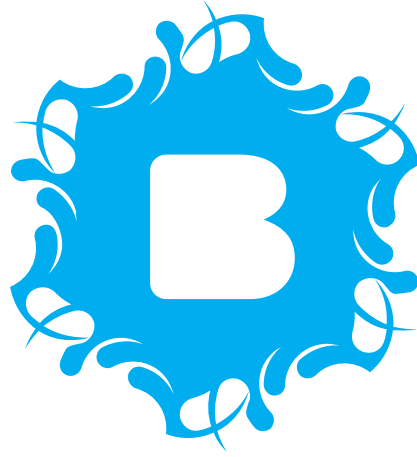


Press Release



March 2011

First New York Museum Exhibition Devoted to the Hindu God Vishnu Media Preview Thursday, June 23, 2011

Vishnu: Hinduism's Blue-Skinned Savior will feature more than 170 objects that will explore the many personae and legends of Vishnu, his entourage, and his accoutrements, as well as the diverse traditions of worship related to him. This large-scale exhibition includes Indian sculpture, paintings, textiles, and ritual objects that range in date from the fourth century C.E. to the twentieth century and will be on view June 24 through October 2, 2011, at the Brooklyn Museum. The exhibition will include sixteen objects from the Brooklyn Museum's permanent collection.

Vishnu, one of the most important gods in Hinduism, is often described as part of a trinity consisting of Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. He is responsible for maintaining balance in the universe and is often depicted in a serene and peaceful state. Visual representations often depict him with four arms, signifying strength and the ability to engage in many activities simultaneously, as well as a blue skin tone that associates him with the cool expanses of water and sky. Vishnu is believed to assume other forms, called avatars, which allow him to descend to earth to fight the forces of chaos and to protect humankind.

The exhibition is organized thematically and will be divided into three main sections. The first is an introduction to Vishnu featuring his emblems; his wives and female manifestations; his eagle mount, Garuda; and legends recounting his role in creation. This introductory section includes sculptures of Vishnu, one of which is a large-scale terra-cotta of the god standing alone. Most gods in Hinduism are portrayed in a swaying posture, but Vishnu is almost always shown standing upright to symbolize the balance he brings to the world. Also included in this section is a tenth-century sandstone sculpture of the god reclining on a giant serpent, depicting the moment of Creation.

Every Hindu deity has a female counterpart; in Vishnu's case this is his consort, Lakshmi, who is portrayed along with Vishnu in many of the works on view, often in affectionate poses. In an elaborately carved stele, Lakshmi and Vishnu (known as Lakshmi-Narayana when shown together) are captured in an intimate embrace; the portrayal is unusual because they are both the same height, standing as equals. Another notable artwork is a watercolor decorated with silver and gold that demonstrates Lakshmi's humility while she lovingly massages Vishnu's feet.

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The second and largest section of the exhibition focuses on objects that show Vishnu in the forms of his avatars, earthly and sometimes mortal beings who bring peace to humankind. The avatars include not only his human forms, Krishna and Rama, but also animals ranging from a fish to a ferocious lion. Among the artworks representing the animal avatars are an illustrated page from the *Dashavatara*, or *Ten Avatar*, series that features Varaha, the boar, saving the earth by raising it out of the sea, and a bronze of the man-lion avatar Yoga-Narasimha created in the twelfth century. Krishna is the most revered of Vishnu's avatars and appears in many legends that reveal his complex personality, ranging from young prankster to divine ruler. One of the highlighted depictions of Krishna is an exquisitely decorated page from a *Dashavatara* series that depicts Krishna as a young man playing a flute for a group of milkmaids. Vishnu's multifaceted character is embraced by his followers (known as Vaishnavas), some of whom choose to worship a specific avatar rather than the god's primary form.

Vishnu has been worshipped for more than two millennia by people of diverse backgrounds and tastes. The final section of the exhibition will focus on the ritual objects used for prayer as well as images of Vaishnavas in prayer. Although most devotees of Vishnu visit public temples, much daily worship takes place at small shrines set up in homes. One intriguing object in this section is a gold shrine that was created in the form of a miniature throne. This intricately detailed shrine, no taller than six inches, has a tiny fringed parasol and is inlaid with rubies, emeralds, diamonds, and pearls. Also included in this selection are more-modern objects that demonstrate Vishnu's enduring popularity, among them a twentieth-century papier-mâché pageant mask, a selection of early twentieth-century popular religious prints, and a pair of Bollywood posters.

Vishnu: Hinduism's Blue-Skinned Savior is organized by the Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee, where it is on view February 19 through May 29, 2011. The exhibition is curated by Joan Cummins, Lisa and Bernard Selz Curator of Asian Art at the Brooklyn Museum, who also organized the Brooklyn Museum presentation. This exhibition is made possible in part by the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and an anonymous donor. *Vishnu: Hinduism's Blue-Skinned Savior* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an introductory essay and object entries by Dr. Cummins and scholarly essays by Leslie C. Orr, Concordia University; Cynthia Packert, Middlebury College; and Doris Meth Srinivasan, SUNY Stony Brook.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$10; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$6. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 2 or 3. Bus: B41, B69, B48.

On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Thursday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; first Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Brooklyn Museum Extended Hours: Beginning Wednesday, October 6, the Brooklyn Museum will open to the public eight additional hours a week and will open each day at 11 a.m.

- Wednesdays 11-6
- Thursdays and Fridays 11-10
- Saturdays and Sundays 11-6

The Museum will continue to present *Target First Saturdays*, its popular free evening of art and entertainment, when it remains open until 11 p.m. the first Saturday of each month except September.