



cover:
Dancing Krishna
Bronze, H.23-5/8" (60 cm.),
Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, South India,
Chola Dynasty, circa 1300 A.D.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christian H.
Aall, and the Jhamandas
Watumull Family Endowment, 1997
(8640.1)

On the Cover: *Dancing Krishna*

ASIAN ART DEPARTMENT

The Academy has recently acquired a major Indian bronze sculpture. Standing almost two feet high, the sculpture depicts the Hindu god Krishna as an exuberant dancing baby boy whose face reflects the mischievousness of youth. The sculpture, from the south of India, was likely made in a bronze workshop in the state of Tamil Nadu, and is dated stylistically to the Chola dynasty of circa 1300. It was probably made as a temple image that would have been carried in procession during important festivals.

In the Honolulu Academy of Arts sculpture we see the baby boy Krishna dancing atop a platform in the shape of a lotus petal. A wonderfully energetic form, the figure appears to pause as if in the midst of dancing, radiating confidence, balance and poise. The *puranas* (stories) surrounding the dancing Krishna refer to the time when Krishna stole butter from his mother's larder and then dances with joy at his accomplishment. The beautifully formed body of the young boy is sculpted completely in the round and is nude except for a lavish crown and jewelry draped around his neck and waist.

Krishna, considered the eighth incarnation of Vishnu, is very popular and important to the religious sects devoted to the Hindu god Vishnu. He is frequently depicted in paintings with black or blue colored skin, a reminder that he sprang from the black hair of the god Vishnu. He is also frequently seen as a beautiful youth with classic features surrounded by the gopis, or the cowherd girls, with whom he laughed and played.

This is the first major bronze image of a dancing Krishna to enter the collection and it is destined to be a centerpiece of our Indian collection. We are grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Christian Aall and the J. Watumull Endowment for providing the funds to purchase this extraordinary object.

— Julia M. White, Curator of Asian Art

Dancing Kṛishṇa

India, Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, Chola dynasty, 14th century
Bronze

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Christian H. Aall and The Jhamandas Watumull
Family Endowment, 1997
(8640.1)

Images of Kṛishṇa dancing were very popular in India. The stories surrounding images of Kṛishṇa dancing refer to the time he stole butter from his mother's pantry and danced with joy at his accomplishment. He is depicted here as an energetic young boy whose face reflects the mischievousness of youth.

DANCING KRISHNA - (8640.1) - BRONZE
Tanjore, Kerala, Chola period, 13th C.
Gift of Mr & Mrs Christian Aall and the
Jhamandas Watumul Family Endowment (1997
From an article published in *ORIENTATIONS* Dec.1999

In the ninth century. the Vaishnava (worshipper of Vishnu) poet-saint Periyalvar composed a set of fifty poems dedicated to various episodes of Krishna's childhood. These helped to popularize a host of delightful antics among artists and devotees alike. The Image in the HAA collection depicts a joyful three-year-old child posed in dance, with his right leg raised while his other leg supports his weight and is slightly bent. His left hand is outstretched in a southern Indian hand gesture called the *lambahasta*, which literally signifies a hand hanging down, while his right hand performs the *abhaya mudra* (gesture of protection and reassurance).

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He is naked except for a variety of ornaments. His hair is arranged in a high *jatamukuta* (crown of locks) with a large flame motif in front and a *shirashchakra* with multiple petals and two tassels behind. Particularly interesting is a broad necklace with a central medallion from which hang a pendant and two chains, which are attached to the necklace at the back. Both pendant and chains swing back and forth as the young child dances, with the bells on his girdle and *padasaras* furnishing the music



DANCING KRISHNA - (8640.1)
Chola period - 14th Dynasty - BRONZE
Gift of Mr & Mrs Christian Aall
and the Jhamandas Watumul Family Endowment (1997)

Vishnu plucked two hairs from his head, a fair one and a dark one which will descend to the Earth to rescue it by conquering its demons.

The hairs became a brother-pair of earth saviors. The dark one became Krishna and the fair one Balarama or Rama. They were raised as normal children, playing in the woods and fields and tending the flocks.

As a seven year old Krishna came to the banks of the Yamuna. The great serpent King Kaliya lived in there, making the waters impure.

Krishna wanted to conquer the serpent. He climbed a tree and jumped in the depth of the water. His impact shook the abyss and the flaming waters splashed high. Krishna was surrounded by serpents which wrapped him in their coils leaving him motionless in the bottom.



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However, Balarama, remembering the divine nature of Krishna told him to display his infinite power, arise and conquer the King of Serpents.

With a burst Krishna released his limbs from the coils, placed his foot on the serpent and began to dance on the mighty head. Krishna continued his dance until the great serpent king lay stiff.

The queens and other serpents implored Krishna to save their Lord. Krishna, in his mercy, banished Kaliya from the Yamuna and sent him to reside in the wastness of the ocean

By not eliminating Kaliya, the counter-play between the productive and destructive energies would not be disrupted as such an eventuality was far from the intent of the Highest Being.

Kṛishṇa as a Child

India, Kerala, 15th century
Bronze

Gift of The Christensen Fund, 2001
(10642.1)

Kṛishṇa is the most popular avatar, or incarnation, of Viṣṇu. Here he is shown as a mischievous child holding butter in both hands. As a young boy living among cow herders, he amused himself with various pranks involving stealing butter and curds from his mother and upsetting pails of milk. "Butterlover," one of his divine names, displays the love and honor his devotees have for his childhood pranks.