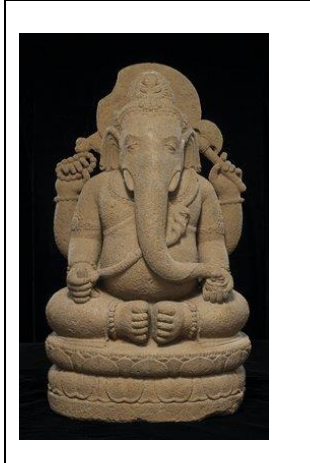

Title of Object

Ganesha

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Culture: Javanese (Hindu)

Date of Object: 10th-11 century

Country: Indonesia

Accession Number: 2003.198

File Created: 4/23/2016

Material/Medium: Volcanic stone (andesite)

Author of File: Brenda Wyley

Department: Chinese, South and Southeast
Asian Art

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Last Updated/Reviewed: 6/6/2016

Tour Topics

Group 3 tour, ancient culture, architecture, animals/birds, gods/goddesses, power/status, relationships/family, ritual/ceremony, spirituality/sacred, stories/storytelling, symbolism, Hinduism

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. Take a moment to look at this sculpture from every angle. What is unusual to you about this piece? What do you see that makes you say that?
2. Can you identify some of the objects that Ganesha is holding? What might their purpose be?
3. Ganesha provides a visual spiritual inspiration to people of Hindu beliefs. What objects in your life provide spiritual inspiration to you?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

This sculpture is carved from a single piece of volcanic stone known as andesite. Its dimensions are 34 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. In this classic tenth-century Javanese depiction, from the island of Java, Ganesha sits erect on a double lotus base. He has the body of a plump boy and the head of an elephant. Pot-bellied and with his chubby feet held tightly together, he eats sweetmeats from a bowl in his lower left hand; His headdress, made of braided locks, bears a protective crescent moon and skull. His lower right hand grasps a broken tusk, while his upper right hand holds a rosary topped with a pomegranate, a symbol of abundance. In his upper left hand, he displays a battle-axe used to counter evil.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Ganesha is a Hindu guardian deity and statues of him often decorate the principal niche in the western wall of Shiva temples. A beloved and playful god, he is the remover of obstacles and the lord of success, the deity whom worshipers first acknowledge when they visit a temple. Hindus invoke his help at the beginning of any enterprise, from weddings to the opening of a new business. They invoke the god to smooth the way, remove distractions, and protect them from evil. He is also the giver of earthly prosperity and well-being. His image is placed where new houses are to be built.

Ganesha is also known as Ganesh or Ganapati. 'Ga' means 'knowledge', 'na' means 'salvation' and 'isa' or 'pati' mean 'lord'. He is the god of wisdom, prudence and salvation.

He is the patron of letters and of learning and poets traditionally invoke him at the start of a book. He is the legendary scribe who, using his commonly held broken tusk, wrote down parts of the Mahabharata Epic. Ganesha is associated with wisdom and knowledge.

Ganesha is usually depicted colored red but there is little evidence of the color on this sculpture. Ganesha's pot belly is usually bound around with a cobra. The cobra is an animal usually associated with Shiva, a reminder that Ganesha is his son. The battle axe in his upper left hand is to protect from evil. In Hindu ideology weapons are viewed as symbolic tools to destroy the ego rather than to cause any type of bloodshed.

In sculpture the position of Ganesha's trunk has a symbolic meaning. If the trunk turns to his left, that is the direction for success in the world. It is a position associated with 'grihastas', or householders. To his right, the trunk represents 'moksha', good for renouncing the world.

Ganesha's identifying weapon is an elephant goad, to move stubborn people, but he is not always shown bearing it. Sometimes he carries a conch shell, holds a book, or receives offerings of sweet foods. Usually, one of his tusks is broken and his vehicle is a rat, who may be shown stealing one of the food offerings placed at his feet. His symbol is the swastika, which he bears in the palm of his hand. His image appears on numerous Hindu products, such as incense and foods.

SHORT STORY: Ganesha became the lord (Isha) of all existing beings (Gana) after winning a contest from his brother Kartikay. When given the task to race around the universe, Ganesha did not start the race like Kartikay did, but simply walked around Shiva and Parvati, both his father and mother as the source of all existence.

LONG STORY: There are many stories as to how Ganesha got his elephant head. In one popular version, Ganesha's mother, Parvati, created him from clay to keep her company when her husband, Shiva, was away. The figure looked so real she decided to breathe life into it.

One day Parvati asked her son to guard her door while she bathed. When Shiva returned he was surprised to find a young boy there, especially one who claimed to be Parvati's son. After the boy denied him access, Shiva became so angry that he cut off Ganesha's head! When Parvati discovered what Shiva had done, she wept and begged him to find the head. Shiva looked hard, but couldn't find it. To ease Parvati's grief, Shiva promised to cut off the head of the first living thing he saw and attach it to the body. That creature was an elephant. Ganesha was thus restored to life and rewarded for his courage by being made lord of new beginnings and guardian of entrances.

FUN FACT: A prayer to Ganesha is invariably accompanied by smashing a coconut, symbolic of smashing the undesirable forces inherent in oneself!

Acceptance of the somewhat funny looking elephant boy Ganesha as the divine force stills the rational mind and its doubts, forcing one to look beyond outer appearance. Thus Ganesha creates the faith to remove all obstacles.

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Label information has been incorporated into the key points above.

One of the most popular of all Hindu deities, Ganesha is the elephant-headed god. He is the destroyer of obstacles and regarded as auspicious. Hindus invoke his help at the beginning of any enterprise, from weddings to the opening of a new business. They invoke the god to smooth the way, remove distractions, and protect them from evil. He also is the giver of earthly prosperity and well-being.

In this classic tenth-century Javanese depiction, from the island of Java, Ganesha sits erect on a double lotus base. Pot-bellied and with his chubby feet held tightly together, he eats sweetmeats from a bowl in his lower left hand. His headdress, made of braided locks, bears a protective crescent moon and skull. His lower right hand grasps a broken tusk, while his upper right hand holds a rosary topped with a pomegranate, a symbol of abundance. In his upper left hand, he displays a battle-axe used to counter evil. Ganesha images often decorated the principal niche in the western wall of a Shiva temple.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Mia website, teaching the arts section:

<http://new.artsmia.org/teaching-the-arts/animals-in-art/the-elephant-headed-god/>

Another sculpture of Ganesha from the Metropolitan Museum:

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/64.102/>

This is an article from the NYT on worshipping Ganesha (aka Ganesh), with accompanying video:

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/27/nyregion/with-bells-and-bananas-a-time-to-worship-ganesh.html?_r=0

The PDF from the Art Institute of Chicago gives information on Ganesha's symbolism and place in the Hindu belief system:

http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/citi/resources/Rsrc_001092.pdf