

Enshrined Buddha 18th Century ... Burma/Myanmar. G213, 89.55

Buddha

Over 2000 years ago, the Indian Prince Siddhartha left his home, family, and all earthly possessions to search for the meaning of life, its cruelties, and its hardships. He was born into a royal family in what is now the country of India in the sixth century BCE. As a young man he renounced his title and retreated into the desert to seek the true purpose of life. After six years of severe asceticism he abandoned that path. After six years of discipline and asceticism, he still had not found an answer. He then sat beneath a bodhi tree to meditate until he achieved enlightenment. On the morning of the eighth day he attained enlightenment, leading to his teachings, which form the foundations of Buddhism.

Buddha means 'enlightened one.' So Buddhism proposed a Middle Path; rejecting both luxury and asceticism just as Buddha had. Buddhism proposes spiritual development through meditation and moral living.



This sculpture is called an Enshrined or Enthroned Buddha. The figure of the Buddha is placed within a backdrop which is highly symbolic of The Buddha's spiritual path and the religion that sprang up in Asia. While Buddha rejected the life of luxury, this object is richly adorned. It reflects a time, 2500 years after Siddhartha was transformed into the Buddha. We might wonder how he would have felt about the ornate decoration of the surround at his back.

This work of art is a devotional image and was placed in a Buddhist temple. The Artist is unknown, but the work was created in Burma around 1800 CE. The medium of the art work is sculpture. It is made of wood, lacquer, bold leaf, mirrors and colored glass inlay. It is large - 41 1/2 x 32 X 23" inches

The Country of Burma

Burma is in southeast Asia and touches Thailand, China and India. The majority of Burma's people are ethnic Burman. Shan, Karen, Rohingya, Arakanese groups, represent about 30% of the population. Indians and Chinese are the largest non-indigenous groups. An estimated 89% of the population practices Buddhism. Other religions - Christian 4%, Muslim 4%, and animist 1%.

History of Government in Burma

Burma was unified by Burman dynasties three times during the past millennium. The first such unification came with the rise of the Bagan (Pagan) dynasty in 1044 AD, which is considered the Golden Age in Burmese history. In 1287 the Bagan Dynasty was destroyed by Mongol invaders.

In the 15th century, the Taungoo Dynasty succeeded again in unifying under Burman rule a large, multi ethnic kingdom. This dynasty lasted from 1486 until 1752. The final Burman royal dynasty, the Konbaung, was established in 1752. The British began their assault and conquest of Burma in 1824. At the end of the third war in 1885, the British gained complete control of Burma, annexing it to British India.

Burma's independence from Britain was gained in 1947. From 1948 - 1962 Burma had a democratic parliamentary government. A coup in 1962 abolished the constitution and established a xenophobic military government.

In more recent times there have been many struggles. There are numerous documented human rights violations, and two million Burmese, many of them ethnic minorities have fled for economic and political reasons to Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Chinese, Indonesia, Malaysia and elsewhere.

Burma remains an authoritarian country dominated by active and former members of the military. In the last 30 or so years there have been many uprisings and struggles for power.

In 1989 the SPDC changed the name of the country to Myanmar, but some members of the democratic opposition and other political activists do not recognize the name change and continue to use the name “Burma.” Out of support for the democratic opposition, and its victory in the 1990 elections, the US Government likewise uses the name “Burma.” Burma is a member of the United Nations and maintains an embassy to the United States in Washington DC.

The Enshrined Buddha

As you stand before the Enshrined Buddha, appreciate the lavish outer borders of the surround. Notice the serene facial expression, lotus position, posture and attitude of the figure. Enjoy the symbols. Common handgestures or Mudras are found in both Buddhist and Hindu iconography.



Enshrined Buddha: Gallery Label - Current

"Enshrining" or "enthroning" freestanding statues of the Buddha with elaborate surrounds derives from the ancient Indian practice of placing stone images within the decorative niches of temple walls. In the later sculpture traditions of Sri Lanka,

Cambodia, Burma, and Thailand, this tradition toward decorative elaboration became increasingly popular.

The Buddha's intense meditation took place under a sacred fig or bodhi tree, which is probably represented by the luxuriant foliage in the ornately perforated outer borders of the surround. Also displayed are disks containing a rooster and hare, symbols for the sun and the moon and twenty-four adoring crowned figures most likely representing the twenty-four mortal Buddhas.

Key Questions

What do you notice about the primary large figure in the sculpture?
How would you describe Buddha's demeanor in this art object? (Mudras, eyes downcast)
(Show the graphic picture of Mudras.)

Can you imitate the Mudra that you see here? It is called "calling the earth to witness" (his resistance to temptation).

As shown here, the Buddha touches the Earth, calling it to witness his meditation and subsequent conclusion that suffering in this life can be avoided only by the elimination of desire. Through personal reflection, Buddhists are encouraged to learn from and emulate the Buddha's profound example, following the path to Enlightenment in their own lives.

Since Buddha proposes a middle path between poverty and luxury,
How do you think this art piece fits in with his message?
What do you see in the decor of the "surround?"

How would you describe the decorations around the figure of Buddha?
The Surround: symbolizes the bodhi tree where Siddhartha attained enlightenment.

This work shows the influence of India sculpture (niche tradition) and torana arch (multiple lintels). Chinese zodiac symbols of the rooster (sun) and the hare (moon). 24 mortal Buddhas are portrayed.

The Surround calls attention to the Buddha figure and enhances it. It includes a symbolic rendering of the bodhi tree where Siddhartha received his enlightenment. There are figures of the 24 mortal Buddhas. There are Chinese zodiac symbols of the rooster (sun) and the hare (moon).

What else do you notice about this art work?

Key Points

1. This Buddha was created in Burma and was placed in one of the Buddhist temples.
2. Burma is a multi cultural country, but 89% of the citizens are Buddhist.
3. Burma has a violent history and a lack of civil rights. This is being addressed today, but there is still conflict and many issues related to freedom of the people.
4. Buddhist monks have been leaders in the protests against human rights abuses. They have been imprisoned and killed for their brave protests.
5. There are many symbols and figures on the surround and the setting of the Enshrined Buddha. See above for the description of the small figures. Chinese zodiac symbols of the rooster (sun) and the hare (moon). 24 mortal Buddha.
6. Call attention to the Mudras of the Buddha.
7. This work shows the influence of India sculpture (niche tradition) and torana arch (multiple lintels).

Other Enthroned or Enshrined Buddhas

There are other Enthroned or Enshrined Buddhas. Here are three of them from various museums. They are from Northern Pakistan, Shri Lanka and Thailand.



Enthroned Buddha (See above)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Date: ca. 600, by inscription

Culture: Northern Pakistan (Gilgit Kingdom)

Medium: Gilt brass inlaid with silver and copper

Dimensions:

H. 9 5/8 in. (24.4 cm); W. 6 in. (15.2 cm); D. 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm)

Accession Number:

2011.19

This artwork is currently on display in [Gallery 237](#)



Gilt Bronze and Silver Figure of the Enshrined Buddha

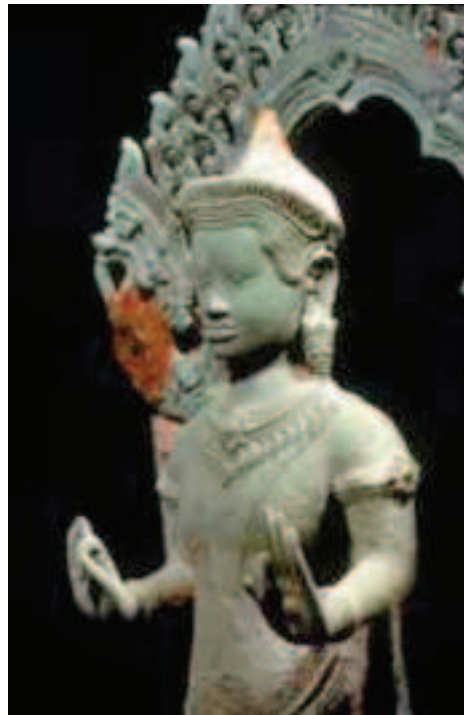
THE BRITISH MUSEUM Form Sri Lanka 18th century AD

This image of Buddha stands in a thirty-one centimetre high silver arched shrine. The Buddha's right hand faces palm outwards with the thumb and forefinger touching, a gesture indicating argument or discussion (*vitarkamudra*). His left hand holds the edge of his long wavy robe that leaves one shoulder bare. The style of the clothing and the arch are typical of the eighteenth

century. In this period the last kings of Sri Lanka ruled the central highlands of the island from their capital at Kandy. A revival of Buddhism and the arts resulted in the production of large numbers of Buddha images and other objects in bronze, silver and especially ivory.

The floral decoration of the arch spews from the mouths of two mythical aquatic monsters (*makaras*). At the top is a *kirttimukha*, a lion-like head that offered protection and good fortune. The arch over the Buddha is very like similar examples surrounding Hindu images in contemporary south India. Though south India was primarily Hindu and Sri Lanka Buddhist, the form of the arch demonstrates the similarity in artistic design and culture. The royal families of Kandy and Tamil Nadu in south India intermarried despite the difference in faiths.

W. Zwalf (ed.), *Buddhism: art and faith* (London, The British Museum Press, 1985)



THE HUNTINGTON ARCHIVE

Country: Thailand

Site Name: Lopburi

Monument: sculpture of Buddha

Subject of Photo: sculpture of enshrined Buddha, detail

Photo Orientation: 3/4 view of proper left side from waist up

Related Archive items:

- [sculpture of enshrined Buddha](#)
- [sculpture of enshrined Buddha, detail](#)
- [sculpture of enshrined Buddha, back](#)

Iconography: Buddha, unidentified

Gestures: standing, vitarka mudra (teaching gesture)

Dynasty/Period: Lopburi

Date: 13th c. CE, 1000 CE - 1500 CE

Material: bronze

Dimensions: H - 52.10 cm

Current Location: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California,

Copyright Holder: Asian Art Archives, U. of Michigan,

Scan Number: 0059477

Resources:

Arts Connected, Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Huntington Archives

Images for Mudras hand gestures on Internet

The British Museum Collection

Metropolitan Museum of Art Collection Information.

US Department of State Diplomacy in Action

Wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudra

www.youtube.com/watch?v+OKlqbEmn4J4