

# The Lotus Transcendent

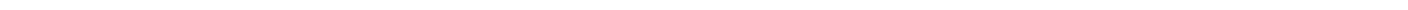
*Indian and Southeast Asian Art from  
the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*



The Metropolitan Museum of Art

# The Lotus Transcendent

*Indian and Southeast Asian Art from  
the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*





---

# The Lotus Transcendent

*Indian and Southeast Asian Art from  
the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*

---

*Martin Lerner and Steven Kossak*

**The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York**

*Distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York*

---

This book has been generously supported by the Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation.

This publication is issued in connection with the exhibition *The Lotus Transcendent: Indian and Southeast Asian Art from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection*, held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art from October 2, 1991, to June 28, 1992.

Copyright © 1991 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art

John P. O'Neill, *Editor in Chief*

Carol Fuerstein, *Editor*

Barbara Cavaliere, *Production Editor*

Abby Goldstein, *Designer*

Susan Chun, *Production*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)

The lotus transcendent : Indian and Southeast Asian art from the Samuel Eilenberg collection / Martin Lerner and Steven Kossak.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-87099-613-4. — ISBN 0-8109-6407-4 (Abrams)

1. Art, South Asian—Exhibitions. 2. Art, Southeast Asian—Exhibitions. 3. Eilenberg, Samuel—Art collections—Exhibitions. 4. Art—Private collections—New York (N.Y.)—Exhibitions. 5. Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)—Exhibitions. I. Lerner, Martin. II. Kossak, Steven. III. Title.

N7300.M47 1991

730'.0954'0747471—dc20

91-15177

CIP

Type set in Sabon by U.S. Lithograph, typographers, New York

Printed by Mercantile Printing, Worcester, Massachusetts

Bound by Acme Bookbinding Company, Inc., Charlestown, Massachusetts

All photographs by Maggie Nimkin except

cover by Lynton Gardiner

rollout photograph, No. 72, by Justin Kerr

Maps by Wilhelmina T. Reyinga-Amrhein

Cover:

No. 139 *Seated Transcendental Buddha Vairochana*

Indonesia, Java, Central Javanese period, ca. late 9th century

---

# Table of Contents

---

6	Acknowledgments	<i>Martin Lerner and Steven Kossak</i>
7	Director's Foreword	<i>Philippe de Montebello</i>
8	Introduction	<i>Martin Lerner</i>
10	The Man and His Collection	<i>Martin Lerner</i>
12	Maps	
15	Colorplates	
45	Catalogue	<i>Martin Lerner and Steven Kossak</i>
46	Early India and Pakistan	<i>Ringstones, Discstones, Stone Dishes, Mirror Handles, and Other Objects</i>
80	India and Pakistan	<i>Kushan-Period Sculpture</i>
90	Pakistan and India	<i>Gupta-Period Box Lids and Other Objects</i>
93	India	<i>Gupta, Post-Gupta, and Chalyuka Sculpture</i>
101	Gandhara, Swat, Kashmir, and Central Asia	<i>Minor Arts, Terracotta and Stucco Heads, Portable Shrines, and Metal Sculpture</i>
121	Northeastern India	<i>Pala Sculpture</i>
129	Southern India	<i>Pallava, Chola, and Kerala Sculpture</i>
136	Sri Lanka	
139	Nepal and Tibet	
151	Thailand and Cambodia	
161	Indonesia	
229	Bibliography	
235	Index	

---

## Acknowledgments

---

The authors gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to Carol Fuerstein, the editor of this catalogue. The text would certainly have been less coherent without her judicious guidance through problems of syntax, proper word-usage, and organization. Maggie Nimkin, the photographer, has done a splendid job overcoming the problems presented by working with so many small objects. Nina Sweet of the Asian Art Department patiently typed Martin Lerner's contributions.

Steven Kossak would also like to express his appreciation for the helpfulness of Prudence Harper, Curator of the Ancient Near Eastern Art Department, Marilyn Jenkins, Curator of the Islamic Art Department, and Carlos A. Picón, Curator in Charge

of the Greek and Roman Art Department, with whom he consulted.

Finally, we both extend our particular thanks to a few special supporters of Indian and Southeast Asian art who, when first informed of the possibility that the Eilenberg collection might come to the Metropolitan, responded with unusual enthusiasm and were extremely encouraging. Their personal generosity served as the catalyst that brought us from the initial phase of hopeful intention to our successfully realized conclusion. They are credited individually in the appropriate catalogue entries.

*Martin Lerner and Steven Kossak*

---

## *Director's Foreword*

---

The Eilenberg collection represents the fruit of a lifetime's passionate and informed connoisseurship. The gift of more than four hundred works of art from Samuel Eilenberg in 1987, combined with our purchase from Columbia University of an additional twenty-four sculptures formerly in his collection, marked a turning point in the growth of the Museum's collections of Indian and Southeast Asian art. It has completely transformed the Metropolitan's holdings in two important areas, the early arts of India and Pakistan and the bronzes of Indonesia. Our collections have been enriched as well by numerous splendid objects dating from the fifth through the fourteenth century from other cultures of Southeast Asia. It is a tribute to Professor Eilenberg's undiminished collecting impulse and pertinacity, as well as to his continuing generosity to the Metropolitan, that, even after the transfer of the majority of his holdings to the Museum, he has continued to acquire rare works of art and has promised many of them to this institution.

Professor Eilenberg's gifts have come at the auspicious moment when we are preparing for the reinstallation of the Museum's much expanded col-

lections of Indian and Southeast Asian art, which have not been on permanent view since the early 1950s. When Samuel Eilenberg made his generous intentions known, planning for the Florence and Herbert Irving Galleries was already underway. It was clear that the accommodation of the extensive Eilenberg holdings would require many modifications to the design of these galleries, and happily these could be realized. The present exhibition affords a preview of a selection of the objects that will be housed in our new galleries.

We extend our thanks to Martin Lerner, Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art, and Steven Kossak, Assistant Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art, for their invaluable role in the organization of the exhibition and the redaction of the catalogue that accompanies it. Appreciation is due as well to the many donors who helped us acquire the Columbia University Eilenberg works.

*Philippe de Montebello*  
*Director*  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*



The byways of institutional and private collecting sometimes cross; more often than not, however, because they are bounded by different parameters and propelled by different motivations, they meander along separate routes. Although the methods of institutions and private individuals may vary, each has the potential for notable accomplishments. Given this, when a distinguished private collection is joined to a strong museum collection, the result is a symbiotic mutual enrichment that, by definition, neither could achieve independent of the other. This enrichment extends considerably beyond the adding of objects to objects; rather, it becomes a merging of separate visions, with one intelligence complementing the other.

Private collections are almost always personal and idiosyncratic. Nevertheless, relative to each individual, certain constants exist. It is a truism that, subject to practicalities, serious collectors acquire the objects whose aesthetic qualities they most admire and to which they respond both intellectually and emotionally—thus, they honor and pay respect to the cultures and artists responsible for producing the works of art. In this, Samuel Eilenberg is no exception. And, rather than admiring these cultures from afar, Eilenberg has made innumerable trips to India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Thailand to carefully study their museums and monuments. More about the collector and his collection follows.

The works of art included in this catalogue, most of which are bronzes, range from images of deep religious significance to secular objects intended for domestic use. Although most of them are small, they collectively provide some sense of the enormous scope of artistic productivity evident in the cultures of the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia and of their impressive aesthetic achievements. While the provenance of most of these works of art can be deduced from formal characteristics and other evidence, a few are so unusual that their places of origin remain somewhat speculative. Some are well known,

having appeared in earlier books and catalogues; many, however, have not been published previously.

The great religions of India, which were exported north and to both mainland and insular Southeast Asia, are well represented by depictions of the most popular deities as well as of rare and esoteric gods, either Hindu or Buddhist, with a single representative of the Jain faith. All are members of an elaborate and extensive family of gods. Each is assigned a specific purpose and is usually supported by a body of textual information that cites the function of the deity, the proper form of worship, and the merit that accrues to the believer when the deity is invoked, and also includes other didactic and exegetic material. Most have a long tradition of veneration, and some trace their origins to the very dawn of civilization in India. Whatever their religious affiliation, gods and goddesses are usually identifiable through a complex but somewhat standardized vocabulary of hand gestures and attributes, the latter either held or set in their hairdos. The evolution of the needs and expectations of the religious faithful is reflected in the changing popularity of individual deities over a long period of time and the introduction of new ones when required.

The formal properties of the sculptures are as varied as those found in Western art. One encounters deities depicted in iconic frontal and symmetrical poses, some that are animated through subtle shifts of the body, and a few that display aggressive, contorted postures. These characteristics correspond to a certain extent to the natures of the gods and goddesses themselves, who range from comforting, easily accessible presences to others who are forceful and aggressive. Some express the specific nature of their divinity through their multiarmed and multiheaded aspects; the forms of others adhere to different sets of iconographic prescriptions. The Buddha, for example, displays suprahuman external physical attributes (*lakshanas*), usually considered to be thirty-two major and eighty minor auspicious marks. The facial expressions of most of the deities are impersonal and

devoid of emotion, reflecting the deep inner calm and spiritual serenity of beings who have overcome personal concerns and reached a higher plane of cosmic consciousness.

The exploration of the various possibilities inherent in three-dimensional figural representation interested artists in Asia as much as those in the West. While it may not be readily apparent, we are confronted here with figures that, within their own idioms, reflect sculptural innovations worked out on the large monuments of their respective cultures. Changes in figural proportions are usually symptomatic of changes in style and redefinitions of concepts of ideal beauty that have taken place over a period of time. Some things, however, remain constant. Musculature is rarely depicted except in the sculpture of Gandhara, which was heavily influenced by the styles of the classical world. Instead, the body is conceived of as a container for the vital inner breath (*prana*), which, pulsing outward, expands its surface into swelling volumes. In general, there is a preference for organic naturalism rather than abstracted geometricized forms.

In addition to the figural sculpture in the exhibition, there are many decorative objects. These objects all display a high level of craftsmanship, and those of the most superb quality reflect the consummate skill of master artisans. Some were created for domestic use, but most had a ritual function. The purposes of a rare few remain unknown. Many of the figures and objects are small yet through their scale and the interre-

lationship of their individual forms, and in some instances a deep sense of religious intensity, convey a sculptural presence and radiate a grandeur far in excess of their physical dimensions.

Exhibition catalogues have their own idiosyncrasies, and this one, reflecting a collection that is very rich in some areas while excluding others, makes no attempt to survey the history of Indian and Southeast Asian art. The entries have been arranged geographically and approximately chronologically. Since some of the works of art are classic representatives of familiar types and others are decidedly rare examples of categories about which little is known, the lengths of the entries vary dramatically.

In the attempt to make this catalogue useful for both layman and scholar, compromises have been made that will be unsatisfactory to both. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this publication, the only one to date that deals specifically with the Eilenberg collection, will provide some new insight into what is a most extraordinary assemblage of Indian and Southeast Asian art. The task of selecting these 187 works of art from the more than 400 now in the Museum's collection has not been easy. Many more will be on view when the Metropolitan's Florence and Herbert Irving Galleries dedicated to Indian and Southeast Asian art open in the not too distant future.

Martin Lerner  
*Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art*

---

## The Man and His Collection

---

Since I have known Samuel Eilenberg and his collection for over thirty years, it seems appropriate to share here some personal observations about them. My first encounter with Professor Eilenberg was not face-to-face, but rather through an exhibition and its catalogue. The show, a wonderful one called *Masterpieces of Asian Art in American Collections*, was held at the old Asia Society galleries more than thirty years ago—in 1960 to be exact. In that exhibition there were eleven Indian and Southeast Asian sculptures. Six of the eleven came from major museums—none, by the way, from the Metropolitan—and the other five were borrowed from Samuel Eilenberg. In 1958 or 1959, when the selection for that exhibition was made, one would have been hard pressed to think of another private collection in this country that could have yielded sculptures of the quality and importance of those lent by Eilenberg. From that first Asia Society exhibition until today, there have been very few significant exhibitions of Indian and Southeast Asian art in which the Eilenberg collection was not represented.

Eventually I met the collector, and, while my initial encounters were not disappointing, I later realized they were incomplete. Not until one visited his Riverside Drive apartment and spent time with him and his collection could one get a measure of the man. Without that visit, one could not get a sense of the vast scope of his holdings, nor experience the delight of seeing Samuel Eilenberg within the environment of the works of art he had assembled. To listen to him discoursing with contagious enthusiasm was not only a great treat but also a reminder that one was in the presence of a formidable connoisseur-collector, with an obvious command of his subject. And, when he pointed out some interesting features of a new acquisition, one might perceive a rare synthesis of the former rabbinic student's appreciation of the seriousness of acquiring knowledge, the mathematician and

educator's devotion to a logical clarity that can be explained to others, and the committed art-collector's concern for beauty and for man's mastery over base materials. For him, collecting art is clearly a compulsion—it is as if his soul requires the romance of a very different kind of aesthetic satisfaction to balance that of his mathematics. The collections at Riverside Drive were available to be seen and studied, and as Eilenberg opened one drawer after the other, it became clear that more could be seen and more learned about Indonesian bronzes and early Gandharan and Kashmiri *kleinkunst* here than at any museum in this country.

If one had to isolate the major strength of the collection, one would choose its extensive holdings of Southeast Asian bronzes, particularly those of Indonesia. The latter incorporate what is widely regarded as the finest private collection in the world of Javanese bronze sculpture: It is unrivaled in both its quality and comprehensiveness. The holdings also include a fine selection of Gandharan minor arts—small objects from Pakistan and Afghanistan dating from the first through the fifth century—as well as some very rare and remarkable examples of early Indian art, and sculpture from Thailand, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tibet.

Thirty-five years ago, Eilenberg, with prescience and conviction, was a pioneer in areas that only today are beginning to be appreciated. But from the very outset, his method of collecting was distinguished from that of many others by the simple fact that he knew precisely what he was doing. Eilenberg established himself as a primal force, constantly on the prowl, blanketing vast areas of South Asian art. He was the will-o'-the-wisp who seemed to be everywhere, often one step ahead of everyone else—buying either at public auction or in some relatively remote part of the world those small, exquisite, sometimes esoteric objects that are the heart of his collection.