

Sumptuous Expression: The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Gift of Southeast Asian Art,
June 25, 2004-October 10, 2004

This exhibition celebrates a spectacular donation of thirty-three Southeast Asian art objects from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. On view are highlights from that gift, which includes Buddhist sculpture and religious and secular pieces from Thailand and Myanmar (Burma). Related works from the permanent collection, including the Museum's beautiful Angkor-period Cambodian head, provide context for these new acquisitions.

Two facts inform the presentation of this material: first, the overwhelming importance of Buddhism and religious art in the context of Southeast Asian culture; and second, the high level of craftsmanship of the works on view. Deep religious sentiment inspired the meticulous care involved in making such refined Buddhist devotional images and ritual materials, and at the moment of observance the objects themselves inspired awe and piety. The ornately embellished surfaces and tactile beauty of the secular materials complement the ritual objects and reflect the same aesthetic of rich adornment demonstrated throughout the exhibition.

Doris Duke's Collection of Southeast Asian Art

Doris Duke (1912-1993), the heiress to the Duke family fortune established by her father, James Buchanan Duke (1856-1925), first visited Asia in 1935 as part of a round-the-world honeymoon. Her love of travel and her lifelong fascination with the arts of Asia began with this journey. In 1937-38, she built her Honolulu residence, known as Shangri La, purchasing sections of Islamic buildings and constructing the house around them. It is now a museum showcasing her noteworthy collection of Islamic art, much of which is actually part of the architecture's physical structure.

In the late 1950s, Doris Duke began traveling again to Asia and the Middle East. During a brief 1957 stay in Thailand, she apparently became enchanted with Southeast Asian art. She soon formed a plan to build a "Thai village" in Hawaii and in 1961 established the Thai House Foundation, quickly renamed the Foundation for Southeast Asian Art and Culture (SEAAC). The black lacquered sculpture of Viṣṇu on display in the adjacent gallery (acc. no. 2004.12.27) is believed to have been the first object purchased through SEAAC. Between the late 1950s and early 1970s, she acquired approximately 2,000 objects, mostly of the 18th and 19th centuries, but an appropriate site was never found for the village. In 1972, the artworks were shipped from Honolulu to Duke Farms, her family estate in Hillsborough, New Jersey, where they remained on view in the coach barn until the dispersal of the collection to museums in Europe and the United States, a process begun in 2002 by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

Doris Duke is well known locally through another of her philanthropic interests, the Newport Restoration Foundation, which implemented extensive conservation of 18th-century architecture in Rhode Island's colonial capital. One residence, the Samuel Whitehorne House, contains Doris Duke's collection of antique Newport furniture. Her summer home, Rough Point, is filled with paintings and decorative arts that reveal a strong sense of quality and individual taste. Most striking is her bedroom, where she spent much of her time. It is filled with mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture

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originally upholstered with Thai silk (the photograph shows the pieces recovered with very similar fabrics). The room's color scheme and rich patterns bear witness to how deeply she had absorbed the aesthetic preferences of Southeast Asia, as do her Mughal (Islamic Indian) and Mughal-inspired jewelry and numerous Asian objects at Rough Point.

Buddhist Art in Southeast Asia

Buddhism, one of the world's great religions, evolved in India. The historical Buddha was born in the 6th century BC to the noble Gotama clan. He taught that to escape life's suffering, one should strive to attain enlightenment. To achieve this goal, one must extinguish all worldly desires within oneself and seek deliverance from the eternal cycle of rebirth. Reincarnation is an important aspect of India's traditional religious beliefs, out of which Buddhism evolved.

Buddhism was transmitted from India via Sri Lanka (Ceylon) into Southeast Asia perhaps as early as the third century BC. The Buddhism of Southeast Asia is Theravāda, or "The Doctrine of the Elders." Only in Vietnam is Mahayana ("The Great Vehicle") still practiced. Theravāda coexisted with Mahāyāna and other religious beliefs, including Hinduism, until the early second millennium, when it gradually gained ascendancy in the region. In its focus on the monastic community (sangha) and emulation of the Buddha's discipline, Theravāda gives prominence to the life and teachings of the historic Buddha. According to tradition, the community originally consisted of the Buddha's disciples and followers, who were charged with the important role of disseminating his teachings. It is the continuity of that tradition within the Theravādist monastic community that is so distinctive.

The Buddha's birth, attainment of enlightenment, and death all occurred on the same day in widely separated years. These three significant events are commemorated on the Buddha's Day (Visākhā Pūja), the most sacred of the religious festivals of Southeast Asia (see the Death of the Buddha sculpture, acc. no. 2004.12.1, in the adjacent gallery). The traditional standing Thai Buddha (acc. no. 2004.12.26, at the entrance to the exhibition), crowned and in royal garb, evokes the ideal Buddhist ruler, or "universal monarch" (cakkavattin) through its costume details. The vision of the enlightened Buddhist ruler in Theravādist doctrine provided significant religious support for the political structure of the various Southeast Asian states. Made as devotional images for worship and to obtain merit, these works convey the solemnity and power of the beliefs that inspired their creation.

Craft Traditions of Southeast Asia

Whether Buddhist or secular, many of these objects sparkle with color and shimmer in the light. Most striking are the gilded lacquer surfaces of the Death of the Buddha (acc. no. 2004.12.1) and other Buddhist ritual objects (acc. nos. 2004.12.2.1, .2.2, and .3) in the next gallery. Not only were wooden sculptures gilded, but also the bronzes. The standing Buddha (acc. no. 2004.12.24) was originally covered with gold leaf, traces of which are still visible. The small gilded Thai head of the Buddha with its mother-of-pearl inset eyes (acc. no. 36.007, exhibited nearby) conveys some sense of the lavish decoration applied to bronze devotional images. The manufacture of these works and the others on view required mastery of elaborate techniques.

Lacquered objects were fashioned from wood, palm-leaf, or coiled bamboo cores, then prepared and coated with several layers of sap from the pipal tree, sometimes mixed with ash or clay. In the Burmese technique used for the Death of the Buddha, the offering containers, and the manuscript

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chest (acc. nos. 2004.12.1, 2.1-2, 3, and 4), the surface decoration was modeled in lacquer paste made from sap mixed with cow-dung ash or finely pounded cow bone. Pieces of colored glass backed with foil were then inset into the design, and the surface was coated with lacquer and finished with gold leaf.

The same lacquer sap was used in the production of the mother-of-pearl inlaid tray (acc. no. 2004.12.8) in this gallery. The wood core has been finished on the interior with a coat of red lacquer. The mother-of-pearl inlay, made from finely cut and prepared sections of the seashell *Turbinidae turbo maroratus*, was set into patterns on the surface of the vessel using a mixture of sap and charcoal from burned banana leaves. The spaces around the inlays were also filled with this mixture, and then the object was cleaned, polished, and coated with a thin layer of clear varnish to seal its surface.

Basketry also makes use of lacquer sap as a sealant. The betel-nut box (acc. no. 2004.12.5.1-5) and some of the purses (acc. nos. 2004.12.29, .31, and .33) in this gallery are sophisticated examples of Thai weaving techniques. Their intricate manufacture is based on coiling systems in which indigenous fibrous materials are woven and then sealed with lacquer.

Objects of silver such as the ladle (acc. no. 2004.12.7, next to the inlaid tray) were hammered into the desired shape. In a technique known as parcel gilding, gold mixed with mercury was applied in patterns; when the piece was heated, the mercury evaporated and the gold adhered firmly to the metal surface. The second design, of niello, consists of an inlaid black mixture of lead, copper, and silver which, when heated, fuses with the silver base and contrasts with it in color. In yet another example of metalworking technique, enamels applied to copper were fired to yield the brightly painted yellow-ground water bowl (acc. no. 2004.12.6, displayed in the freestanding case).

Since the ceramics on exhibit were made in China for the Thai market, their techniques of manufacture are omitted here; yet their elaborate enameling and brilliant colors certainly relate to the rich palette and textured patterns seen on the Southeast Asian objects in these galleries.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Thai

Stool, 1800s-early 1900s

Lacquered wood with gilding and glass inlay

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.9

The placement of the *toh jar* on the wooden stool shows how the stool would have been used for serving food in a domestic setting, where seating was on floor mats.



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Chinese

Jar, Rama 5, 1868 - 1910

Porcelain with underglaze blue and enamel

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.11A

Burmese

Offering Container, mid 1800s-mid 1900s

Lacquer, bamboo coils, wood, gold-leaf, glass, mirrors

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.2.2

Lacquered wood and bamboo with gilding and glass and mirror insets.
This offering container would have been used to bring food to a temple.



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Saudi Arabian

Standing buddha in royal garb (abhaya mudrā), 1800s

Bronze with gilding

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.26



Thai

Ladle, 1800s-1900s

Silver with metal sulfides and gilding

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.7



Thai

Pedestal tray, 1800s-early 1900s

Lacquered wood with mother-of-pearl inlay

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.8



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Thailand; Thai

Rectangular purse, 1950-60 or later

Woven indigenous fibrous material; brass fittings

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.33

The Queen of Thailand revived the technique of basket weaving in the 1950s. Ms. Duke probably purchased these small purses during her travels to Thailand around this time.



Thai

Oval purse, 1950-60 or later

Woven indigenous fibrous material; brass fittings

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.29



Thailand; Thai

Oval purse, 1950-60 or later

Woven indigenous fibrous material; brass fittings

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.31



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Chinese

Water Jar, Rama V, 1868 - 1910

Porcelain with underglaze blue and enamel

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.11

The Chinese imagery on the bowl and vase symbolize the wish for “a long life, many sons, and every happiness.” The inscriptions surrounded by five bats indicate that both pieces were commissioned for King Rama V of Thailand.



Chinese

Covered toh jar lid, late 1800s

Porcelain with overglaze enamel and gilt decoration (lai nam thong type)

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.10B

The placement of the toh jar on the wooden stool shows how the stool would have been used for serving food in a domestic setting, where seating was on floor mats.



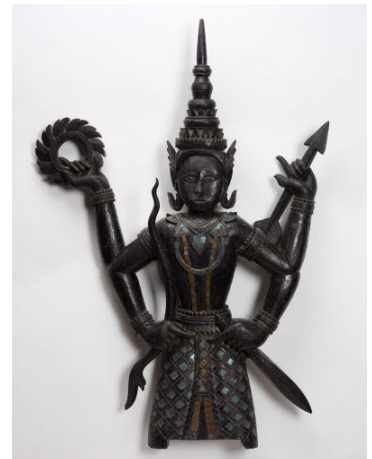
Thai

Gable Decoration of Rama, the Seventh Avatar of Vishnu, 1800s

Wood, lacquer, glass, and mirrors

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.27

This sculpture of the deity Viṣṇu may once have adorned the roof gable of a Thai royal temple



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Chinese

Lidded Jar and Cup, Rama V, 1868 - 1910

Porcelain with underglaze blue and enamel

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.12

The Chinese imagery on the bowl and vase symbolize the wish for “a long life, many sons, and every happiness.” The inscriptions surrounded by five bats indicate that both pieces were commissioned for King Rama V of Thailand.



Standing Buddha (abhaya mudra), 1400s

Bronze with traces of gilding

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.24

Traces of gilding found on this standing Buddha indicate that it had once been covered with gold. The gilt-bronze head of the Buddha located nearby (acc. no. 36.007) gives some idea of what this sculpture would have originally looked like.



Chinese

Bowl, 1800s

Stoneware with overglaze enamel decoration (bencharong type)

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.16

The main band of ornament of these bowls consists of images of deities in a flamelike background alternating with “man-lions” (Sanskrit narasimha).



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Thai

Covered water bowl, mid 1800s

Copper with enamel

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.6A

A high-ranking monk who had given up his worldly wealth would have used this covered water bowl.



Chinese

Covered toh jar, early 1800s

Porcelain with overglaze enamel and gilt decoration (lai nam thong type)

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.13A

The use of gold distinguishes the lai nam thong kind of decoration seen in this toh jar from that of Thai bencharong, as exemplified in the nearby bowl (acc. no. 2004.12.16).



Thai; Cambodian

Manuscript and covers, 1800s

Palm leave; silken cords

Gift of Miss Lucy T. Aldrich 33.247

This manuscript is written in Khmer (Cambodian) and most likely transcribes a religious discourse (sutta) or the texts of prayers. The paper labels on the inside of the lacquer covers are in Thai, indicating that the manuscript might have come from a Thai monastery. The leaves of the manuscript were smoothed, polished, and cut to size; a wire or cord was then passed through a pair of holes in each leaf; and the stack fastened to the upper and lower covers with sealing wax. The text was inscribed onto each leaf using an iron stylus held in the right hand and steadied by the thumbnail of the left hand. The ink



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used for the text is of lacquer sap, boiled and thickened for use as a medium for writing. Since erasure was impossible, deletions and errors were indicated by a pinprick located in the center of each letter to be ignored.

Burmese

Manuscript chest, ca. 1800-1885

Gilded and lacquered wood with colored glass and mirror insets

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.4

This chest would have held palm-leaf manuscripts such as the one located nearby (acc. no. 33.247). It is decorated in a low-relief putty of lacquer sap mixed with cow-dung ash or finely pounded cow bone.



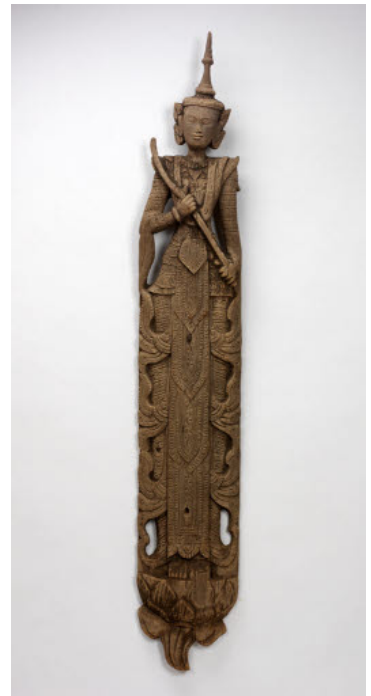
Burmese

Adorant, 1800s

Carved wood

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.28

This adorant would have originally been one of a pair decorating a double temple door.



Saudi Arabian; Siamese?

Crowned Buddha head, late 1400s - early 1500s

Bronze with gilding and mother-of-pearl insets

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 36.007

The gilding and mother-of-pearl inlay on this Buddha head give some idea of the original appearance of the standing Buddha (acc. no. 2004.12.24).



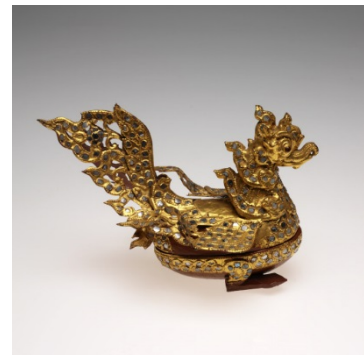
Burmese

Box in the Shape of a Mythological Hinthia Bird, ca. 1900 - 1960

Lacquer, betel-nut, wood, gold-leaf, metal, glass, mirrors

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.3

The hinthia bird is a popular image in Burmese religious art and literature. The earliest known reference to the hinthia is in several jātaka stories. Hinthia birds are featured in religious and royal art as symbols of fidelity and faith.



Burmese

Offering Container with tray and cover (hsun ok), mid 1800s-mid 1900s

Wood, bamboo coils, glass, mirrors, lacquer, gold leaf

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.2.1

Lacquered wood and bamboo with gilding and glass and mirror insets
This pair of offering containers would have been used to bring food to a temple.



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Chinese

Covered toh jar, late 1800s

Porcelain with overglaze enamel and gilt decoration (lai nam thong type)

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.10A

The placement of the toh jar on the wooden stool shows how the stool would have been used for serving food in a domestic setting, where seating was on floor mats.



Burmese

Death of the Buddha, 1860-1885

Lacquered wood with gilding and glass and mirror insets

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.1



Cambodian

Head of a Hindu god, probably Shiva, 1100-1199

Sandstone

Museum Appropriation Fund 31.282



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Thai

Basket for preparation of betel nuts, early 1900s

Indigenous fibrous material coiled on a one-rod foundation

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.5.1

Betel-nut chewing is enjoyed throughout Southeast Asia during social gatherings and special occasions. The betel quid, or packet, consists of the areca palm nut and lime wrapped in the leaf of the betel pepper vine. This packet is stowed in the side of the mouth between the teeth and cheek in order to be sucked on, slowly releasing the flavor. Betel chewing is practiced in informal social and formal ceremonial events because of its traditional association with goodwill, hospitality, and social enjoyment.



Thai

Basket for preparation of betel nuts, early 1900s

Indigenous fibrous material coiled on a one-rod foundation

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.5.2



Basket for preparation of betel nuts, early 1900s

Indigenous fibrous material coiled on a one-rod foundation

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.5.3



Thai

Basket for preparation of betel nuts, early 1900s

Indigenous fibrous material coiled on a one-rod foundation

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.5.5



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Thai

Basket for preparation of betel nuts, early 1900s

Indigenous fibrous material coiled on a one-rod foundation

Gift of Doris Duke's Southeast Asian Art Collection 2004.12.5.4

