



## Art of India: Hindu Icons



UIMA K-12 School Programs Collections | Art of India: Hindu Icons

The multiplicity of Indian culture is not unlike the multiplicity of Gods in Hinduism. The concept of “God” in Hinduism is that of multiple supreme beings who transform and exist in multiple forms. However, they are simultaneously viewed as one God, the source from which all originates. Similarly, India is a land of many cultures, but it is one united country. Today in India, there are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, and Parsis, and multiple subdivisions of each belief system. For example, within Hinduism there are many sects, including Vaishas (followers of Vishnu), Saivas (followers of Shiva), Saktas (followers of the Goddess Shakti [Durga]), and numerous other sects and sub-sects for each major deity and folk deity of the Hindu pantheon. Mark Twain recorded in his diary while traveling through India, “In religion, all other countries are paupers. India is the only millionaire.” Further adding to the rich palette of India’s culture is the fact that there are fourteen major language groups and an elaborate caste system. The art of India shows this interweaving of diverse cultures.

Many of the objects in the Art of India: Hindu Icons Collection are *murthi*, or embodiments of Hindu gods. In order for a person to see an infinite God, it is necessary to create forms, or murthi, for the worshiper to focus his or her mind in the relationship with the divine. Forms of the divine are created in multiple ways, some by artists and some occurring in nature. Natural occurring objects are believed to be self-created, or *swyambhu* (self-born). Artists create three-dimensional forms of Gods with a variety of media: wood, brass, stone, bronze, resin. Two dimensional polychrome prints, wall paintings, drawings, and multiple examples of self-emanating forms in nature, catch the eye of a devotee and become vessels for God to inhabit, sometimes for only the duration of a worship ceremony or for the life of the artwork. Hindus believe these forms contain the cosmic energies. It is understood that God takes on a form for the benefit of the human worshiper, and that the murthi is but an illusion of the supreme concept of the divine.

Other items in the Art of India: Hindu Art Collection are religious paraphernalia, used in ceremonies. These objects help a worshiper focus on the spiritual experience. During worship, or *Puja*, God can be seen from various perspectives. Hindus express this act of seeing as *darsan* (daar-SHan), the seeing of the divine image. The other senses are activated during puja, by touching objects of worship (*sparas*), listening to mantras and *sravana* (stories), *nayasa* (touching one’s own limbs), tasting teas, and smelling incense. These acts do not render an invisible god visible, but rather awaken the worshiper’s ability to see.

The following pages show examples of objects in the collection.





India; Hindu

*Ganesh* (Ganesh murthi)

Cast brass, 17 x 15 ½ x 35 in.

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India; Hindu

*Nataraja* (Dancing Shiva murthi)

Rosewood, 9  $\frac{7}{8}$  x 4  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 21  $\frac{1}{4}$  in.

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India; Hindu

*Hanuman* (Hanuman murthi)

Resin, paint, 5 ½ x 3 ¾ x 8 ½ in.

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India; Hindu

Daily puja ritual set

Metal, 8 x 8 x 8 in.

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India, Rajasthan, Pushkar

Sarah Cossom (English, b.1964)

*Paints Pushkar, Rajasthan, India, 2002*

Photo print, 34 <sup>6</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 11 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.

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