are almost certainly of pre-Buddhist origin.

In the Buddhist tradition, these eight auspicious symbols represent the offerings presented to the human and “historical” Buddha, upon his attainment of enlightenment (nirvana). These symbols appear on many Buddhist objects, textiles, and paintings in all of the countries where Buddhism is practiced. In Tibet, they generally are shown in a prescribed order, as seen on this banner.

The Eight Auspicious Symbols, Top to Bottom

Parasol

The parasol (or umbrella) is a traditional Indian symbol of royalty and protection. This association is derived from the practice of people of high rank employing servants to protect them from the heat of the sun (or from rain) with parasols (or umbrellas).

In Buddhism, this symbol of worldly power has been transformed into a symbol of spiritual power. The coolness of the shade created by the parasol symbolizes protection from the painful heat of suffering, desire, obstacles, illnesses and harmful forces. Because the parasol is held above the head, it also symbolizes honor and respect. The white parasol symbolizes the Buddha’s ability to protect all beings from delusions and fears.

Coupled Golden Fish

The coupled fish symbol originally symbolized the two main sacred rivers of northern India, the Ganges and Yamuna. The fish, a paired male and a female, are depicted symmetrically head to head, and symbolize fertility, because fish reproduce rapidly.

In Buddhism, golden fish represent happiness and spontaneity because they have complete freedom of movement in the water. Fish also represent freedom from the restraints of caste and status because they mingle and touch each other readily. Additionally, they are a symbol of salvation from suffering.

There are variations in the meaning of this symbol in different Buddhist countries or cultures. In China, a pair of fish symbolizes conjugal unity and fidelity because fish often swim in pairs.

Vase of Treasure

The golden treasure vase is modeled on the traditional Indian clay water pot, with a flat base, round body, narrow neck, and fluted upper rim. It has lotus-petal motifs radiating around its various sections, and in the middle. The treasure vase symbolizes certain wealth deities, and also is considered a symbol of spiritual abundance. In Buddhism, it represents the fulfillment of spiritual wishes.

A silk scarf is tied around the neck of the vase, and may represent the khata, the sacred scarf offered to deities and exchanged by religious dignitaries as tokens of protection and sharing of spiritual wishes. The upper rim of the vase is sealed with a group of three gems representing the Three Jewels of the Buddha,

which symbolize the Buddha, the law (dharma) and the monastic community (sangha). The top of the vase is sealed with a wish-granting tree.

Lotus Flower

The lotus is a symbol of spiritual purity and the potential of all beings to attain buddhahood, the successful renunciation of the material world and achievement of enlightenment. Just as the pure white lotus flower rises from muddy waters to blossom, the human heart and mind can transcend physical desires and attachments to reveal its essentially pure nature.

The lotus, therefore, represents the blossoming of wholesome activities performed with complete freedom from the faults having to do with existing within the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (reincarnation), or samsara.

Right-coiled White Conch Shell

The white conch shell is depicted vertically with a silk ribbon threaded through its lower area. It is a key implement in both Buddhist and Hindu ritual.

In Tibet, it is used as a trumpet in temple music as well as to call the congregation together. Deriving this function from the battle horn, it is an emblem of power, authority, and sovereignty. Its blast banishes evil spirits, averts natural disasters and scares away harmful creatures.

The sound of the conch shell represents the spreading of the law (dharma), and the

voice of the Buddha. It symbolizes the fame and supremacy of the Buddha's teachings, his fearlessness in proclaiming their truth, and his call to humankind to awaken and work for the benefit of others.

Because the conch shell comes from the water, it is believed to have power over rain. Monks stand on the temple roofs and blow the conch in all directions to stop the heavy rains or hail storms which endanger Tibetan crops.

The conch also serves as an offering vessel. Filled with curd or a sacred elixir, it is one of the Offerings of the Five Senses, representing the sense of smell. (The conch can be seen on the Yamantaka Sand Mandala.) Some shells in their natural state are used as containers for consecrated water and often are placed on top of a water pot on an altar.

Endless Knot

The endless knot is an auspicious drawing, a simple, balanced form, with no beginning and no end. It may have originated as two intertwining snakes, and as such, signifies long life, eternal love, and the interconnection of all things.

In Tibetan Buddhism, it symbolizes the Buddha's mind, standing for his infinite knowledge and compassion. It also symbolizes the mutual dependence of religious doctrine and secular affairs.

Victory Banner

The victory banner represents the victory of the Buddha's teachings, and the victory of knowledge over ignorance and evil. It may have its origins in a military banner.

This victory banner is a traditional representation. It is fashioned as a cylindrical ensign mounted on a long wooden axle-pole. The top of the banner is a small, domed white parasol topped by a central wish-granting gem. It is rimmed by an ornate golden crest-bar with amphibious mythological animals (makara) on either end, from which hangs a billowing yellow or white silk scarf. The cylindrical body of the banner is draped with overlapping vertical layers of multicolored silk valances and hanging jewels. A billowing silk apron with flowing ribbons covers its base.

Wheel

The wheel is one of the most important symbols in Buddhist art and iconography. It is an early Indian solar symbol of sovereignty, protection, and creation.

It represents the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (reincarnation), or samsara, as well as the teaching and law of the Buddha (dharma), which is in constant motion. It provides a path towards spiritual enlightenment (nirvana) and eventual release from this cycle. The Sanskrit term for the "wheel of law," dharma chakra in Tibetan has come to mean the "wheel of transformation" or spiritual change.

The Buddha's first discourse at the Deer Park in Sarnath, where he first taught the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path, is known as his "first turning of the wheel of dharma."

Some Buddhists believe that the three main sections of the wheel represent the three kinds of training of Buddhist practice. The hub represents the training in ethical discipline, which supports and stabilizes the mind. The sharp spokes symbolize wisdom, which cuts through and defeats ignorance. The rim represents the training in concentration, which holds the whole practice together by encompassing and facilitating the motion of the wheel.

The wheel with eight spokes, like the one on this banner, symbolizes the Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path, and the transmission of these teachings towards the eight directions, while the perfect circular form is associated with the completeness and perfection of the Buddha's teachings.

The Border of the Banner

The Eight Auspicious Symbols are surrounded by a colorful yellow and red silk border which has been embroidered with five-clawed dragons cavorting in the clouds. In China, Japan, and Southeast Asia the

dragon is a benign creature that inhabits the seas, rivers, lakes, and clouds. It is associated with the emperor in China and is valued for its ability to bring rain.

Sources and Additional Background

[Learn Religions](#) | Barbara O'Brien, The Eight Auspicious Symbols of Buddhism, Images and What They Mean

[The Rubin Museum](#) | The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room

[Tricycle.org](#) | Himalayan Art 101 (The Tricycle Foundation is dedicated to making Buddhist teachings and practices broadly available, with many brief and informative articles on Himalayan Art.)

[Wikipedia](#) | Ashtamangala (Auspicious Symbols)

Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe this banner? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. How would your impression of the banner change if it were black and white? What do the bright colors of the silk and threads contribute to the overall effect of this banner?
3. If you were going to design a banner to represent your values, your interests, or your beliefs, what would it look like? What colors, designs, and format would you use?
4. Symbols have been used throughout the world in many ways. What are some symbols that are important to Americans (such as the American flag, symbol of the nation)? What are some symbols that are important to you, personally?
5. The lotus, in particular, is used widely in the arts of China, Japan, and South and Southeast Asia. Find examples of the lotus in the galleries and compare and contrast them. How does the lotus change from one country or culture to another? From one medium to another?
6. Dragons appear frequently in the arts of Asia. Compare the dragons on the Art Cart banner with the dragons on Chinese textiles and other objects. How are they the same? How are they different?
7. To get an idea of how this banner would have been used, look at the banners on either side of the ancestral shrine in the Wu Family Reception Hall (which is set up in this configuration). What is different about these banners? What is the same?

Collection Connections

Additional connections to come after the S/SE Asia gallery reinstatement.

- [Buddhist Reliquary in the Shape of a Wish-Granting Jewel](#), 16th-17th century. Unknown artist, Japan, 2006.42
- [Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light](#), 12th century. Unknown artist, Japan, 78.20.
- [The Wu Family Reception Hall](#), early 17th century. Unknown artist, China, 98.61.1.

VAJRASATTVA THANKA PAINTING



What Is a Thangka Painting and How Is It Used?

A thangka is a painting made for use in worship ritual or as an aid in meditation by followers of Tibetan Buddhism. Thankas depict the Buddha, important spiritual figures such as male and female bodhisattvas (those who have achieved enlightenment but remain in the physical world to guide others towards enlightenment), deities and other elements of the Vajrayana Buddhist spiritual universe. They are characterized by intense colors and fine detail.

Thankas are conceived and designed as objects of religious devotion or spiritual meditation, and are valued as sources of miraculous power.

Monasteries and lay patrons commission thankas for worship or to commemorate certain events. They may be commissioned to help in time of sickness or trouble, death in the family, or the need for an image for the performance of certain rituals. Thankas are hung in monasteries or at family altars. They also are carried by monks during ceremonial processions on holy days.

The Art Cart Thangka Painting

The Art Cart thangka was painted on cotton and mounted on a silk brocade hanging scroll. It depicts Vajrasattva, the primordial Buddha who has been awakened from the very beginning of time.

It was made by the Venerable Jamyang, a Tibetan monk and artist who lives in Dharamsala, India. It was made for sale to support the artist and the Tibetan exile community.

Who Makes Thangka Paintings?

The creation of a thangka is a religious act that brings spiritual merit (karma) not only to the person who commissions it but also to the artist. Most Tibetan thangka artists, however, do not sign their works. Painting a thangka is considered a divine act; and the artist is thought of as a mortal instrument of divine power, making his own identity inconsequential. This artistic anonymity also relates to the Buddhist belief in eliminating the individual ego.

Traditionally, the creation of a thangka was a joint effort of three people: a lama (monk or priest), a religious worshipper, and a thangka artist. The worshipper sought the counsel of a qualified lama, and learned which deity image of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon was the most beneficial for his or her spiritual practice. The worshipper then invited a thangka painter to the home to create a painting of that deity image. The artist was provided with the best possible hospitality for the duration of the painting process, as well as all the necessary materials.

How Are Thangka Paintings Made?

The process of making the painting is a form of meditation and devotion requiring great mental capacity and concentration. Work on the thangka must begin on an auspicious day that promises success.

Thankas are usually painted on sized cotton canvas with water-soluble pigments. Their creation is a five-step process:

1. Preparation of the painting surface. The cotton panel is set up in a wooden frame. If the artist does not have a single piece of cloth long enough for the painting, he sews on additional strips, which are barely noticeable in the finished work. The cotton panel is treated with a thin layer of gelatin to prevent the paint from getting absorbed into the fabric, from cracking, and from turning dull. A mixture of chalk or white clay is then placed on both sides of the cotton panel. When dry, the surface is polished with a smooth stone, which makes the texture of the cloth barely visible.

2. Transferring the drawing to the canvas. Painters begin by drawing eight major lines of orientation. A painter learns the precise proportions from iconographic manuals and achieves precision in his own drawing with the help of a thin string saturated with chalk. After the lines are drawn, the rough drawing of the deity is created with charcoal or graphite. Finally, the artist goes over the drawing with a brush dipped in black ink.
3. The application of the paint. Paints are made from minerals. The pigments are ground in a small mortar, dissolved in water, and then bound together by a glue substance. The right amount of glue is very important so that the pigments are the ideal consistency. The artist applies the paint with a series of goat and rabbit hair paint brushes differing in size and texture. There is a definite, specific sequence to color application, and in general, the thanka is painted from top to bottom.
4. Shading and color gradations. After laying the initial coats of color, the painter applies thin coats of dyes diluted in water. He creates shading is done to add volume and dimension to the form. He then makes outlines to set off objects from the background, to mark the subdivision of certain forms and to emphasize specific features.
5. At the fifth and final stage, the painter finishes the facial features and paints the eyes of the deities. **This is the most sacred stage of thanka painting when, traditionally, the Buddha is said to enter the image.** To prepare for this sacred act, the artist bathes and makes offerings to the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. When the eyes have been painted, prayers are inscribed on the back of the thanka to awaken the image's energy.

How Is a Thanka Painting Completed?

A thanka painting may take weeks, months, or even years to complete the details. It then is mounted on silk. To protect the painted surface from dust and smoke, a thanka usually is draped with curtains of silk and a contrasting square of silk brocade serving as a "door to meditation" is added to the mounting below the painting. The Art Cart thanka does not have these elements, but they can be seen in the thankas on view in gallery 212. Two wooden rollers are attached at the top (from which the painting is hung) and at the bottom (for stability).

What Do the Colors Mean?

Colors are important in Tibetan Buddhist art. Buddhist thought places much emphasis on the spiritual meaning of colors, and this emphasis has influenced the development and practice of Buddhist aesthetics. Some examples of Buddhist color symbolism are:

- Blue – the concept of loving kindness and peace.

- Yellow – the Middle Path: the complete absence of form and emptiness. Red – achievement, wisdom, virtue, fortune, and dignity.
- White – for purity and emancipation.
- Orange – the essence of Buddhism: full of wisdom, strength and dignity.

Who Is Vajrasattva?

Vajrasattva's Tibetan name is Dorje Sempa (dor-je sem-pa). In Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrasattva is seen as the primordial Buddha who has been awakened from the very beginning of time. As such, he holds the position of Supreme Being in Tibetan Buddhism and often is referred to as the Adi-Buddha. Vajrasattva purifies and protects all the other Buddhas, and therefore all the bodhisattvas, and thus all spiritual seekers. In the Art Cart vajra scepter, his role as purifier and protector is represented by the rounded center section joining the "double-dorje" or "intersected vajras."

As the source of spiritual perfection and knowledge of the true nature of the self, Vajrasattva is the focus of meditation and the basis of all forms of spiritual practice in Tibetan Buddhism. One major form is the visualization and recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra addressed to Vajrasattva. This mantra calls on Vajrasattva's aid to purify actions, lift barriers of the mind, and allow his light and all the energies of enlightened beings to enter the body, speech and mind of the meditator. The spiritual goal is to become one with the body, speech and mind of Vajrasattva, and become a holder of the vajra thunderbolt and diamond.

How Is Vajrasattva Depicted?

Vajrasattva is identifiable by his lotus-white skin and in this thanka painting, Vajrasattva is seated in a special yoga position of repentance. He holds a vajra scepter representing compassion in his right hand before his heart, and a vajra bell representing wisdom in his left hand. (See entry on the Art Cart bell and scepter.) He is richly adorned with gold and jewels in the form of a crown, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces.

The objects in front of Vajrasattva's lotus throne are traditional offerings to deities. They are a part of a complex symbolism relating to the attributes of a universal monarch, chakra vartin, or "wheel-turning king," with the king referring to the Buddha and the wheel to Buddhist Law (dharma). The objects are:

- two pairs of elephant tusks (representing the precious elephant);
- interlocked round earrings (representing the precious queen);
- interlocked square earrings (representing the precious minister);

- a heap of multicolored gems (representing the precious jewels). While these gems symbolize worldly treasure and royal power, they actually refer to the qualities of spiritual wealth and divine kingship embodied in the universal monarch; which are topped by
- the wheel (representing the precious laws of Buddhist teachings).

Sources and Additional Background

[Folklife](#) | VIDEO: Painting the Sacred: Tibetan Thangka (Video and article)

[The Asia Society](#) | A Guide to Decoding Buddhist Symbolism in Tibetan Art (including a Video: A Closer Look at Tibetan Thangkas)

[The Rubin Museum](#) | Art That Celebrates the Earth

[Wikipedia](#) | Thangka

[Wikipedia](#) | Vajrasattva

[Wikipedia](#) | Buddhist symbolism

Questions and Activities

1. Look closely at the figure in the painting. What do you see? How would you describe the figure in the painting? What do the clothes tell us about the figure?
2. Compare Vajrasattva with the Southeast Asian Buddhas and the Mughal emperor Humayun in the Indian miniature painting on the Art Cart. How are they similar and how are they different?
3. Find other figures like Vajrasattva in the Asian galleries. How are they similar and how are they different from the one on the Art Cart?
4. Where would you hang this painting? Why? What types of things do you hang on your wall at home?
5. (Watch a minute of the video on painting the sacred, to see the detail and time spent on such paintings.) What is one question you would have for the artist?

Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation.

CHAK-PUR (Sand Mandala Funnel) AND COLORED SAND



What Is It?

Chak-pur are metal funnels used by Buddhist monks to create Tibetan sand mandalas. The funnels typically have ridges on the side. Another chak-pur or other tool is brushed along the ridges, creating small vibrations which allow small amounts of sand inside the funnel to be dispensed. Chak-pur can also be tapped to dispense sand. By only allowing a small amount of sand to be deposited at a time, chak-pur help users create very intricate designs.

What Is a Sand Mandala?

A mandala, or circle, is a representation of the Buddhist universe. These cosmograms represent in symbolic color, line, and geometric forms, all realms of existence and are used in Tantric meditation and initiation rites. A mandala represents an invitation to enter the Buddha's awakened mind. Tibetan Buddhists believe there is a seed of enlightenment in each person's mind that can be uncovered by visualizing and contemplating a mandala. The complex symbols and exquisite combination of primary colors are considered a pure expression of the principles of wisdom and compassion that underlie Tantric Buddhist philosophy.

Mandalas constructed from sand are unique to Tibetan Buddhism and are believed to effect purification and healing. Historically, the mandala was not created with natural, dyed sand, but granules of crushed coloured stone. In modern times, plain white stones are ground down and dyed with opaque inks to

achieve the same effect. The monks use a special, extremely dense sand in order to limit interference by things like wind or sneezes.

Typically, a great teacher chooses the specific mandala to be created. Monks then begin construction of the sand mandala by consecrating the site with sacred chants and music. Next, they make a detailed drawing from memory. Over a number of days, they fill in the design with millions of grains of colored sand using the chak-pur. At its completion, the mandala is consecrated. The monks then enact the impermanent nature of existence by sweeping up the colored grains and dispersing them in flowing water.

Sand mandalas traditionally take several weeks to build due to the large amount of work involved in laying down the sand in such intricate detail. It is common that a team of monks will work together on the project, creating one section of the diagram at a time, working from the center outwards. (An example: a seven-foot-square mandala could take twenty monks working in shifts two weeks to complete.)

How Do Mandalas Heal?

According to Buddhist scripture, sand mandalas transmit positive energies to the environment and to the people who view them. While constructing a mandala, Buddhist monks chant and meditate to invoke the divine energies of the deities residing within the mandala. The monks then ask for the deities' healing blessings. A mandala's healing power extends to the whole world even before it is swept up and dispersed into flowing water—a further expression of sharing the mandala's blessings with all.

Tibetan Buddhism

The historical Buddha, founder of Buddhism in India during the fifth century B.C.E., taught the impermanence of existence. Tibetan Buddhism, which developed in the seventh century, draws its main tenets from Indian Buddhism: individual enlightenment, the liberation of all beings, and the development of compassion and insight into the nature of reality.

Sources and Additional Background

[Blanton Museum of Art](#) | **VIDEO:** Highlights from the Sand Mandala Project at the Blanton Museum of Art, January 9-13, 2013

[Freer Sackler](#) | Tibetan Healing Mandalas

[Frist Art Museum](#) | Sand Mandala Painting

[Gustavus Adolphus College](#) | **VIDEO:** Traditional Tibetan Sand Mandala Time Lapse

[Wikipedia](#) | Sand Mandala

[Wikipedia](#) | Chak-pur

Questions and Activities

1. Creating a sand mandala using chak-pur requires a great deal of patience and concentration. What is a project you've worked on that required a high level of continued patience and concentration?
2. After many hours of work go into creating sand mandalas, they are destroyed, which is a representation of the ephemeral nature of life. How would you feel about intentionally destroying something you had spent hours creating? Can you relate this to the concept of "letting go" in aspects of your life?

Collection Connections

(To be updated after gallery reinstallation.)

- [Mia Collection \(G212\)](#): *Yamantaka Mandala*, 1991, Monks of the Gyuto Tantric University, Tibet. Read more about the mandala and its preservation [here](#).
- [Mia Collection \(G212\)](#): *Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi Mandala*, 1400-1500, Unknown artist, Western Tibet
- [Mia Collection \(G212\)](#): *Taima Mandala*, early 14th century, Unknown artist, Japan

TIBETAN PRAYER WHEEL



What Is It and How Is It Used?

A prayer wheel is a cylindrical wheel on a spindle made from metal, wood, stone, leather or coarse cotton. The Art Cart prayer wheel has a wood handle and a copper and brass top. The movement on the metal top is fueled by a ball-and-chain governor connected to the center of the cylinder. Also known as “Mani” (jewel) wheels, prayer wheels are used by Tibetans of all classes as a common meditation and prayer aid. The prayer wheels exist to purify negative karma and add positive karma.

Prayer wheels are associated with the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, and his Six Syllables Mantra, “om mani padme hum,” which can be translated as “hail the jewel-lotus” or “hail to the jewel in the lotus.” Traditionally, the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum is written in Newari language of Nepal, on the outside of the wheel.. The mantra is also enclosed within the wheel cylinder. It is printed on very thin tissue paper as many times as possible, in some cases numbering in the millions! The paper is wrapped around a spindle and covered with the protective cylinder. In recent years, microfilm technology has allowed billions even trillions of prayers to be invoked with just one turn of the wheel.

Though the practitioner recites mantras while spinning the wheel, it is believed that turning the wheel is also the same as reciting the prayers and mantras. Thus, the mantras written around the side of the wheel and enclosed inside the wheel multiply the number of prayers sent into the universe every time the wheel is spun, benefitting countless beings. The benefit of spinning the wheel with a concentrated mind is said to be one hundred thousand times greater than spinning it with a distracted mind.

Believed to go back to the famous Indian master Nagarjuna, this common practice is often combined with circumambulation around a sacred site or temple. The wheels are spun clockwise so the mantras inside can be read correctly, from left to right.

Wheels vary in size—they can be hand-held like the one on the Art Cart or very large on the side of buildings (see the video “Benefits of Prayer Wheels” below for an example).

When the wheels are outside temples, practitioners can turn them while circumambulating, multiplying the effect of their prayers in a sacred space. In addition to stationary wheels, which people turn themselves, there are different methods of spinning, including by water, fire, wind, and electricity. Tibetan Buddhists believe that if wind and water touch the wheels, they also become sacred and that wind/water will have the same effect of purifying negative karma in everything they touch.

This prayer wheel was purchased in Nepal by CIF guide Manju Parikh.

Sources and Additional Background

[Beauty of Nature](#) | VIDEO: Benefits of Prayer Wheels

[WildFilmsIndia](#) | VIDEO: Tibetan worshipper spins a hand-held prayer wheel at Bodhgaya

[Rubin Museum of Art](#) | Prayer Wheel

[Gardner Museum](#) | Hand Prayer Wheel, 19th Century

[Met Museum](#) | Prayer Wheel and Xylographic Folio Page

[Khan Academy](#) | Prayer Wheel

[BBC](#) | A History of the World: Tibetan Prayer Wheel

[National Museum of Scotland](#) | Tibetan Prayer Wheel House

Questions and Activities

1. How would you describe the sound of the prayer wheel? What kinds of sounds do you find calming? What kinds of sounds do you find energizing?
2. If you could ask a question of the artist who made this, what would you ask?

Collection Connection

(To be updated after gallery reinstallation)

[Mia Collection](#) (G212): Prayer Wheel, 18th-19th century, Unknown artist, Tibet

TIBETAN SINGING BOWL



What Is It and How Is It Used?

Singing bowls, also known as Himalayan bowls and standing or resting bells, are sometimes used in Buddhist rituals to accompany meditation and chanting. They are essentially inverted bells that produce noise when a padded or wood mallet is rotated around the rim. They have become popular with yoga practitioners and music therapists due to their calming sound.

Standing bells originated in China, and Tibetan singing bowls like the one on the Art Cart have become popular in the last few decades. According to Tibetan oral tradition, the existence of singing bowls dates back to the time of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (560-480 BCE). The tradition was brought by the tantric master Padmasambhav in the 8th century CE. Others believe that the manufacture and use of bowls specifically for the purpose of 'singing' (as opposed to standing bells/bowls that are intended to be struck) is a modern phenomenon.

Singing bowls produce sounds which invoke a deep state of relaxation which naturally assists one in entering into meditation, the ultimate goal being enlightenment. They are a quintessential aid to meditation and can be found on private Buddhist altars, as well as in temples, monasteries and meditation halls throughout the world.

In Buddhist meditation in Nepal and other Himalayan areas, singing bowls are widely used to either start or end the meditation session. They also act as an anchor to signal the mind to get ready for the meditation; this in return deepens the level of meditation at each session.

In addition to their traditional usage for meditation, Tibetan singing bowls are used for deep relaxation, stress reduction, holistic healing, Reiki, chakra balancing, and World music. Many people find that the rich blend of harmonic overtones which the bells produce have a direct effect upon their chakras. Playing

the bells usually causes an immediate centering effect. The tones set up a “frequency following response” that creates a balancing left/right brain synchronization. Meditating on the subtle sounds of the Tibetan singing bowl tunes one into the universal sound within and without.

How Is It Made?

These bells are historically made in Nepal, Japan and China. It is thought that traditional singing bowls were made of seven metals (gold, silver, mercury, copper, iron, tin, and lead) that each produced an individual sound and together harmonized to create the “singing” sound that is produced when the bowls are rubbed with a mallet. The amount of each metal used in the traditional bowls is unknown, and not all bowls contained all seven metals.

Each bowl produces its own unique sound based on size, shape, and the metals used. The singing bowls made in the past forty years or so have not been produced in the traditional way, although there are still older singing bowls in circulation. It is thought that traditional bowls served a dual purpose and were used for both meditation and eating.

The usual manufacturing technique for standing bells was to cast the molten metal followed by hand-hammering into the required shape. Modern bells/bowls may be made in that way, but may also be shaped by machine-lathing.

The finished article is often decorated with an inscription such as a message of goodwill or with decorative motifs such as rings, stars, dots or leaves. Bowls from Nepal (such as our Art Cart bowl) sometimes include an inscription in the Devanagari script.

The Art Cart singing bowl appears to be made of brass, and it has a wood mallet. There is an inscription around the side of the bowl as well as on the bottom. The inscription on the bottom of the bowl looks to be the OM Mani Padme Hum, sometimes translated as the jewel in the lotus. This famous chanted prayer can be found etched or engraved on Tibetan singing bowls. The mantra is also repeated on the side of the bowl four times. Inside the bowl is a raised relief of the Wheel of Law (Dharmachakra).

This bowl and mallet were purchased in Nepal by CIF guide Manju Parikh.

Sources and Additional Background

[Binaural Meditation Music](#) | **VIDEO:** Tibetan Singing Bowls: Pure Tone, No Background Music, Meditation

[Glessner House Museum](#) | The Singing Bowl (Japanese)

[BBC](#) | Tibetan singing bowls give up their chaotic secrets

[University of Copenhagen](#) | BBB lecture series: The 'Tibetan' Singing Bowl

[Wikipedia](#) | Standing Bell

[Heaven of Sound](#) | Symbols on Singing Bowls and Tingsha

Questions and Activities

1. Demonstrate how the bowl works, then give to the visitor. How does it feel to hold the bowl and mallet, to produce the sound?
2. What sounds do you find relaxing or helpful for reducing stress?
3. What sounds do you find helpful for concentration?

Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation

TIBETAN AMULETS (GA'U)



What Are They and How Are They Used?

These amulet containers from Tibet are called “ga’u” in Tibet, “gahu” by Tibetan groups in Nepal, and “jantar” in Nepali. An amulet is an object that is worn somewhere on the body in the belief that it will help give the wearer some protection against evil, danger, or disease. Amulets come in many forms, but typically are small objects or ornaments, or prayers on paper which are placed in boxes or containers.

In the Himalayan region, amulet boxes generally contain an amulet (called “ten” in Tibetan) in the form of a protective diagram or formula written on paper by a lama and consecrated. Amulet boxes also may contain objects that have come into contact with revered religious figures, especially bits of clothing or silk presentation scarves called “katag”). Auspicious multi-colored threads often are wrapped around the paper or fabric, which further enhances the potency of the amulet. It may be wrapped in a simple cloth or leather covering before being placed in the amulet box, which is then kept closed with a cord of some type. The purpose of the amulet is protection from evil spirits. (The Art Cart examples do not contain any amulets, so may have been for sale as cultural display objects.)

The purpose and function of an amulet box is for protection when traveling. Objects such as this were generally carried when traveling some distance away from home, such as on pilgrimage, or for extended business trips. Amulet boxes are often plain and utilitarian, but when financial ability allows, the art of the metal smith transforms the amulet box into a piece of jewelry. This gives the amulet container the additional aesthetic purpose of adornment, and also helps enhance social status by displaying wealth, which is thought to have been attracted by the amulet.

Men's and women's ga'u differ in their stylistic depictions, size, and shape. Men's ga'u are typically shrine-shaped oblong boxes with flat base on which they can stand. There is an opening at the center of the box for viewing the sacred image inside. The surface of the cover is embellished with Buddhist motifs, usually by embossing. A common design on the cover of the men's ga'u is the eight auspicious emblems. The ga'u is typically suspended from the neck.

For women, the ga'u doubles as jewelry and tends to be more ornate with elaborate filigree work and decorated with precious and semi-precious stones, such as turquoise as on our example. They are worn as necklaces and also as hair ornaments (which is possibly why one of these is not strung on a necklace). There is a greater range of shapes as well, in contrast to the men's ga'u. For men and women alike, the ga'u also serve as an indicator of social standing, with the quality and characteristics of workmanship marking the owner's status and wealth.

In addition to being a source of protection, the ga'u is also the symbolic seat of the Buddha, a case in which an image of the Buddha was carried when not placed on the altar.

How Are They Made?

Most amulet boxes are made of silver of varying alloys or base metal alloys containing no silver. Gold containers are relatively rare because of their expense. The back section of the amulet boxes are usually made of brass, copper or mild steel. The Art Cart examples appear to be made of silver alloy (in the front) and brass (in the back).

Amulet boxes come in many shapes: round, square, trapezoid, oval, hexagonal, mandala-like, or in a rectangular form with elegantly curved points at the sides. The oval shape of the Art Cart examples is based on a stylized kidney shape, and is a type worn by women in Tibet, eastern Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.

The Art Cart examples display the two elements most amulet boxes have in common: firstly, the top loop, a tube with puffed up segments that in their roundish shapes imitate beads; and secondly, the bottom decoration, a stylized dorje (a representation of a thunderbolt in the form of a short double trident or sceptre, symbolizing the male aspect of the spirit and held during invocations and prayers).

The faces of the amulet box lids, although they rarely show representational imagery, are always very elaborate, and may include stamped elements, scrolls, pieced cut-outs, wire borders, and inlays of metal and precious stones.

The Art Cart's larger amulet box is set with a red coral and is strung on a necklace composed of red coral and silver beads. The corals most likely originated in the Mediterranean region, from which they were traded into all parts of Asia, but there may be some Pacific corals as well as imitation corals used.

The smaller amulet box is set with a green turquoise, which most likely originated in Tibet, which is a source of green turquoise. Although turquoise is found in Tibet, the Tibetans much preferred the bluer shades that came from turquoise in Afghanistan and especially Iran. Those boxes with blue turquoise would have been quite expensive, so the one on the Art Cart is more of the budget version.

Floral designs are the most commonly used decorative motifs in Nepalese and Tibetan jewelry, and we see these in the Art Cart amulet boxes. Floral designs are often abstracted down to dot shapes, but there are rosette shapes apparent in the larger amulet box (set with red coral), which represent marigolds. This flower (genus *Calendula*) grows well in the lower mountain regions of the Himalayas, and is used widely in herbal medicine to treat a variety of illnesses. Marigolds are used by Nepalese Hindus (and Hindus throughout South Asia generally) in religious ceremonies. The deep yellow-orange color also is reminiscent of saffron dye used to color Buddhist monks' robes.

Floral designs represent femininity and fertility. The use of a red stone (in this case the red coral) emphasizes ideas of fertility as it represents life forces present in blood and is a common design element in amulet boxes worn by Himalayan women. The Art Cart examples are similar to elaborate silver amulet boxes worn by Lhomi women, members of a Tibetan-Nepalese ethnic group living in eastern Nepal. Much plainer versions of this type of amulet box were worn by Buddhist nuns throughout Tibet.

Amulet boxes are often strung on bead necklaces, and besides coral and silver beads, the most commonly used stones are turquoise and amber which, similar to coral, are believed to have many auspicious and protective qualities. Turquoise is worn to attract good luck, support health and longevity, absorb sin, and help keep the soul attached to the body. The bluer the color of the turquoise, the more auspicious and protective its qualities are believed to be. Green turquoise is thought to be blue turquoise that has begun to age, and is considered to be less powerful, but is widely used because of greater availability and lesser expense as it is commonly found in the Himalayas. Amber, which was mainly imported from the Baltic region, is worn to protect against illness, especially eye disease, and evil generally, but also to attract good luck, purity, peace and wealth. Imitation beads are freely mixed with the precious stone beads, as the value lies in the deep colors and their symbolic meanings. Also, when glass and plastic beads became available, they were appreciated as exotic novelties that added to the powers of the other beads made from natural stones.

Sources and Additional Background

[Liverpool Museum](#) | Amulet box/ga'u and

[Himalayan Art Resources](#) | Ritual Object: Amulet Box (Ga'u)

[Koelz Collection of Himalayan Art](#) | AMULET BOXES (GA'U)

Jewellery of Tibet and the Himalayas, by John Clarke. London and New York: V & A Publications and Harry N. Abrams, 2004.

The Jewelry of Nepal, by Hannelore Gabriel. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1999.

Gold Jewelry from Tibet and Nepal, by Jane Casey Singer. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996.

Tibetan Amulets, by Tadeusz Skorupski. Bangkok, Thailand: Orchid Press, 2009. Focuses on the amulets (design and content) rather than the amulet boxes.

Questions and Activities

1. Spend a moment looking at the amulet containers and touching them. What details do you notice visually? What details do you notice from touch?
2. What kind of designs or patterns do you notice?
3. What question would you ask the artists who made these?
4. Do you have any objects that you feel offer you protection or good luck while you travel?

Collection Connections

To come after gallery reinstallation

PRAYER BEADS

What Are They?

Prayer beads are used by members of various religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and the Bahá'í Faith to mark the repetitions of prayers, chants or devotions, such as the rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Catholicism, and dhikr (remembrance of God) in Islam. The number of beads on the strand varies by religion or use.

The English word bead derives from the Old English noun *bede* which means a prayer. The oldest image of a string of beads in a religious context and resembling a string of prayer beads is found on the fresco of the "Adorants" (or "Worshippers") in the prehistoric settlement of Akrotiri, Santorini (Thera,) Greece dating from the 17th c. BCE (c. 1613 BCE). The exact origins of prayer beads remain uncertain, but their earliest historical use probably traces to Hindu prayers in India. Buddhism probably borrowed the concept from Hinduism.

Materials used to make prayer beads are varied (e.g., glass, stone, wood). Whether made of simple or precious materials, prayer beads reveal highly sophisticated and complex arrangements and structure rooted in their symbolic meanings and ritual use. Prayer beads are religious objects of a particularly personal nature, and so the materials often reflect both the status and taste of the beads' owner.

We have examples of Islamic and Buddhist prayer beads on the Art Cart. (We also have a set of Rudraksha Beads, used in Hinduism as prayer beads and to aid in meditation. See the separate entry on Rudraksha Beads for more information.)

Islamic Prayer Beads (Misbaha, Tasbih, Sibha)



What Are They?

This is a strand of Islamic prayer beads. Islamic prayer beads, called Misbaha or Tasbih, usually have 100 beads (99 +1 = 100 beads in total or 33 beads read thrice and +1).

These beads were donated to the Art Cart by CIF guide Nahid Khan. The price of these beads depends on the materials used, their age, and how many beads there are in a strand.

How Are They Used?

Islamic prayer bead strands are also known as “worry beads.” The number of beads has meaning. They typically have either 33 (read three times) or 99 beads, a reference to 99 names of God, which some people say while counting the beads.

Since the beads are fingered in an automatic manner, they allow the user to keep track of how many prayers have been said with a minimal amount of conscious effort, which in turn allows greater attention to be paid to the prayers themselves.

The counting element, like with prayer beads used in other religions, can help people concentrate and allow them to enter a more spiritual mindset.

The prayer is considered a form of *dhikr* (a form of devotion in which the worshiper is absorbed in the rhythmic repetition of the name of God or his attributes) that involves the repetitive utterances of short sentences in the praise and glorification of Allah, in Islam. The prayer is recited as follows: 33 times "Subhan Allah" (Glory be to God), 33 times "Al-hamdu lillah" (Praise be to God), and 33 times "Allahu Akbar" (God is the greatest) which equals 99, the number of beads in the misbaha.

Buddhist Prayer Beads or Japamala/Mala



What Is It and How Is It Used?

A Japamala or Mala (Sanskrit: mālā, meaning garland) is a string of prayer beads commonly used by Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and some Sikhs for the spiritual practice known in Sanskrit as japa, which means, “to recite”. This mala with wood beads, purchased in Bodhgaya, is believed to be meant for use in Buddhist meditation.

Malas are used to help keep the mind focused during meditation while reciting, chanting, or repeating a mantra, as the practitioner sits in silence. Mantras are typically repeated hundreds or even thousands of times and the mala is used as a tool to help count mantras. One repetition is usually said for each bead while turning the thumb clockwise around each bead, though some traditions practice with a counterclockwise motion. When arriving at the guru bead, the practitioner turns the mala around and then goes back in the opposing direction.

What Is the History of Malas?

Malas were first created in India 3000 years ago with roots in Hinduism and Buddhism. Malas can be made of many materials including gemstones, rudraksha seeds, sandalwood or wood from the Bodhi tree.

What Are the Components of a Mala?

Malas typically consist of 108 beads with a 109th bead (often called a guru bead), and a tassel.

108 Beads

There are numerous explanations why there are 108 beads in both Buddhist and Hindu traditions. One explanation for the 108 beads in Buddhist tradition is that they signify the 108 mortal desires of mankind. The beads are symbolic of purifying these 108 causes of negative karma.

The number is attributed to the Mokugenji (soapberry seed) Sutra wherein Shakyamuni, the original Buddha, instructed King Virudhaka to make beads and recite the Three Jewels of Buddhism:

- the Buddha, the fully enlightened one
- the Dharma, the teachings expounded by the Buddha
- the Sangha, the monastic order of Buddhism that practice the Dharma

These wooden beads may be made from the Bodhi tree, or at least the wood is in reference to the Bodhi tree, a tree that the Buddha sat under to meditate. Certain materials are thought to impact the merit accrued, especially when associated with a specific type of Buddhist practice. For instance, turquoise is highly regarded by Tibetans as a jewel, so turquoise beads are considered one of the best and most effective materials for accruing merit with prayer beads. Beads made of carved bone are thought to be most suitable for practices related to wrathful deities.

The Guru Bead

The guru bead, also called a sumeru or bindi, is the bead that the tassel attaches directly to. When strung on a necklace, the guru bead is often the 109th bead. Counting should always begin with a bead next to the guru bead. The guru bead is said to pay homage to the guru from who the student has received a mantra, symbolizing the student-guru relationship.

The Tassel

The tassel is ornamental, but in some religions a tassel may represent a lotus blossom and represent enlightenment. The saffron color of this tassel may reference the saffron robes of Buddhist monks.

Sources and Additional Background

[The National](#) | Muslim prayer beads: what they are and what they are used for

[Prayer Beads](#) | A history of prayer beads throughout the world

[Museum of Fine Arts, Boston](#) | *Islamic prayer beads*, Syrian, 19th century

[Met Museum](#) | *Strand of Beads*, 9th–12th century, Excavated in Iran, Nishapur

[Rubin Museum](#) | Count Your Blessings: The Art of Prayer Beads in Asia

[Rubin Museum](#) | *Prayer Beads*, 19th Century

[Wikipedia](#) | Buddhist Prayer Beads

Questions and Activities

1. What do you do to help your concentration?
2. How would you describe the feel of the beads in your hand?
3. When you are able to touch the beads, how might it change your initial impression of them?

Collection Connections

- [Figure of Portuguese missionary](#), c. 1880. Unknown artist, China, 2004.261.35.
- [Portrait of Charlotte of France](#), c. 1522. Jean Clouet the Younger, 35.7.98.
- [A Hermit Praying](#), 1670. Gerrit Dou, 87.11.

HMONG STORY CLOTH



What Is It?

This is a Hmong Story Cloth, depicting a story of a tiger through embroidered pictures and text. Story cloths and larger blankets are striking personal statements of skilled and imaginative artists. We do not know the name of the artist who created this cloth.

A Brief History of Hmong Textiles

Hmong embroidery is traditionally taught to girls at a young age. Textiles are embellished using embroidery, applique, reverse applique, and/or batik. Historically, embroideries marked landmark moments in life, such as marriage or death. Marriage skirts have symbolic embroidery and are brightly colored, traditionally given to girls by their mothers.

There's a connection between the colors and designs used in these textiles and tribal identity. For example, White Hmong, Blue Hmong, Green Hmong, Black Hmong, and Flower Hmong all can be identified by the textiles they make. Flower Hmong are known in particular for *paj ntaub* (pronounced pahn-dow), or flower cloth, which features intricate and brightly-colored embroidery. While aesthetic choices were adjusted by Hmong in refugee camps, the patterns connecting to specific identities are still used. Common in Hmong textiles is the use of symbols to tell a story. Because the Hmong did not have a written language until the 1950s, it is thought that the symbols used in *paj ntaub* were a way of communicating in a way that couldn't be read by non-Hmong people.

It is thought that the Hmong people originally lived in central China, and over a time period of several centuries some groups migrated or fled into Southeast Asia. During this process, Hmong groups have

developed distinctive clothing traditions. Many Blue Hmong women are skilled indigo dyers and create elaborate resist dyed patterns on cotton or hemp fabric. This fabric is further decorated with cross stitch embroidery and sometimes appliqué, then sewn into intricately pleated skirts. New clothing is made for the annual New Year festival and thereafter worn for daily wear during the following year. For the Hmong people, new clothing celebrates the good fortune of the past year and is a sign of future prosperity.

For many Hmong women, traditional clothing continues to be a source of creative expression as well as cultural affirmation. This clothing is particularly appreciated by all the community when worn for holiday celebrations. Although there are a variety of costume styles reflecting regional and ethnic subgroup preferences, embroidery is universally valued and used to embellish everything from the distinctive pleated skirts to baby carriers, jackets and funeral garments. Sometimes needlework is worked directly on specific garments, but frequently individual units of cloth, as seen here, are embroidered and then incorporated into individual costumes. As clothing wears out, it is not unusual for the embroidered panels to be reused. Hmong women are known to use many embroidery stitches, but the fold and tuck appliqué style is a distinctive tradition that is admired wherever it is seen.

Story Cloths and Blankets

During the Vietnam War, the Hmong sided with the Americans and fought against the Pathet Lao, the communist party in Laos. Because of this, many Hmong people were forced to leave their homes. While living in refugee camps in Thailand, many of the women were able to supplement family income by adapting their needlework skills, traditionally used for making elaborate clothing, to make distinctive wall hangings. The pictorial elements of story cloths were typically drawn by men and embroidered by women. The story cloths often reflected personal experiences ranging from the English school books found in the camps to memories of traditional life as well as impressions of the war. The hangings were not only sold through the refugee camp store, but also by friends and relatives living in America and Europe. Story cloths were created for commercial reasons as opposed to cultural reasons and are not traditional to Hmong culture, although the needlework techniques that are used to make them are considered to be traditional.

The Art Cart Story Cloth

The Art Cart's story cloth is smaller than the Village Story Cloth found in Gallery 213, but the colors and figures are similar in appearance. This cloth appears to tell a popular Hmong folktale called *Nuj Nplaib thiab Ntxawm* (pronounced *Nou Nplai and Yer*). This tale has also appeared in book form and in Hmong movies.

The story is sometimes called *Yer and the Tiger* or *Woman and the Tiger*. A tiger killed a man, then dressed up in his clothes and went to the man's house. He pretended to be the father, but then he ate the mother and all the younger children, with the exception of the younger daughter Yer, who was up in the attic. The tiger called for her to come down, and she refused. She threw salt and pepper in his eyes, and he went back to the river to wash them out. Yer called for help, and her older brothers heard her.

They asked her where the tiger was, and she told them the tiger was at the river, but she would call for him. She called the Tiger and said her family would give her to the Tiger as his wife. The Tiger came back to the house, and was distracted while the brothers dug a trap for him outside. It was a hole covered by leaves. They took him outside the house for a walk, and said “your eyes must be hurting you. Close them and we’ll lead you on a walk.” Then they took him on the path and he fell into the hole. The brothers killed the tiger and took Yer home with them.

In the story cloth, we see several of these scenes illustrated. The tiger comes to Yer’s home. She is in the attic, and she throws salt in his eyes and he runs to a nearby river in pain. Two of the woman’s brothers come by the house asking where the tiger is. They lay a trap for the tiger by digging a hole in a path and covering it with leaves. They then find the tiger and walk with him on the path so that he falls into the trap, and then they kill him and take their sister home.

These are the words written on the Art Cart story cloth (from left to right, top to bottom). Some of the words are stitched together as one word, and some words are broken into separate lines or are spaced differently—these words are clarified or interpreted in brackets.

Then the tiger went back to the house
He said to Yer come down but she threw
Salt and pepper in his eyes.

The tiger said .o.o. wo
And he ran to the river again

Yer’s family came whe
reis [where is] the tiger the yasked [they asked]
Hes downat [down at] the river
Answer Yer Illcallhim [I’ll call him]

I some for Yer sbrothers [Yer’s brothers] went out
Said they dug a hole they dugtini [dug it in]
The path

Then they putlan Yer hole [put plants in the hole]

Then two brothers walked
With the tiger the tiger talked
On the middle only the tiger
Walked

So the tiger walked on the

Leaves over the hole he fell
In the bruther skille dhim [the brothers killed him]

Then they took Yer home
With them

Sources and Additional Background

[Edmond Historical Society & Museum](#) | Cloth As Community: Hmong Textiles in America

[University of California Irvine](#) | Hmong Textiles Exhibit (photos of textiles linked here)

[Ms. Fabulous](#) (fashion blog) | Street Style Vietnam - Hmong Fashion

[Museum Textile Services](#) | Identity of a Community: Hmong Textiles

[Hmong Embroidery](#) | Embroidery Stories

Here is a full copy of *The Woman and the Tiger*:

http://www.reninc.org/bookshelf/johnsons-folktales/the_women_and_the_tiger_2.pdf

Questions and Activities

1. What do you see happening in this story cloth? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. What makes a story memorable? What stories do you remember from childhood?
3. What do you think happened before the scene on the story cloth?

Collection Connections

(To be updated after gallery reinstallation)

SPICES



Introduction

Spices and herbs are the backbone of Indian and Southeast Asian cooking. Spices and herbs (e.g., black pepper, cinnamon, turmeric, cardamom) have been used in South and Southeast Asia for thousands of years for both culinary and health purposes. Spices were a key component of trade with Mesopotamia, China, Sumeria, Egypt and Arabia, along with perfumes and textiles as far back as 7000 years ago. During the Middle Ages, it was said that:

- one pound of ginger was worth a sheep
- one pound of mace was worth three sheep or half a cow
- one sack of pepper was worth a man's life!

The eight spices represented on the Art Cart (**cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, nutmeg, pepper, saffron** and **star anise**) are just a very few of the spices used to flavor the cuisine of these regions. They were chosen because they are some of the most fragrant. Each single spice can have up to eight different flavors depending on the technique used – toasted dry, roasted with oil, whole, ground, soaked in water, made into a paste, etc.

To illustrate the richness and complexity of flavors, some of the more common spices not represented on the cart include:

Asafetida (hing)
Bay leaf (tez patta)
Bishop's weed (ajowan/ajwan/ajwain)

Bitter melon (karela)
Chiles, red and green (lal aur hara mirch)
Cilantro (taasa dhania)

Coriander (sabud dhania)

Curry leaves (kadipatta)

Dill (suva)

Fennel seeds (saunf)

Fenugreek (methi)

Ginger (adrak)

Gongura

Holy basil (tulsi)

Jaggery (gur) and sugar (chini)

Kokum (Garcinia indica)

Kudampuli (Garninia camboge)

Lime (nimbu)

Mango powder (amchur)

Mint (pudhina)

Mustard (rai)

Nigella (kalonji)

Peanuts (sengdana)

Poppy seeds (khus-khus)

Screw pine (kewra) and Rose (gulab)

Sesame seed (til)

Tamarind (imli)

Tumeric (haldi)

For detailed information about each of the spices on the Art Cart, refer to the laminated photo cards accompanying the spice jars.

Sources and Additional Background

The Gateway to Indian Cooking: 660 curries, by Raghavan Iyer

[BRAND INDIA PLANTATIONS](#) | Origin of Indian Spices

Questions and Activities

1. What kinds of spices do you or your family use in cooking?
2. What memories are evoked by the smells of spices?
3. What other uses are there for spices?
4. What other cultures value spices?

Collections Connections

- [Spice container](#), 20th century. Unknown artist, Israel, 98.136.4.1,2. (Other spice containers are also included in the Judaica gallery.)
- [Tea caddy named "Tamamizu"](#), 13th century. Unknown artist, China, 2003.28.1.

PHOTOS ON THE CART

Maps of South and Southeast Asia

Spice Cards

Creation of a Sand Mandala

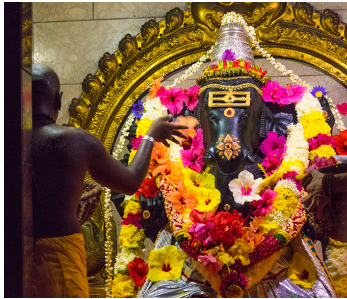
Series of photos, including the use of the chak-pur

Prayer Wheels

Larger size wheels, outside temples

Golden Buddha, Thailand

Ganesha



Three photos, showing garlands on sculptures

Hmong Textiles



Rudraksha Beads/Mala

Series of three photos, including the necklace in Mia's collection

How to Wear a Sari

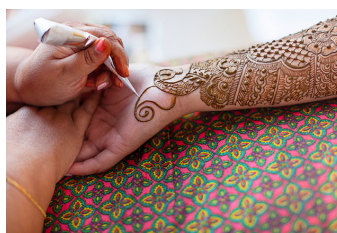
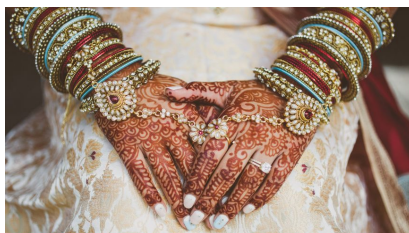
Illustrated instructions

Singing bowls

Series of two photos, one of which shows the use of the bowl



Mehndi



Mehndi, or henna, is a type of body art commonly used to decorate the hands and feet for celebrations. The tradition dates back an estimated 5,000 years—it likely originated in North Africa and made its way to India through trade and cultural exchange, where it was popularized as a bridal tradition. The designs have evolved over time to become more elaborate. Arabic designs are typically floral with large spaces, while Indian designs tend to be very intricate and closely-spaced with little skin showing. Indian designs may also incorporate motifs, such as peacocks or figures of gods. African henna patterns are usually geometric rather than floral. Henna comes from the henna shrub, which grows in Africa, Australia, and South Asia, and was historically used to cool down the skin in those hot climates. Henna leaves contain a reddish molecule called lawsone which can temporarily stain skin, hair, and nails. Today, mehndi events are common prior to weddings.

Sources and Additional Background

[PBS](#) | Henna Body Art

[Vogue India](#) | The history of bridal mehendi: How the tradition came to be

[BBC](#) | Henna: not just skin deep

[Smithsonian](#) | A Quest to Master the Art of Henna