

The Sculpture of Thailand

HIS MAJESTY KING BHŪMIBOL ADULYADEJ
AND HER MAJESTY QUEEN SIRIKIT OF THAILAND
HAVE GRACIOUSLY CONSENTED TO ACT AS
PATRONS OF THIS EXHIBITION.

Asia House Gallery, New York City

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio

Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington, Indiana

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal, Canada

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington

Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, Texas



The Sculpture of Thailand



THEODORE BOWIE, editor

M. C. SUBHADRADIS DISKUL

A. B. GRISWOLD

Photographs by BRIAN BRAKE

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FRONTISPICE: 4 a, b. Wheel of the Doctrine with Crouching Deer.
*Dvāravati style, 7th-9th century. Stone; Wheel, diam. 37¹³/₁₆ in.;
Deer, H. 10¹/₄ in. See page 35.
Photographed before the National Museum, Bangkok.*

The Sculpture of Thailand is the catalogue of an exhibition shown
in the Asia House Gallery in the fall of 1972 as an activity
of The Asia Society, to further greater understanding between
the United States and the peoples of Asia.

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Acknowledgments

The exhibition of Thai sculpture for which this catalogue has been prepared was originally suggested to us by Ambassador Kenneth T. Young, then President of The Asia Society. He felt that sufficient new material had been discovered within the past decade to make possible another fine exhibition without using any of the works of art which had been included in *The Arts of Thailand* of 1960-62. Such encouragement from the former Ambassador from the United States to Thailand was strongly supported by other advisers. These included Miss Elizabeth Lyons of the University Museum of The University of Pennsylvania, who had recently assisted with the new installations of the National Museum of Thailand; Professor Theodore Bowie of Indiana University, who had helped organize the earlier exhibition; and the distinguished scholar Mr. Alexander B. Griswold. But it was not until we received the generous assurances of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, His Excellency Mr. Thanat Khoman, and those of the Minister of Education and Culture, His Excellency Mr. Sukich Nimmanaheminda, that we could begin work on this auspicious project.

Now, as the exhibition is finally realized, we rejoice that His Majesty King Bhūmibol Adulyadej and Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand have agreed to act as its patrons. Their royal condescension both as patrons and as private lenders will be deeply appreciated by all American admirers of the people and arts of Thailand.

Since the beginning of our undertaking, encouragement was given by His Excellency Mr. Sunthorn Hongladarom, the Ambassador of Thailand in Washington, and by Mr. Chua Sariman, Director General of Fine Arts. Among kind officials in Thailand who were soon to aid us were Mr. Bunthin Attagora, Under-Secretary of State for Education, Mr. Noom Yoonaidharma, Deputy Director of Fine Arts, Mr. Somporn Yupho, and Mrs. Chira Chongkol, Mr. Nikom Musigakama, and Mr. Kamthornthep Krataithong of the Bangkok National Museum.

During the summer of 1970, Professor Bowie, having been invited to be the organizer of the exhibition, traveled in Thailand on our behalf. He was accompanied on this trip by Prince Subhadradis Diskul, the eminent Thai scholar and Dean of the Faculty of Archaeology, Silpakorn University, who had agreed to write the descriptive entries for the catalogue. Professor Bowie also conferred with Mr. Alexander B. Griswold, who would later provide one of the learned introductory texts that are here printed.

I, too, journeyed to Thailand in the autumn of that same year to conclude our official agreements and to make final requests for the treasures that The Asia Society hoped to

borrow. The Honorable Leonard Unger, United States Ambassador to Thailand, and Mr. Kenneth T. MacCormac, our Cultural Affairs Officer, were both immensely helpful at this juncture, as was Mr. Charles Sheffield, Curator of the James Thompson house, the "House on the Klong," who has generously lent us rare material from Mr. Thompson's collection.

Now, more recently, the difficulties of financing so ambitious an undertaking have been alleviated by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Moreover, the unusual quality of the catalogue has been made possible by a grant from the Ford Motor Company Fund.

As a result of all this invaluable assistance, the Asia House Gallery is able to present an up-to-date survey of ancient Siamese art in its various aspects as religious sculpture. Moreover, a new generation will visit this rich and illuminating assemblage of Thai imagery who could not have taken advantage of the exhibition presented a decade earlier.

Let us hope that this special opportunity to view her great sculptural heritage will draw many travelers to Thailand who will discover that even so fine an exhibition as this can only offer a taste of the larger feast.

GORDON B. WASHBURN
Director, Asia House Gallery

Lenders to the Exhibition

His Majesty King Bhūmibol Adulyadej of Thailand

Prince Piya-rangsit, Bangkok

Dr. Viroj Kanasut, Bangkok

James H. W. Thompson Collection, Bangkok

National Museum, Ayudhyā

National Museum, Bangkok

National Museum, Chainât (Jayanāda)

National Museum, Gampèng Pet

National Museum, Lampûn

National Museum, Sukhodaya

National Museum, Ū Tòng



Foreword

The present exhibition might be termed a direct descendent of "The Arts of Thailand," a large exhibition which was circulated in the United States in 1960-62, then seen in Japan and, after a pause in Bangkok where it was also placed on view, continued on to various countries in Western Europe. This Asia Society presentation, however, as the title of the exhibition reveals, is confined to one expression of the art of Thailand, namely its sculpture. Such an assemblage of fine and rare pieces, including so large a number of early examples, has not been seen previously in the United States.

Many of those responsible for the earlier event have participated in this later one. My own functions were identical: head of the selection committee and editor of the catalogue. Both Prince Subhadradis Diskul and Mr. Alexander B. Griswold performed again, the former as principal advisor for the selections and the latter as contributor of texts for the catalogue. The selection committee also included Miss Elizabeth Lyons, whose knowledge of public and private collections in Thailand is unparalleled, and Mr. Gordon B. Washburn, who made all the final decisions.

Special recognition must be made of the extremely cordial cooperation accorded to the project on the part of the Thai Government and its representatives. Mr. Washburn has already expressed our gratitude to many Thai officials, but in addition we should like to thank particularly those members of the staffs of the Bangkok, Ayudhyā, Û Tòng, Sukhodaya, and Lampûn National Museums, who went out of their way to assist us.

It is a matter of great personal satisfaction for me to have been able to count on the unstinted help of two such outstanding authorities as Prince Diskul and Alexander Griswold, whose contributions to the catalogue are a guarantee of its distinction. Thanks are also owed to Professor Jean Boisselier for numerous valuable suggestions.

I am also grateful for the privilege of using the resources of the Breezewood Foundation at Monkton, Maryland, and for the generous assistance given at all times by its Secretary, Mrs. Mildred Dreher. I also wish to acknowledge the support afforded me by the Faculty Research Committee of Indiana University in the preparation of this catalogue.

First and last, however, I must express my most sincere appreciation for the constant encouragement given me by The Asia Society in the person of the Director of its Gallery, Gordon B. Washburn, and its Assistant Director, Miss Virginia Field. They have been warm and understanding friends.

THEODORE BOWIE

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Introduction

A visitor who comes upon the ancient art of Siam for the first time may quite understandably be baffled by its astonishing variety. Unlike Javanese and Khmer art, where a certain uniformity of style prevails, the sculptures created in the land today known as Thailand have a strongly eclectic look. They reflect numerous influences and crosscurrents in a way that permits them to be labeled as "international," in the same sense that twelfth century Gothic art, early Renaissance painting or contemporary architecture may be described as international, i.e. hybrid. The parallel is indeed a useful one, since Siam, like France or Northwestern India for example, has been historically (and mainly by dint of geographical determinism) a crossroad, a battlefield, and a melting pot.

The present day Kingdom of Thailand is the heir of a succession of states with capitals located in widely different places, where, by turns, the various peoples—Malaysian, Cambodian, Burmese, Tai, Chinese and others—which now constitute the nation originally held sway and claimed hegemony over the other parts. This historical process began about the first century A.D. when a large part of the vast territory which we think of as Southeast Asia was loosely organized into an Indianizing kingdom known to the Chinese as Fu-nan. The culture of the ruling class was therefore largely Indian, and its religion either Brahmanism or Buddhism.

In the states that succeeded Fu-nan, art was predominantly a religious function; basic iconographic themes and cult imagery, imported from India, became transformed first by local conventions and habits and later by the phenomenon of cross-fertilization. Travel—motivated by missionary zeal, the urge for pilgrimage to sacred shrines, trade, and conquest—contributed to the richness of the art found there.

The process is far from having been always peaceful; some destructive aspects are, unhappily, all too visible today. Curiously enough, by comparison with its neighbors Thailand has had a rather fortunate history. It can with some justification claim that it has been an independent nation for a very long time, and that it was never colonized by a European state.

Though not free from its share of political, social, and economic complaints, Thailand gives the impression of being a reasonably prosperous land inhabited by a gentle and easy-going people. This impression is not altogether misleading because for fourteen hundred years the land, whatever its political configurations may have been, has been largely under the sway of Theravāda Buddhism. The term is often translated as meaning the "Doctrine of the Elders," and might perhaps be equated with a modified type of fundamental Buddhism



Ruins at Sukhodaya.