

ABOUT THE ART

Sculpture
from Asia

Gallery 2

ACKLAND

QUESTIONS?

Contact us at acklandlearn@unc.edu

ACKLAND ART MUSEUM

The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
101 S. Columbia Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Phone: 919-966-5736

MUSEUM HOURS

Wed - Sat 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Sunday 1 - 5 p.m.
Closed Mondays & Tuesdays.
Closed July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve,
Christmas Day, & New Year's Day.

About About the Art

The Ackland's *About the Art* guides offer information about every work of art from the Museum's collection that is on view in galleries 2, 3, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17. All of these galleries are marked on the Gallery Map available at the desk in the Lobby. In the bottom right corner of the label beside each object, there is an open book symbol with a number. You can find the same symbol and number on the top of the corresponding page in *About the Art*.

Within each entry, you can find the following information:

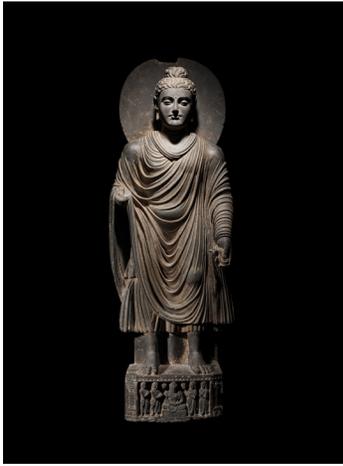
- At the top of the page, you'll see a thumbnail image, the title of the object, who made it and with what materials, and where and when it was made
- Next, you'll see bullet points with information or observations about the object (more or fewer, depending on how much we know about the object so far). There is no standard formula for what kinds of information appears, but you will often find comments on historical context, style, and materials.
- In keeping with the Ackland's tagline, "Look Close, Think Far," the first bullet point will often highlight something visible in the work of art itself.
- You will find names, phrases, and concepts that could be good internet search terms for those who want to learn more
- When specialized terms are used, you'll see a definition, helpful contextual information, or language suitable for an internet search.
- Whenever we know the artist's name, there will be some details about the artist's life, often under the heading "About the Artist," but sometimes as one of the bullet points.

For those visitors who want to engage further with an object, we also suggest other resources to investigate on our website: [ackland.org/education/learning-resources](https://www.ackland.org/education/learning-resources).

The authors of *About the Art* include Ackland curators and educators who use a variety of sources. They consult museum records, art historical research, comments from outside specialists, and more.

About Galleries 2a and 2b: Sculpture from Asia and Islamic Art

These two galleries display selections of the Museum's collection of Asian sculpture and our growing collection of art from Islamic traditions. These works in stone, wood, metal, and ivory range in date from the second century to about 1900. In various ways, they relate closely to the beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam — faith traditions that emerged in places across Asia and are currently practiced throughout the world.



Unidentified artist
Pakistani, Gandhara region
Standing Buddha, c. 3rd century CE
gray schist
Anonymous Loan, L2022.3.1

About the Art

- Schist is a relatively hard gray stone that can be finely carved. It was very commonly used in the ancient region of Gandhara, the northwest part of the Indian subcontinent, for the many Buddhist sculptures created there for temples in the first to fifth centuries CE.
- This figure wears the heavy robes of a monk, but his urna (the dot on his forehead) and his extended earlobes denote his status as the Buddha. The sculpture is missing part of its right arm, which would have been carved with the hand in a Buddhist gesture of reassurance and approachability.
- Although an emblem of calm strength, the sculpture subtly implies some naturalistic movement, with the Buddha's left knee bent slightly forward displacing the heavy folds of the garment.
- On the base of the sculpture is a seated figure of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, who is being venerated by four standing figures.
- The style of Gandharan sculpture combines elements of indigenous Indian traditions with aspects of Greco-Roman styles, the result of influences from Hellenistic culture transmitted in the wake of the military campaigns of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE.



Unidentified artist
Indian, Gandhara region, Kushan
period (100 BCE – 300 CE)
**The Offering of Four Bowls to
Buddha,**
2nd century CE
gray schist
Gift of Clara T. and Gilbert J. Yager
and Ackland Fund, 90.35

About the Art

- In the principal scene on this relief, the Buddha is at the center and looks directly at the viewer. His companions flank him in symmetrical groups arranged in three tiers. On the other side of a standing figure in a niche near the right, the left edge of another narrative scene appears, indicating that this is a fragment cut from a larger whole.
- The Buddha is represented here with characteristic features: the knot on his head representing his infinite wisdom, his elongated earlobes recalling the heavy earrings he wore in his past as a prince, and his hand raised in the teaching mudra, or gesture.
- In the narrative depicted here, four princes present the Buddha with four bowls. They first offered him gold bowls, but the Buddha rejected them as too extravagant. They next offered silver bowls, which he also rejected. Then they gave him four stone bowls, which he considered a more appropriate material for a monk. Before accepting the gift, he miraculously merged the four bowls into one.



Unidentified artist
Nepalese, Malla dynasty (10th – 18th century)
**Bhrikuti, the Female Companion of the White
Avalokiteshvara, Lord of Compassion**, 14th century
wood with polychrome
Gift of the Tyche Foundation, 2010.9

About the Art

- This elegant sculpture was originally primed with gesso and painted. It now has only traces of paint, which may suggest that it was ritually bathed once a year. At other times, it would likely have been covered with ornate textiles and ornaments.
- Bhrikuti was a devout Nepalese Buddhist believed to have married the first emperor of Tibet and to have been an incarnation of the deity Tara.
- This sculpture originally formed part of a group in a Buddhist temple. A figure of the bodhisattva of compassion, known as the White Avalokiteshvara, would have stood at the center. The statue of Bhrikuti and another female figure would have been positioned on either side; together they represented two manifestations of Tara, the Green Tara and the White Tara.
- The White Avalokiteshvara (literally, The Lord Who Looks Down from on High) is considered one of the guardian deities of the Kathmandu Valley of the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal.
- The figure of Bhrikuti has a fourth arm, now broken but visible in the image below; two of her missing hands would have held a coral tree and prayer beads, while the others formed gestures, including the gesture of reassurance.





Unidentified artist
Indian, possibly northeastern Rajasthan, southern
Haryana, or Uttar Pradesh, Mathura region
Vishnu in his Boar Incarnation (Varaha),
late 11th century CE
phyllite
Gift of Clara T. and Gilbert J. Yager, 82.5.1

About the Art

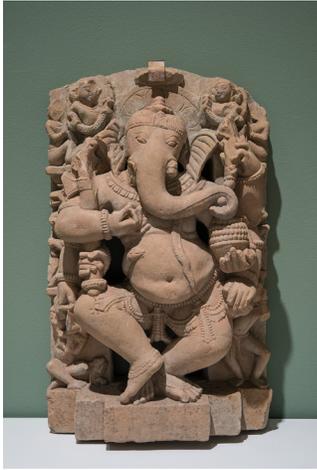
- The smooth black phyllite and fine carving of this sculpture suggest that rather than occupying the exterior walls of a Hindu temple, this representation of Varaha the boar would have been placed in the inner sanctum or a subsidiary shrine inside.
- In his incarnation as Varaha, the god Vishnu fights for a thousand years with Hiranyaksha, a demon who trapped the earth goddess, Bhumidevi, beneath the ocean. Bhumidevi is seated on his left elbow with her hands in a gesture of gratitude to him for saving her.
- Vishnu's left foot rests firmly atop two serpent beings, and one of his right hands grasps a mace. His other attributes, a conch shell and a disc, appear in his two left hands. He is crowned by an umbrella-like lotus.
- Brahma (with three of his four heads showing) is at the upper left of the sculpture and Shiva is at the upper right. Together with Vishnu, they represent the cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe.



Unidentified artist
Indian, Tamil Nadu, Kaveri delta region, Chola period
(880 – 1279 CE)
Vishnu or Shiva, 11th century CE
granite
Ackland Fund, 82.6.1

About the Art

- The tall crown on this figure's head and the mace he leans on with his left hand indicate that it is one of two Hindu gods, either Vishnu or Shiva. The objects once held in the missing hands – two right hands and one left – would have provided definitive evidence of the figure's identity.
- The stone's surface is weathered and the back is relatively flat, suggesting that it was designed to adorn the exterior of a temple. Most, though not all, Hindu temples built in southern India during the Chola period were dedicated to Shiva.
- In the eleventh century two powerful kings ruled southern India, Rajaraja and his son Rajendra I. Both sponsored Hindu temples that became famous for their elaborate sculpted decoration.



Unidentified artist
Indian, possibly Madhya Pradesh, active mid-10th to
mid-11th century CE
Dancing Ganesha, mid-10th to mid-11th century CE
sandstone
Gift of Clara T. and Gilbert J. Yager, 85.2.1

About the Art

- Ganesha, one of the most popular Hindu deities, appears here with several of his attributes, including an axe. He holds a bowl of sweets in one of his left hands. He raises his right foot to dance to the music of his attendants. His mode of transportation, a tiny mouse, is in the lower left of the sculpture.
- One of the narratives about Ganesha explains how he got his elephant head: his mother, the goddess Parvati, created him to guard her while she bathed. When her husband Shiva returned home, he saw Ganesha emerging from her doorway, but did not recognize him and decapitated him. To atone, he vowed to give Ganesha the first head he saw – which was an elephant's head.
- Ganesha is called the Lord of Auspicious Beginnings. He is often invoked when initiating a new undertaking to remove any obstacles to success. This carving would have adorned the exterior wall of a northern Indian temple at the place where devotees began their circumambulations of the temple.