

## Seated Gaṇeśha

India, Rajasthan, 9th century  
Sandstone

Purchase, 1975  
(4310.1)

Among the objects Gaṇeśha holds is his own tusk. One story recounts that after falling off of his rat vehicle, Gaṇeśha's stomach burst open and all of the sweetmeats he had eaten fell out. He picked them up and put them back inside, securing his stomach by tying a snake around it. The moon, having watched this event, burst out laughing. In his fury, Gaṇeśha broke off his tusk and threw it at the moon, causing a temporary period of darkness, explaining the moon's cycle of waxing and waning.

## Ganesha

From Rajasthan, Gurjarat

Pratihara period, 10th century

Pink sandstone

Purchase, 1975 (4310.1)

Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Parvati and Shiva, is one of the most popular Hindu deities. Images of the jovial god are found everywhere: at entrances to temples and villages, at the front of religious processions, and on family altars. As the Remover of Obstacles, and a god of success and good fortune, Ganesha's name is invoked at the beginning of all enterprises.

In his upper right hand Ganesha holds an axe; in the upper left hand is a lotus bud which, in Hinduism, symbolizes creation. The god's pot-belly, and the bowl of round sweetcakes, which he holds in his lower left hand, attest to his fondness for food. In Ganesha's lower right is his own tusk which, according to one legend, he broke off to fling in anger at the moon. In his crown is a *kirttimukha*, a "demon mask" which wards off evil. Ganesha's *vahana*, or vehicle, is the mouse, a creature so small he knows few barriers. Worshippers appear on either side of the image.

# Gaṇeṣha

India, Tanjore, Tamil Nadu, Pallava dynasty, 9th century  
Bronze

Gift of The Christensen Fund, 2001  
(10784.1)

There is perhaps no deity in the whole of the Hindu pantheon so often seen and addressed as Gaṇeṣha. As The Remover of Obstacles, he is invoked by Hindus at the beginning of an undertaking. For example, if a house is to be built, an image of him is set up nearby. He is also The Bestower of Earthly Prosperity and Well-being, therefore, before a journey he is invoked for protection and his image is often seen on roadsides and especially at crossroads.

Ganesha (#4310.1)  
Purchase, 1975  
Pink sandstone

India  
10th Century  
Gallery 21

ARTIST: Anonymous.

SUBJECT: There are a number of legends relating to the birth and life of the elephant headed Ganesha. He is known as the "Destroyer of Obstacles" and typically is considered the son of Shiva and Parvati. He helps devotees in all their undertakings.

Ganesha is shown usually standing or sitting with his vehicle, the rat, nearby. His four hands hold a hatchet, a bulbous root, a pot of sweet meats and his own tusk which he broke off.

In this piece a snake forms the "sacred thread" that winds around Ganesha's protruding stomach. On top of his bejewelled head a Kirttimukha, or demonic feline mask, is found. A large round urna sits between Ganesha's eyes. Below his legs on the left and right sides, a sage and a woman are found worshipping him. His feet rest on a flattened flower petal which shades the diminutive rat.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE: The pink sandstone has been carved deeply thus creating an exciting surface for the play of sun or artificial light.

All textures are finely articulated and this composite being appears quite plausible.

STYLE: The work reflects the style used in Rajasthan during the Gurjar -Pratihara period. The large volumetric forms which run down the center of the piece (the head, stomach and legs) are beautifully complemented by the fine details on the left and right (the various attributes and the handling of the hands and tip of the trunk).

The Ganesha is imbued with that feeling of "becoming" which the best of Indian art possesses. The modulating form seems to billow out from the stone and then recede. "Prana" or the breath of life pervades the entire work.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: Compare this piece with some of the real or composite animals depicted in the gallery. Talk about the Indian belief that man and nature were one, so the depiction of a composite being was easily understood by the people.

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NEW INDIAN SCULPTURE COLLECTION NOV 75

In 1974 the Honolulu Academy of Arts embarked upon a program to establish a small but representative collection of Indian sculpture. The results of this effort will be on view along with examples from the Academy's earlier holdings later this month in a new gallery devoted to Indian and Southeast Asian art. In consultation with a number of Indian art specialists, including Professor Spink of the University of Michigan; Dr. Pratapaditya Pal of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and Professor Prithwish Neogy of the University of Hawaii, a group of eight images were selected to encompass diversity of style and religious expression. Examples range in date from the first century A.D. through the 18th century and include a wide range of geographic types. Among the choice examples from this new assemblage are a third century Gandharan Bodhisattva, a ninth-tenth century Central Indian

Ganesha (shown here), and a late Chola bronze Parvati of the 13th century. The gift of an important folk bronze from Bengal, an 18th century figure of Radha, by Mr. and Mrs. Gulab Watumull and a generous donation by Mr. Jhamandas Watumull have substantially added to the Academy's collecting program in this area.



The Spring Lecture Series takes a look, among other areas, at Indian art, as exemplified by *Ganesha*; Indian, Rajasthan, Gurjara-Pratihara period; 10th century; Pink sandstone; h. 22 in. (55.9 cm.); Purchase, 1975 (4310.1) CNI/91



This 10th-century sandstone image of *Ganesha*, the multi-faceted, elephant-headed Indian god, will be featured on the Members Tours of the Gallery of Indian Art, see March 13 and 27.

(4310.1)

Ganesha, Rajasthan, Central India,  
Jurjara-Pratihara Period, 9th-10th century  
pink sandstone; h. 22" (55.9 cm.)  
Purchase, 1975 (4310.1)  
On view in gallery 21

Of the numerous gods in the Hindu pantheon, probably the most popular and beloved is the elephant-headed god, Ganesha. He is the God of Wisdom and Success, and among his many names is *Vighnesvara*, "Lord of Obstacles," for he removes obstacles as well as puts them in the way of others. Thus, all pious Hindus pray to Ganesha before embarking on any project and he is especially venerated by merchants and traders.

Originally an ancient non-Aryan, pre-Hindu deity, Ganesha was adapted in Hindu belief as the indulgent dispenser of health and bounty and the discriminating patron of cultural and intellectual enterprises. Many Hindu myths arose concerning Ganesha's origin. One version tells of Shiva's bad habit of surprising his wife Parvati at her toilette. From the dirt on her skin, Parvati fashioned the handsome Ganesha and ordered him to stand guard and not to let anyone pass without her permission. When Shiva was barred from entering, he decapitated Ganesha in a fight. But in order to calm the heartbroken and angry Parvati, Shiva commanded his cohorts to bring back the first head they could find. Unfortunately for Ganesha, the first living thing they encountered was an elephant, and they brought back its head and attached it to Ganesha's body. In a variation on this tale, Shiva encountered Parvati with the infant Ganesha and not believing that the child was his he flew into a rage and cut off its head. When Parvati finally convinced him the child was indeed his son, Shiva desperately went in search of a head swearing to bring back the first one he found.

Despite the diverse stories of how he got his elephant head, Ganesha is traditionally depicted in similar fashion throughout India. As in the Academy's particularly fine sculpture, Ganesha is an amusing pot-bellied figure with multiple arms (usually four, but other Ganesha figures range from two to twelve arms). In his hands Ganesha holds attributes or symbols. In the Academy work



he holds an axe and a lotus bud in his upper arms and a piece of his broken tusk (legend has it that he broke it off in anger to hurl at the moon) and a bowl of sweet, ball-shaped cakes called modaka, which he is supposed to be fond of. Other attributes can include an elephant goad or noose, a rosary or bulbous root such as a radish. The Academy's Ganesha is elegantly bejewelled befitting the god of prosperity and wears the sacred thread made of a serpent entwined around his body. Above his head appears a fierce-looking mask, the *kirttimukha* or "Face of Glory." Ganesha is shown seated on his mount, a rat, and the discrepancy between his rotund bulk and

the diminutive rat further heightens the mirth of the image. At either side and slightly behind (not visible in the illustration) crouch two human worshippers, a bearded *risi* or sage and a voluptuous woman, dwarfed by the presence of the deity.

The Academy's Ganesha embodies the best qualities of Indian sculpture in its informal interplay of bold volumetric curves within a self-contained or poised composition and in its characterization of a "pneumatic" force, which emerges from the back plane of the rock and is projected into space, infusing the image with a latent vitality and revealing the spiritual or religious content which the image symbolizes.