Manifestations of Shiva

EXHIBITION GUIDE

March 23–May 30, 1982

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Frances and Armand Hammer Wing
Shiva, the Great God, is among the most mysterious and complex deities in the religions of mankind. Worshiped by hundreds of millions of Hindus, Shiva has been known in one form or another since the time of the most ancient civilization on the subcontinent of India. There is no one explanation as to who or what Shiva is: he is all-encompassing, the creator, the preserver, and the destroyer of the universe. His manifestations are many and often seemingly contradictory. Hymns and legends reveal various aspects of Shiva, as do the images adorning his temples and altars, those carried in religious processions, and those in paintings made for private devotion.

Shiva can be represented either in human form or symbolically, as a linga, an erect phallus. In human form he often has multiple arms that, like those of other Hindu gods, indicate his more-than-human power; the objects he holds identify his specific forms according to rules evolved during many centuries of artistic tradition. The works in this exhibition, created over a period of two thousand years, present Shiva in some of his different forms: he is the protector of devotees, the great ascetic or yogi, the king of dancers, the destroyer of demons, the benign teacher, the loving husband. In a horrific form, he roams the cremation ground permeated by guilt and bitter anger; in a gentle form, he tenderly holds the goddess on his lap. On a different level, Shiva is understood as the personification of time and death. In his ability to be manifested in forms that are in themselves distinct opposites, Shiva conveys the essential paradoxes of life on earth.

It is through his images that Hindus can most readily approach Shiva. By identifying with him they can find the ultimate freedom, that is, release from the effects of karma (which produce an endless cycle of death and rebirth) and attain oneness with the absolute.

This exhibition guide focuses on eight objects which you can view as you proceed from room to room through the exhibition. The objects are arranged in galleries according to the following subjects: lingas and temple sculpture; benign aspects; angry aspects; dynamic aspects; couples; divine attendants; saints and goddesses; and paintings in which one or several of Shiva's manifestations are represented. Marked wall labels indicate the objects discussed in this guide. Those terms in boldface type in the text are defined in the glossary which follows.

Glossary

Ascetic: in the Hindu religion, a holy man who wanders the earth in search of truth, sometimes teaching the life of solitude, contemplation, and self-discipline. Shiva is the greatest of all ascetics.

Bhairava: Shiva as his most fearsome aspect, an angry demon who wanders cremation grounds. Bhairava is a god of dread and terror.

Brahma: Hindu god of creation and sacrifice who is often shown with four heads. He is the father of Shiva.

Ganesa: elephant-headed son of Parvati; god of wisdom and art, remover of obstacles. Worshiped prior to a journey or a new undertaking. His vehicle and animal form is the rat.

Ganga: goddess of the Ganges River.

Karma: according to Hindu beliefs, the full effect of actions performed, in this life or in a former one, that determines one's present and future character and form.

Linga: representation of Shiva as a phal- lus. The linga can be represented either realistically or abstracted into a geometric form. Most temples dedicated to Shiva have the linga placed in the central chamber. The linga can also be depicted as a pillar, in which case it makes reference to the axis of the world.
Nandin: the bull, Shiva’s vehicle. Usually in a separate shrine of a temple dedicated to Shiva, protecting the linga in the innermost chamber.

Nataraja: Shiva as king of dancers who conveys in his dance the concepts of creation, destruction, and liberation from ignorance and earthly constraint.

Parvati: gracious and benevolent wife of Shiva. Her vehicle and animal form is the lion. In her horrific aspects she is Durga or Kali.

Skanda: son of Shiva and Parvati. A warlike god, his vehicle and animal form is the peacock. Also known as Kumara and Karttikeya.

Vishnu: along with Brahma and Shiva, one of the three supreme Hindu gods. Vishnu is the preserver or protector of the cosmic system who works continuously for the world’s welfare.

Yoga: a system of spiritual and physical exercises meant to still the mind so that one may attain union with the soul. A yogi is one who practices yoga, often teaching it to others.

Selected Bibliography
In addition to the exhibition catalogue Manifestations of Shiva, which is available in the Museum Shop, the following books may be consulted for more information about Indian art:


Five-Faced Linga (Pancamukhalinga)
East Rajasthan
7th century
Sandstone
h: 29½ in. (74.9 cm.)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. James W. Alsdford, Chicago

In the center of most temples dedicated to the worship of Shiva is the linga, or “sign,” of the god. The linga is a highly complex symbol. In the form of an erect phallus, it stands for creation as well as for sexual control; it is at the same time the pillar of the universe, or axis of the world, and a column of resplendent light. The simple postlike shape is often augmented sculpturally and symbolically with one, four, or five heads. Probably all four-headed lingas are meant to be understood as five-headed. Although only four heads are visible in our example, it is understood to have a fifth head at the top which indicates Shiva’s transcendental reality; Shiva is understood to be omnipresent. In fact, each of the heads represents another aspect of Shiva, one of which is the fierce Bhairava. The piled-up, matted hair represents Shiva as an ascetic. The necklace marks the transition from abstract pillar to human face.
Shiva, the Lord Whose Half Is Woman
(Ardhanarishvara)
Chola dynasty, Tiruchchenampundi,
Tamil Nadu
Early 10th century
Granite
h: 51 in. (129.5 cm.)
Government Museum, Madras

Shiva is installed in most Shivaite temples in the abstract form of the linga; he is also represented in human form in relief sculptures set into niches in the temples’ walls. This granite sculpture from a temple in South India shows the manifestation of Shiva as the Lord Whose Half Is Woman. The god who is both male and female is an expression not of duality but of divinity in which opposites are in union. The right side of the image is male, dressed in a short dhoti, the traditional uncut and unsewn garment worn by men in India from the most ancient times to the present day. The left side, the female half, wears more elaborate garments and jewelry. The figure, fashioned in the elegant curvaceous style of the Chola dynasty, holds a flower and leans against the bull Nandin, Shiva’s animal vehicle.

Bhairava (God of Dread and Terror)
Hoysala dynasty, Krishnarajapet,
Karnataka
First quarter of the 12th century
Chloritic schist
h: 39 in. (99 cm.)
Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Karnataka, Mysore

Here, in an intricate, ornate style, Shiva is shown as Bhairava, his most fearful and gruesome aspect. During a dispute, Shiva cut off one of the five heads of his father, the god Brahma, committing not only patricide but an act ancient Hindus considered even more reprehensible—the killing of a Brahmin, a member of the priestly caste. As punishment, Brahma’s skull stuck to Shiva’s hand, testifying to his guilt, and he was made to roam as an outcast in cremation grounds for twelve years. At the end of this period he found release when he reached Varanasi (Benares), and the skull fell from his hand. In this manifestation, Shiva has terrible bulging eyes and fangs, serpents weave his body, a garland of skulls adorns him, and the bowl-shaped skull of Brahma sticks to his left
hand. The dog, Bhairava's companion in his cremation-ground wanderings, intensifies the macabre mood of this image by sniffing at Brahma's severed head. Bhairava stands between a pair of pillars surmounted by an intricately decorated arch. He carries a trident and a drum, objects by which Shiva can be recognized. Skeletal figures playing musical instruments accompany him.

Of all the bronze images of divinities and saints cast during the Chola dynasty, when South Indian sculpture reached its peak of creativity, figures of Shiva as king of dancers, or Nataraja, are the most impressive. These images are conceptions of composure and movement, of dynamic grace, of an intricate balance between form and void. The delicate proportions of the figure suggest the ideal male form aspired to by the Hindu yogi—one of liseness and grace, flexibility and suppleness. Shiva's flame-like hair, decorated with leaves and flowers, spreads out behind him like a halo as he dances in ecstatic frenzy within the flaming arc of the universe. His multiple arms are extensions of his energy. The upper two arms are balanced but not symmetrical; the lower arms emphasize the thrust of the effortlessly raised leg and complement the flexed knee of the supporting leg. Underfoot lies a childlike figure, the personification of the demon of ignorance, who is stamped out by the enlightened Shiva. Shiva's dance is one of both creation and destruction. In his upper right hand is a drum, symbolizing the first beat of creation, while the flame in his upper left hand indicates the fire of destruction. The lower right hand is held in a gesture of reassurance and the lower left hand is pointed to his raised foot, indicating that by prostrating oneself at the foot of the god one can find release and salvation. This image conveys Hindu concepts of the cycle of creation and destruction, liberation from the bondage of ignorance, and true knowledge as ultimate freedom.
Shiva and Parvati Seated, Embracing
(Uma-Maheshvaramurti)
Late Western Chalukya dynasty,
Balligrama (modern Belgavi), Karnataka
12th century
Chloritic schist
h: 55½ in. (141 cm.)
Government Museum, Shimoga, Karnataka

In one of his most popular and enduring images, Shiva sits or stands in embrace with his wife and consort, the Great Goddess, called Uma or Parvati, daughter of the mountain, King Himalaya. In this sculpture, Shiva and Parvati sit upon a low throne set against a perforated panel. In a relaxed, casual mood, Parvati sits on Shiva’s lap as he places his arm lovingly around her shoulders. A multitude of ornaments, scarves, and tassels adorn the divine pair. Shiva’s bejeweled mass of matted locks includes a row of skulls, a reference to his fearful aspect as Bhairava. He holds an hourglass-shaped drum. The bull Nandin, Shiva’s vehicle (his head damaged), rests under his lord. An iguana, an animal associated with Parvati, peeks from under the elaborate lotus scroll supporting her foot. Below are figures of the couple’s children: elephant-headed Ganesha dances on the left and trident-bearing Skanda rides his peacock on the right. Emaciated Bhṛingi, an ardent devotee of Shiva, dances excitedly next to Nandin.

Ganesha Dancing
Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, Madhya Pradesh
Late 9th–early 10th century
Sandstone
h: 23 in. (58.4 cm.)
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

Ganesha, the god with an elephant’s head and a child’s body, is one of the most popular and widely worshiped deities in India. His presence is auspicious: he removes obstacles and brings prosperity; however, he also creates obstacles. The story of his unusual form is related in ancient texts. Parvati was angry with Shiva for entering her house while she was bathing. One day, as she prepared for her bath, she applied a paste of cream, flour, essences, and oils to her skin and fashioned a son from this substance as she scraped it off. She named the son Ganesha and placed him at the entrance to her chambers, telling him to deny access to all as she bathed. Soon Shiva appeared; not knowing who he was, the newly fashioned guard stopped him. Angered, Shiva cut off Ganesha’s head. Parvati was inconsolable at the loss of her child, so Shiva asked his attendants to bring him the head of the first living being they could find. Coming upon an elephant, they cut off its head and attached it to the child’s
body. Ganesha is potbellied not just because he loves sweets, but also because he holds the universe within himself. Here, he dances, filling the entire space with his eight arms. Like many other works from central India of this period, this image is carved in bold relief. Below the bright Indian sky, the background would have fallen into deep shadow, creating a contrasting backdrop for the animated, sculpted form.

The Ganges River, or Ganga, is holy to Hindu followers; its waters are thought to wash away all earthly sins. The Ganges is frequently personified as a female goddess. According to legend, Ganga first flowed in heaven in waves of light. When she fell to earth, Shiva caught her in his long hair, softening the blow. This relief was meant to be part of a doorjamb of a temple entrance. Usually on the opposite jamb in Indian temples was a second river goddess, the personification of the Yamuna River. (The mate to this relief is also owned by the Museum and is currently on view on the fourth floor of the Ahmanson Gallery.) By seeing Ganga at the entrance to a Hindu temple the worshipper is purified and blessed with a fruitful life. Ganga rides on the Makara, a mythical aquatic monster that looks up at her adoringly, its body turning into wavelike scrolls. The goddess is the largest female figure on the relief; she is followed by a retinue of beautiful females, a dvarapala (or door guardian), as well as by a pair of flying celestials holding a flowered garland. The depiction of beautiful females in varying postures shows the ideal image of feminine beauty in Hindu religious art. Round arching hips, domed, full breasts, calm oval face, and the strong curve of the body itself convey a feeling of elegance, ripeness, and sensuality. The carving of this relief is crisp and deep, causing the figures to project in bold relief. Both volume and linear grace create a feeling of exuberance and buoyancy, the linear rhythms like the rippling river surface.

The River Goddess Ganga
Madhya Pradesh or Rajasthan
8th century
Sandstone
h: 28¾ in. (71.4 cm.)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, from the Nasli and Alice Heeramanneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase
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Cover:
Shiva, King of Dancers (Nataraja)
Chola dynasty, Tamil Nadu
10th century
Bronze
h: 30 in. (76.2 cm.)
Los Angeles County Museum of Art,
Anonymous Gift
Manifestations of Shiva

RELATED EVENTS

Except where otherwise noted, all programs are free to members and included in the admission fee for the general public.

Shiva: The Nature of Image of a Universal God, a twelve-minute audio-visual orientation to Manifestations of Shiva, is shown continuously in the viewing room at the end of the exhibition.

Docent Gallery Tours: Tuesdays—Sundays at 1 p.m.
Meet at the entrance to the exhibition.

LECTURES

Sundays at 3 p.m. in the Leo S. Bing Theater
March 21 “The Great Rock-Cut Shiva Temple of Elephants”
Stella Krennich, Curator, Indian Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art
April 4 “Visions of Terror and Bliss: Shiva in Indian Mythology and Iconology”
Bruce Long, Director of the Blaisdell Institute for Advanced Study in World Culture and Religion, Claremont, California
April 18 “Shiva Transforming: Shivaite Art in Mainland Southeast Asia”
Robert Brown, Assistant Curator, Indian Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art
May 2 “The Path of Love: Shiva Saints of South India”
Vidya Dehejia, Adjunct Associate Professor of Art History, Columbia University, New York
May 16 “Shiva Smeared with Ashes: The Lord of Yoga and Death”
Gerald Larson, Professor of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara

FILMS

Education films about art and life in India will be shown Fridays at 11 a.m. and Saturdays at 11:30 a.m. in the Bing Theater March 25 through May 30. No films will be screened April 14 or 15.

Manifestations of Shiva, a 50-minute film produced by Malcolm Leigh especially for the exhibition, will be screened Tuesdays, March 30 and April 13, at 6 p.m. in the Bing Theater. Admission is free to all.

The Films of Satyajit Ray

Wednesday and Thursday, March 3–April 1, 8:30 p.m., Bing Theater
Admission: Members of the Museum, the American Film Institute, and students and senior citizens with ID, $2; General Public, $4.
Now Indian Cinema

The work of Indian filmmakers who have come into prominence since 1969: Fridays and Saturdays, April 2–May 1, 8 p.m., Bing Theater
Admission: Same as above

Films for Children

Two different programs of films made by Satyajit Ray for young people.

Saturdays, March 12 and March 26, 2:30 p.m., Bing Theater
Admission: Same as above

PERFORMING ARTS

Indian Classical Dance
A program featuring Sunita Ramaswamy performing the dances Bharata Natyam and Kuchipudi will be presented Sunday, March 26, at 3:30 p.m. in the Bing Theater.

Students of the Kalanandram School, Westminster YMCA, will perform classical dance of India, Sunday, April 11, at 3 p.m., in the Bing Theater.

Sanjukta Panigrahi, India’s leading exponent of Orissi classical dance style, will make her U.S. debut in two Museum performances: Sunday, April 18, and Wednesday, April 21. Both performances are at 5 p.m. in the Bing Theater. Admission: Members, $8; General Public, $12.

Classical Sitar Music performance by Harihara Rau and accompanists Sunday, April 25, 3:30 p.m., Bing Theater.

THE TRADITIONAL CRAFTS OF INDIA: The richness and diversity of Indian arts will be explored in a series of expert demonstrations given by members of Los Angeles’ Indian community.

Porphyry, floor designs with colored rice flour, Alpana, pottery and floor decorations, and Mordi, designs for feet and hands in henna powder, Sunday, March 26, 12:30 p.m., Ahmanson Gallery Atrium
Dress of India
Sunday, April 25, 3 p.m., Ahmanson Gallery Atrium
Kantha: Indian Quiltsmaking
Saturday, May 2, 2 p.m., Ahmanson Gallery Atrium
Musical Instruments of India
Sunday, May 2, 2 p.m., Ahmanson Gallery Atrium

BARRIER-FREE PROGRAMS

Programs for groups of disabled persons may be scheduled on Fridays, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. For reservations, call 857-0300 or 774-5536.

CLASSES

The Hindu Art of India
A survey of Indian art with special reference to Hinduism and Shiva.
Six sessions

Saturdays, April 18–May 15
1-3 p.m.
Place: Leo S. Bing Theater
Instructor: Katherine Harper-Lorenzana
Tuition: Members, students, and senior citizens, $8; General Public, $17
Registration deadline: April 3

An Introduction to the Dance of India
A Lecture/Demonstration

The classical dances Bharata Natyam, Kathak, and Kathakali will be discussed and demonstrated by performers Amalaka Ambeaokar, Medha Yodh, and Jan Zeltin.
Saturday, May 22
2 p.m.
Place: Leo S. Bing Theater
Admission: Members, $2; General Public, $3

These Education Department programs are made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the California Arts Council, with additional assistance provided by Air-India.