

Kimbell Art Museum

Buddha, Shiva Lotus, Dragon

The Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd
Collection at Asia Society

*Transcript of the
Acoustiguide Audio Tour*

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1. DIRECTOR'S WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

ERIC LEE:

Hello, I'm Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum, and I'm pleased to welcome you to *Buddha, Shiva, Lotus, Dragon: The Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection at Asia Society*.

Asia Society was founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd to promote a greater understanding of Asia in the United States. Today it is an international organization, and its New York headquarters houses the Rockefellers' collection of Asian art, one of the finest ever amassed in the West.

Among the highlights of this extraordinary collection that you'll see today are an array of exquisite ceramics from China, Korea, and Japan; splendid Hindu sculptures from medieval South India and the great Khmer empire at Angkor Wat in Cambodia; and a pantheon of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from India, the Himalayas, and Southeast Asia. You'll also see how religions evolved and artistic traditions and technologies spread throughout Asia via the ancient Silk Road and sea trade routes. And you'll have the rare opportunity to appreciate these treasures up close, as the Rockefellers intended.

This exhibition is the first joint venture between Asia Society and the American Federation of Arts, which has been organizing traveling exhibitions since 1909. Both organizations have long been devoted to promoting cross-cultural exchange and mutual understanding through visual art.

Your guides for this tour will be Adriana Proser, curator of Asian art at the Walters Art Museum and curator of this exhibition for Asia Society; Jennifer Casler Price, curator of Asian, African, and Ancient American art at the Kimbell Art Museum; and Lisa Rotondo-McCord, curator of Asian art and deputy director for curatorial affairs at the New Orleans Museum of Art.

Enjoy your tour.

NARRATOR:

This is an Acoustiguide production.

2. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER 3RD COLLECTION

ADRIANA PROSER:

I'm Adriana Proser, curator of *Buddha and Shiva, Lotus and Dragon: Masterworks from the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection at Asia Society*. John D. Rockefeller 3rd was the grandson of the railroad baron John D. Rockefeller. His father was a collector of many things, including Chinese ceramics, and his mother, Abby Aldridge Rockefeller, was instrumental in the founding of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. So he grew up in a family that loved art and collected art. There were a number of family homes, and in all of these homes there were works from all over the world, including Asia. In Maine, in the summer home, there was even a garden that was surrounded by a wall, and on top of the wall were tiles that had come from the Forbidden City in Beijing.

NARRATOR:

As you enter the exhibition, you will see a photo mural. In the center is that garden wall with a circular opening called a Moon Gate—a design that originated in ancient China. To the right is the Buddha Room at the Rockefeller's summer home. JDR the 3rd, as he was known, didn't begin collecting art himself until after World War II. His initial focus was Japan, where he was a diplomatic envoy working on American postwar policy. This position led to an opportunity to help bring an exhibition of Japanese art to the United States. The exhibition traveled to five American cities.

ADRIANA PROSER:

And it's really with the success of that exhibition that he recognizes that art can be a means for diplomacy—cultural diplomacy. Rockefeller recognizes that Asia is going to play a very important role in the future. And he sees that it's critical that the United States have a good relationship with not only Japan but other Asian nations. And the only way to do that is for Americans to understand Asia better—to get a better sense of their cultures, their deep histories, and also the importance that these cultures have in the development of art.

NARRATOR:

By the 1950s, JDR 3 and his wife, Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller, had become serious collectors of Asian art, and Blanchette was very much his partner in this endeavor.

ADRIANA PROSER:

Every object that they chose was a joint decision. Together, they traveled throughout Asia. They would visit archeological sites; they would visit museums. Even when they were in places like London and Paris, they would spend time viewing Asian art. And eventually, he and Blanchette form a relationship with Sherman Lee, who was the director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. And he becomes their advisor.

NARRATOR:

The decades during which the Rockefellers were building their collection were ones of political upheaval throughout Asia. Japan's defeat and wholesale reconstruction after World War II, the Communist Revolution in China, and the rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia all had profound effects on the ebb and flow of the Asian art market and impacted what the Rockefellers were able to acquire.

ADRIANA PROSER:

They were trying to buy crème-de-la-crème objects that reflected the high points in culture. And it was their belief that if Americans had the opportunity to encounter some of the best of the best, that they would have increased respect for those countries. I think we have to recognize that was how they were thinking about their collection and building their collection.

3. THE BUDDHA

Buddha, India (probably Bihar), Gupta, late 6th c.
(1979.8)

NARRATOR:

This sculpture is considered by many to be one of the finest early representation of the Buddha.

The historical Buddha, Shakyamuni was born a prince, Siddhartha Gautama, of the Shakya royal family of Kapilavastu, in either the 5th or 4th century BC, in what is today the southern region of Nepal. When he was about 30, he renounced his princely life, embarked on a spiritual journey, and eventually achieved enlightenment.

Buddhist art evolved along with the religion itself. It was not until the first century AD that artists began depicting the Buddha in human form. But he had unusual physical attributes that indicated that he was a supernormal being. Lisa Rotondo-McCord, curator of Asian art and deputy director for curatorial affairs at the New Orleans Museum of Art.



LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

He is identifiable through what are known as *lakshanas*, or auspicious marks, which appeared on the infant when he was born and were indicators of his extraordinary nature. Those include the *ushnisha*, a cranial bump on top of the head that represents his cosmic openness, and the *urna*, the small circle in the forehead; it symbolizes spiritual truth. You also have this wonderful webbing between his fingers. Early texts described his hands as being like a frog's. It is not an auspicious sign that is often seen subsequent to this time. His elongated earlobes allude to his life as a prince.

NARRATOR:

This sculpture was made during the Gupta period, the golden age of Indian art. The Gupta style would influence both Buddhist and Hindu art throughout Asia for centuries to come.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

You can see remnants of the Gupta style in many of the other works in the exhibition. And foremost among those is the treatment of drapery. It's absolutely plastered to his body, as though he's had a swim in the ocean. The treatment of the drapery is accentuated by these almost concentric lines that fall from the shoulders all the way from the hem of the garment, and you see those as well in other works in the exhibition.

NARRATOR:

In the nearby case, you can get a better view of the Buddha's *lakshanas* on the head from Gandhara.

4. **BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS**
Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the Form of Kharsarpana Lokeshvara, India (Bihar or Bengal), Pala period, late 11th–early 12th c. (1979.40)

NARRATOR:

The most popular bodhisattva was Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Lisa Rotondo-McCord.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

His compassion, in this instance, is exemplified by his right hand, which extends down past his knee. A nectar or a food [is] dripping from his hand, and it is being used to feed the small, crouching figure near his foot, which is a kind of hungry ghost, this being who lives in a sort of never-ending hell.



NARRATOR:

Avalokiteshvara is easily identified by the seated Buddha in his hair or crown. This is Amitabha Buddha.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

As Buddhism spreads, the realm of the Buddhas also expands. There's celestial Buddhas. The Buddha of the Western Paradise, Amitabha Buddha, becomes one of the most popular forms of the Buddha, the focus of great devotional practice throughout Asia. And you see him most often represented in the crown of Avalokiteshvara as a small, seated figure.

NARRATOR:

As Buddhism was evolving, so was Buddhist art. This work is an example of the Pala style, named after the dynasty that ruled Eastern India from the 8th to the 12th centuries.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

The elegant proportion of the body, and particularly the attenuated waists, exemplify the Pala style, and then there are still remnants of the Gupta tradition that you can see in the skirt and the treatment of the drapery.

5. TRANSMISSION OF BUDDHISM

Pair of Bodhisattvas in the Pensive Pose, China, Northern Qi period, dated 570 (1992.4)

NARRATOR:

As Buddhism spread throughout Asia, the Buddha was joined by a whole pantheon of bodhisattvas, enlightened beings who help followers reach enlightenment—two of whom are seated here. Jennifer Casler Price, curator of Asian, African and Ancient American art at the Kimbell Art Museum.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

They're seated on high stools. They have their opposing knees resting on their legs. And they have one hand raised, the finger touching the face in this, what we call a "pensive pose." They have very narrow waists and slim limbs. This is indicative of the Chinese style of Buddhist statuary.



NARRATOR:

Chinese artists mixed Indian and Chinese iconography in these works.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

Up near the top are two dragons. Dragons are actually an ancient symbol in Chinese culture: of clouds and rain and sky and heaven. Below, we have two lions. And lions in India are traditionally representative of royalty and power, and before Siddhartha Gautama became the Buddha, he was a prince. So we often see symbols of traditional Indian royalty incorporated into Buddhist iconography.

NARRATOR:

The sculpture dates to around 570, an era of dynastic wars and foreign invasions in China. Buddhism, which offered an escape from a troubled world, was becoming increasingly popular.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

This is a time where there's political instability, and it's a time when Chinese Buddhists are really focusing on their desire to be reborn in a Buddhist Pure Land. These paradises were thought to be places where the believer could go and concentrate on their Buddhist practice.

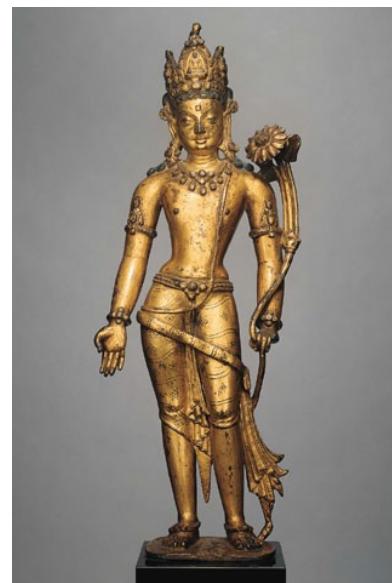
NARRATOR:

Here the practitioner would work toward their ultimate goal—enlightenment—breaking the cycle of rebirth and escaping this earthly lifetime.

6. BODHISATTVA AVALOKITESHVARA
 Nepal, Early Malla period, late 13th–early 14th c.
 (1979.51)

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

In this marvelous gilt copper sculpture representing the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, we have an example of Newari metalsmith at its finest. The broad face, full cheekbones, elegantly raised eyebrows, wide-set eyes—these all identify the sculpture as Nepalese.



NARRATOR:

The Newars, a minority community in the Kathmandu Valley, were the great masters of both Nepalese and Tibetan metalwork. Jennifer Casler Price.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

We are able to identify Avalokiteshvara by the seated Buddha in his crown. Another way that we are able to identify Avalokiteshvara is the lotus that he grasps in his left hand. The lotus is a symbol of both the Buddha and Buddhist purity. His right hand is making a gesture, and the gesture, or *mudra*, that he is making is called the *varada mudra*, the gesture of charity, granting the devotee's wishes.

NARRATOR:

In Nepal, as in the other Himalayan kingdoms of Kashmir and Tibet, aesthetic influences from outside the region were assimilated into native traditions. In this sculpture, we can see the influence of Gupta art.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The body is very slim; it has this very narrow waist, you get the wonderful sense of a little bit of a belly, the articulation of a belly button, these wide, full hips, the *tribhanga* pose, the “thrice-bent pose,” where he’s got his hip thrust out to one side, and then his legs and his head go to the other side. This is Gupta style from the fourth to the sixth centuries, as interpreted by these Newari artists now in the 13th and 14th centuries.

NARRATOR:

We can also see the influence of the Pala style in the almost baroque quality of the bodhisattva’s adornments, from his three-pointed crown to the floral pattern on the *dhoti*, or skirt, which hugs his hips. The Pala style can also be seen in the two carved stone stelae nearby.

7. CROWNED BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI
Kashmir or Northern Pakistan, 8th c. (1979.44)

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

This is an example of how when Buddhism encounters local traditions it was transformed.

NARRATOR:

In this sculpture, the historical Buddha no longer wears a simple robe. Kashmiri artists have adorned him with a crown, necklaces, and armbands. He is depicted giving his first sermon at Deer Park in Sarnath. Lisa Rotondo-McCord.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

If you look at the base, you see two deer flanking either side. At the center of the base is a wheel, which indicates the *dharma*, or the beginning of his Buddhist teaching. We see him seated on a lotus flower with his hands in a particular *mudra* indicating that he is turning the wheel of the law or beginning his phase as a teacher.



NARRATOR:

Take a good look at that remarkable lotus throne.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

He is literally seated on a lotus throne. It's extraordinary. The base represents a pond, and coming out of the center there is a stem that runs straight up and culminates in this lotus flower.

NARRATOR:

The lotus is a Buddhist symbol of purity: a beautiful white flower blossom that rises out of a muddy pond, much as a Buddhist aspires to rise above earthly life.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

At either side of the stem, there are two figures crowned by snake hoods. These are known as *nagas*, or water figures. And then there are two subsidiary stems that represent the *stupas*, structures that were built to commemorate important places in the Buddha's biography. And you have these wonderful stairwells that go up the sides.

NARRATOR:

This is the only object in this exhibition with an inscription identifying both the donor, a princess, and the date—the latter making it an important work to which other Kashmiri works can be compared.

8. CROWNED BUDDHA SEATED IN MEDITATION AND SHELTERED BY MUCHILINDA

Cambodia, Angkor period, Angkor Wat style, possibly 12th c.
(1979.68a-c)

NARRATOR:

In Cambodia, Buddhist art was transformed once more. This sculpture was made in the Khmer Period, during the reign of Jayavarman VII. Here, the crowned Buddha was seen as a kind of universal ruler—and thus comparable to the Khmer king, who ruled by divine right. Like the Buddhas we've seen from Nepal and Kashmir, this one is adorned with a crown and jewelry. Curator Adriana Proser.



ADRIANA PROSER:

We see a Buddha seated with his legs in the lotus position, his hands folded one on top of the other in the gesture, or *mudra*, of meditation, known as the *dhyanamudra*. You'll notice that he's actually seated on three coils of the body of a snake, and there's a large cobra hood over his head. This is a being whose name is Muchilinda.

NARRATOR:

In his search for enlightenment, Prince Siddhartha was meditating in the wild, when a huge storm rose up. Muchilinda opened its enormous hood to protect him from the rain. Sadly, the original serpent hood and coils have been lost. The ones here are likely 19th-century replacements. The gilded lacquer coating was also added later. But we can still appreciate how the Khmer sculptors animate the bronze.

ADRIANA PROSER:

You can see that the belly of the Buddha is a little bit convex, giving that sense of *prajna*, or breath, that one uses when one's meditating. And that sense of taut fleshiness is something that's very typical of Khmer sculpture.

9. CERAMICS AND METALWORK
Food Vessel (Gui), China, Eastern Zhou period, ca. 6th c. BC (1979.103a, b)

ADRIANA PROSER:

This is a Chinese bronze vessel called a *gui*. It's a kind of ritual vessel.

NARRATOR:

Curator Adriana Proser.

ADRIANA PROSER:

In China, there's a tradition of ancestor worship, and these bronze vessels would have been used for serving food and wine to the ancestors. That lid comes off, and if you turn it upside down that crown becomes a stand for the top.



NARRATOR:

Take a look at the handles—they're dragons.

ADRIANA PROSER:

These kinds of zoomorphic designs are very, very typical of ancient Chinese bronzes. And during the Zhou Period, when this vessel was cast, they became even more expressive. As you follow the neck of the dragon down, you can see these tiger-like beings that are kind of clamping on, biting on to that dragon. This kind of morphing in and out of different kinds of creatures is something very typical of bronze vessels.

NARRATOR:

Both the Rockefellers and their advisor, Sherman Lee, had their eyes on this piece. Lee hoped to acquire it not for the Rockefellers, but for the Cleveland Museum of Art.

ADRIANA PROSER:

If one of them saw an object first that person had first dibs. But in some cases, they would toss a coin. Now, in this particular case, this *gui* went up for auction with a pair. And so today, the one piece is in the Rockefeller collection at Asia Society and the other piece is at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

10. **FIGURE OF A COURT LADY and FOOTED DISH (SANCAI WARE)** China, Tang period, 8th c.
(1979.113 and 1979.128)

LISA ROTONODO-MCCORD:

Both of these objects were made as tomb sculptures, known as *mingqi*, or spirit objects.

NARRATOR:

Lisa Rotondo-McCord.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

The Chinese believed that the deceased needed to have, in their afterlife, all of the comforts and signs of status and authority that they had in their earthly existence. These could include ceramic replicas of your home, replicas of wine vessels, food vessels. If you made your money through trade, you might see camels or luxury goods from other parts of the world.



NARRATOR:

The *mingqi* we have here are a musician and footed dish. These would have been included in the tomb of the deceased.



LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

Both of them were covered in a lead glaze. And that lead glaze is another sign that these were never intended to be used by a living being, because the Chinese knew from a very early time that lead was a toxic substance. Lead glazes were very runny, and you can see that quite clearly on the figure of the woman. In the footed dish, the application of the glaze is much more controlled. The glaze has a life and a vitality that is uncommon in ceramics made for earthly use.

NARRATOR:

These pieces were glazed in three colors—green, amber, and white—a combination known as *sancai*. It's the addition of blue that reveals the wealth of the deceased.

LISA ROTONODO-MCCORD:

That blue comes from cobalt. And that was imported from Central Asia and the Middle East and was extremely expensive. And it's very lavishly applied onto the figure of the woman and applied in a much more controlled way on the footed dish.

- 11. BRUSH WASHER and BOWL (JUN WARE)**
China, Northern Song period, early 12th c. (1979.138, 1979.137)
- CUSPED BOWL (YAOZHOU WARE)**
China, Northern Song period, ca. early 12th c. (1979.131)
- CENSER (GE WARE)**
China, Yuan period, 13th–14th c. (1979.146)



NARRATOR:

While his father had collected Chinese porcelains that were popular in Europe, JDR III and Blanchette were more interested in the types of wares that were considered important to East Asian connoisseurs. Curator Adriana Proser.



ADRIANA PROSER:

The wares we're looking at now include pieces that are from the Northern Song Period, considered one of the high points of ceramic production in China. Two pieces are Jun ware. One is a little bowl that's known as a bubble bowl, and another one is a brush washer, which would have been used to wash your calligraphy brush. Because the Chinese wrote using calligraphy brushes and ink.

NARRATOR:

These pieces get their green and blue tones from iron oxide in the glaze. But the bubble bowl adds splotches of purple.

ADRIANA PROSER:

The potters figured out how to achieve this in the glaze by using filings of copper, and, in the kiln, the chemical reaction would create this brilliant purple on the blue glaze. The glaze is really thick, kind of unctuous, and drips towards the bottom of the vessel. So it's a really kind of perfect little example of Jun ware.

NARRATOR:

The cusped bowl, which is Yaozhou ware, also gets its olive-green color from iron oxide.



ADRIANA PROSER:

Yaozhou wares are known for their molded and incised decorations. And in this particular case, we have a really elegant design of a peony and peony leaves.



NARRATOR:

You'll notice how the glaze pools into the lines on the bowl. In the censer, or incense burner, which is Ge ware from the Yuan Period, the potter rubbed ink into the cracks in the glaze to emphasize them. The shape of this rare censer takes inspiration from the ritual bronze serving vessel called a *gui* that we saw earlier in this exhibition.

12. PLATTER

China, Yuan period, mid-14th c. (1979.151)

NARRATOR:

The fine white clay used to make porcelain is native to China, but the cobalt blue pigment most often associated with Chinese porcelain was actually imported from the Middle East. As Chinese blue-and-white porcelain grew in renown, Chinese artisans began making pieces like this remarkable platter for export—to the Middle East. Lisa Rotondo-McCord.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

Blue-and-white porcelain is thought to have been produced first in the early part of the 14th century. And cobalt is the perfect vehicle, because it can withstand the extremely high temperatures necessary for porcelains to vitrify, or become glasslike, in the kiln.



NARRATOR:

The platter's decorative scheme is primarily Chinese. In the center is a *qilin*, a mythical beast with a dragon's head, a deer's antlers, and a horse's hooves. It's surrounded by morning glories, bamboo, plantains, and melons. Both the *qilin* and its surroundings are symbolic of good fortune. But while the imagery is Chinese, the density of the design would have appealed to foreign clientele.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

Works being created for the Chinese market at this time were much simpler in their design. The size of the platter itself also indicates that it was created for a foreign market because the Chinese, at this time, did not eat off of large communal platters. But that was the practice in other parts of the world.

NARRATOR:

An extraordinary feature of this dish that cannot be seen is an inscription on the bottom, indicating that this platter was in the collection of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, the builder of the Taj Mahal.

13. BOTTLE and FLASK

China, Ming period, early 15th c., probably Yongle era
(1979.156, 1979.160)

NARRATOR:

In the early Ming Dynasty, the most important ceramic center in China was the city of Jingdezhen, where the kilns produced porcelains exclusively for the imperial court. Jennifer Casler Price.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

One of the great achievements of the Jingdezhen kilns was a glaze referred to as “sweet white,” in Chinese that is “*tianbai*.” The best of the *tianbai* wares have a very thin, fine-grained, pure white body and a glaze that is transparent and glossy, without any tinge of color. The walls of these wares were so thin that they were often called ‘body-less.’



NARRATOR:

This bottle is a superb example of sweet white ware. To see its decoration, you’ll have to look closely.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

A very popular device in the decoration of these sweet white wares was to execute the ornament as an *anhua*, and *anhua* means “secret decoration.” It’s so delicately incised that you can barely see it. It’s a stylized lotus flower in the center, and it’s on both sides of the bottle.



NARRATOR:

However, you can’t miss the decoration on the flask beside it—a wild, writhing dragon. His three claws indicate that the flask was a gift from the emperor.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

This flask has all the hallmarks of early Ming blue-and-white porcelains: the almost black spots, where the cobalt has what we call “heaped and piled,” and a slightly blue-tinted clear glaze.

NARRATOR:

Cobalt was notoriously difficult to control in the kiln. It would clump up, creating dark areas. If you look closely, you’ll also see subtle pockmarks.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

We call it “orange peel quality.” And this results from tiny bubbles that are bursting during firing at high temperature. And it’s just an indication of these Chinese potters learning how to control the glazes in the kilns.

14. DISH, STEM CUP, and WINE CUP

China, Ming period, mid to late 15th c., probably
Chenghua era (1979.177, 1979.176, 1979.175)

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

It's very easy to walk by this case and look at the little wine cup and not think anything about it all, because you have no idea what it took to create this perfect, precious piece of porcelain.



NARRATOR:

What it took was a two-step process involving two artists—one to outline the decoration in cobalt blue, and a second to color it in. This method allowed ceramic artists to use pigments that couldn't be fired at high temperatures, such as the green, red, and yellow in this small cup. Jennifer Casler Price.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

We call this “*doucai*,” and *doucai* means “joined colors.” An underglaze cobalt blue and clear glaze are applied onto the surface of the ceramic, and they’re fired first at a high temperature. Then a colored glaze is applied on top and fixed in a second firing at a lower temperature, and this fuses the color to that glaze.



NARRATOR:

The dish is an example of *jihong*, or sacrificial red, as it was reformulated in the Chenghua era. Artisans were attempting to replicate a lost technology by mixing finely ground copper oxide into the glaze. But red is a difficult color to control in the kiln.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The copper red that you see in Chenghua porcelains have a blackish tinge to them. Nonetheless they’re still quite beautiful and elegant. Around the rim of the dish is the white of the porcelain, and that’s literally from gravity exposing just the rim of the dish.

NARRATOR:

The stem cup brings together the blue underglaze and overglaze red.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The wonderful decoration on the cup is a bunch of frolicking animals, winged fish and elephants and horses and deer, against this backdrop of a roiling sea. For such a tiny little cup, it’s really packing a big punch.



15. COVERED JAR

China, Ming period, 16th c., Jiajing era
(1979.182a,b)

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The palette of underglaze cobalt and overglaze enamels that we see on this large covered jar is known as “*wucai*,” which means “five-color.”

NARRATOR:

Unlike *doucai*, or joined colors, in *wucai* almost all of the enamel colors are painted on the glazed object *after* its first firing. The artist is not coloring within someone else’s lines.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

This allows for the artists to work in a much more free and more detailed manner. We see these wonderful fish—perhaps they’re carp, since they’re orange. The scales of the fish are painted first and then filled in with the orange color. Some of the details that we see on the lotus blossoms and some of the other plants—this is all painted on the surface in a much bolder way.

NARRATOR:

Fish are an auspicious symbol in Chinese art. And in this case, it’s not just the fish, but the number.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

We have eight fish here; there’s five on the body and three on the cover. And this is a visual pun that means “vast fortune,” because “*bā yú*” pronounced one way means “eight fish,” and “*bā yú*” pronounced in a different tone means “vast fortune.”



16. DISH and BOWL

China, Qing period, early 18th c., Yongzheng era (1979.188, 1979.186)

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

Eighteenth-century Chinese ceramics were noted for the perfection of their porcelain bodies and the development of a new range of opaque enamels, giving ceramic artists a much broader range of options and the opportunity to create incredibly subtle and detailed images.

NARRATOR:

The soft pink opaque color of the peaches on this plate, for example, would not have been achievable with the pigments used in *doucai* and *wucai*. Lisa Rotondo-Mccord.



LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

The peaches are created in what is known in the West as a *famille rose*, or a pink-family, palette. In Chinese, this palette is known as either *fencai* or *ruancai*, which mean powdery colors or soft colors. These enamels were thought to have been introduced into China by Jesuit missionaries who brought with them enameled wares. This technology was then transferred to the imperial kilns at Jingdezhen, where colloidal gold was used to create these soft pinks.

The versatility of these opaque enamels is also evident in the small bowl, which features two quails in a landscape setting. And the extraordinary detail of the feathers is a testament to the possibilities created by the development of this new technique.

NARRATOR:

Auspicious symbolism abounds on both of these exquisite porcelains, which were likely intended as birthday or New Year's gifts.



LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

The peaches are traditional symbols of longevity. And the number eight is an auspicious number, if not the most auspicious number. And the five bats form a rebus, or a pictorial pun. In Chinese, the phrase for five bats, or *wufu*, sounds very similar to a phrase for the five blessings, or five happinesses, which are wealth, health, longevity, a virtuous life, and a tranquil or peaceful death.

The two quails serve as a rebus for peace and prosperity and are presented in a landscape of spring flowers and a sacred fungus, or a mushroom, all of which are indicators of spring, of new life and of rebirth.

17. STORAGE JAR

Korea, Joseon period, ca. mid-18th c. (1979.196)

TWO FOLIATE BOWL AND SAUCER SETS

Korea, Goryeo period, early 12th c. (1979.193.1-4)

NARRATOR:

“The secret color of Goryeo is the first under heaven.” So wrote one twelfth-century Chinese connoisseur about the shade of the glaze in these two bowl-and-saucer sets. That secret color is celadon. Jennifer Casler Price.



JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

This kind of celadon-colored glaze that we see here was produced in China and introduced into Korea probably just around the twelfth century. But then the Koreans refine it even more so, and it becomes this really delicate greenish-blue glaze known as “kingfisher.” It’s interesting that even though celadon originated in China, this Korean celadon, this really coveted kingfisher blue glaze, was ultimately highly admired and prized in China.



NARRATOR:

The graceful, crisply articulated floral shape of these dishes indicates that they were luxury goods, possibly used for a court banquet. But take a closer look at their surface.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

There is this really subtle kind of craquelure, these little crackles. This is actually intentional. And it adds to their allure and to the preciousness of these Korean celadons.



NARRATOR:

The storage jar is an example of Korean blue-and-white ware, which was introduced into Korea from China around the fifteenth century. Again, Korean artisans took something that originated in China and made it their own.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The shape of it is slightly irregular. The potting is quite thick. It’s not as fine as Chinese porcelains of the Ming dynasty. These are all indicative of Korean blue-and-white ware. The decoration derives from Korean folk painting. These are all symbols of longevity: the pine tree, the crane, the *lingzhi*, which is the longevity-inducing fungus, and the moon. These are motifs that were taken, again, also from China, and now adopted by the wealthy literati class of Korean society.

18. TWO STANDING FEMALE FIGURES

(ARITA WARE)

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1670–90 (1979.239, 1979.240)

DRUM-SHAPED PILLOW (ARITA WARE)

Japan, Edo period, late 18th–early 19th c. (1979.233)

NARRATOR:

The Chinese brought the manufacture of porcelain to Korea; Korean potters then brought it to Japan. There, Korean potters founded the Arita kilns on the southern island of Kyushu. These kilns would step in to fill the international demand for porcelain when dynastic wars disrupted Chinese production in the seventeenth century. In this case are works from the Arita kilns, including two figures of courtesans, which were made for export and very popular in European markets. Curator Adriana Proser.



ADRIANA PROSER:

At the time, it was fashionable for women to have very, very white skin. And here the potters are really exploiting this white of the porcelain to give a sense of the beauty of the very white skin of these courtesans.

One has a robe that has very delicate wisteria patterns on the back. And the other one has a more elaborate pattern that includes waves and chrysanthemums. And if you look at the front, it's kind of fun because the inner robe has this scrolling pattern painted in red. But on the other figure, the pattern is done in white. So they're kind of positive and negative images of the same type of pattern.

NARRATOR:

Also in the case is a ceramic pillow, used to protect elaborate hairstyles while sleeping. Unlike the figures, it was *not* made for export.



ADRIANA PROSER:

There's a long tradition of using ceramic pillows in China and also in Japan. This is a small pillow in the shape of a Japanese drum, with these beautiful cherry blossoms. The cherry blossoms and the chrysanthemums were very popular decorative motifs during this period.

19. TEA-LEAF JAR

Nonomura Ninsei (active ca. 1646-77), Japan (Kyoto),
Edo period, 1670s (1979.251)

ADRIANA PROSER:

This tea-leaf jar is one of the most spectacular pieces ever produced by the ceramicist Nonomura Ninsei. Ninsei was a Kyoto-based potter and was one of the first potters ever to sign his works. So, with Ninsei we really see a shift where ceramic artisans are now considering themselves full-fledged artists.



NARRATOR:

Curator Adriana Proser.

ADRIANA PROSER:

Ninsei arrived in Kyoto in the middle of the seventeenth century, and he established a kiln there next to a Buddhist temple gate. And that temple was closely connected with a renowned tea master whose name was Kawamori Sowa. And he became a patron of Nonomura Ninsei's.

NARRATOR:

On this jar, which may have been made more for display than actual use, Ninsei painted myna birds frolicking against an elegant landscape.

ADRIANA PROSER:

One's standing on the ground calling out; others are in the air fighting. It's almost like you're unrolling the scroll and the scene is unfolding. The artist also used some silver leaf to enhance the wings. It's turned kind of a black color over time. But if you look carefully, you'll be able to see some of that silver on the tips of the feathers of those myna birds.

NARRATOR:

Sherman Lee first spotted this piece for the Rockefellers in Japan. But the Japanese government wouldn't allow them to acquire it, having designated it important cultural property.

ADRIANA PROSER:

John D. Rockefeller III felt that it was really critical to have a work that was of this quality in his collection, because his rationale for collecting was to give Americans the opportunity to see Japanese works of the first order. So he asked the Ministry of Culture to make a special dispensation. And ultimately he was granted permission to import the piece to the United States and have it added to his collection.

20. GODS AND KINGS

Shiva and Female Figure, Cambodia, Angkor period,
Baphuon style, early 11th c. (1979.64, 1979.65)

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

Throughout Southeast Asia, Hinduism and Buddhism were practiced side by side. Cambodian sculptors worked in the service of both Hindu and Buddhist rulers.

NARRATOR:

We identify this sculpture as Shiva because of the third eye incised on his forehead. But take a good look at his crown and hair.
Jennifer Casler Price.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

There's an outline of something that's been abraded. The outline looks a little bit like the outline of a seated Buddha, and that would indicate that the sculpture may have been the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who has an image of a Buddha in his headdress. And what this indicates is that this sculpture was probably a Buddhist sculpture originally and then later was transformed into Shiva, merely by adding the third eye.



NARRATOR:

Cambodian sculptors enhanced the sense of naturalism by burnishing the stone to a high polish.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

It's molded into very smooth volumes. And then this is contrasted with this beautifully carved and stylized linear pattern of the *sampot*, the male skirt. There's also a belt that helps to emphasize the fact that he has rather substantial and wide hips. So Cambodian sculpture possesses this aura of elegance, but also power. And this stylistic formula lasted for over three centuries, until the fourteenth century.



NARRATOR:

The unidentifiable female figure, lacking a head, arms, feet, and jewelry, has a similar aesthetic.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The stone is being kind of brought to life. It's radiating a warmth and tautness, obviously of a woman in the prime of her life. What I love is the articulation of her smooth, sensuous stomach, the belly button that's carved, the delicate way that the sarong has been tied. It's tied with a belt, again, to accentuate her hips, and it ends in this stylized fishtail motif.

21. GANESHA

India (Tamil Nadu), Chola period, 11th c. (1979.26)

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

Chola bronzes are almost universally considered to be some of the finest examples of three-dimensional sculpture in the traditional world. And these Chola bronze casters were extraordinary artists. These sculptures really demand to be walked around. And they are as dynamic from the rear as they are from the front.

NARRATOR:

You can see that dynamism in this statue of the popular and beloved Hindu god Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Lisa Rotondo-McCord.

LISA ROTONDO-MCCORD:

He's got his weight on his back foot with this hip that's cocked, and the other foot forward. His belly provides a weight to the front of the sculpture that's counterbalanced in the back.

Many, if not most, of the postures and poses that you see these sculptures in are derived or very closely related to South Indian classical dance. If you have the opportunity to see these dances, you'll immediately recognize the positions and the postures. And it's very much as though the sculptor had captured these deities at a moment in time. We talk about capturing the decisive moment when we speak about photography. That's what this is, except it's in the form of three-dimensional sculpture.

NARRATOR:

Ganesha holds a mace in one hand and a lasso in another. With these he protects his followers from evil. Ganesha is the son of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati. Sculptures depicting them can be found nearby.



22. PARVATI

India (Tamil Nadu), Chola period, 11th c. (1979.21)

ADRIANA PROSER:

The Rockefeller collection has a relatively large and extremely strong collection of Chola bronzes, and the pieces that you're seeing in this exhibition give you a really good sense of the quality of those pieces and the desire of the Rockefellers to share some of the best of the best of the world's bronze production with the American public.



NARRATOR:

Among these are this statue of the Hindu goddess Parvati.
Curator Adriana Proser.

ADRIANA PROSER:

Parvati is the consort of Shiva and the mother of Ganesha, and she's also the daughter of the Himalayas. And you can see actually an abstract image of the Himalayas at the top of her crown.

One of the things that Chola bronzes are so esteemed for is the sense of movement in them. In this particular piece, you'll notice the s-shaped curve—what we would call in the West that sense of contrapposto is given also by that bend in her right knee. This is what is called the *tribhanga* pose. It's always important with Chola bronzes to make sure you view them in the round. You'll see that the sculpture is as beautifully finished on the sides and the back as it is from the front.

NARRATOR:

And yet this exquisite craftsmanship was not meant to be admired in this way.

ADRIANA PROSER:

These pieces were really made as processional pieces. They would have been fully dressed and covered with garlands of flowers. The craftsmen have articulated all of the jewelry and the garments around the lower part of her body, even though most people wouldn't have been seeing these details.

NARRATOR:

In a Hindu temple, a statue of Parvati is often placed next to an image of her consort, Shiva Nataraja, to witness his divine dance of bliss. An extraordinary image of Shiva Nataraja is displayed nearby.

23. HINDU SCULPTURE

Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Shiva Nataraja), Tamil Nadu, Chola period, ca. 970 (1979.20)

NARRATOR:

Here we have one of the finest treasures of the Rockefeller collection: Shiva Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance. Jennifer Casler Price.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The Chola rulers were Hindus devoted to Shiva. As the cosmic lord of the dance, Shiva Nataraja combines the god's role as creator, preserver, and destroyer in one image. Shiva's dance of bliss is the catalyst for the destruction of the universe and the creation of a new cosmos.

NARRATOR:

Shiva's dance is set within a flaming halo that symbolizes the cosmos.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

The fire in his left hand signifies the destruction of the universe, while the drum in his right hand denotes the rhythm of creation. One leg is lifted in dance, while the other leg tramples a dwarfish figure representing ignorance and illusion. The left palm points to the foot, signifying refuge and deliverance from ignorance. The open right palm grants freedom from fear.

The energy of Shiva's dance forces his hair to fly to the sides. A small image of the goddess Ganga is shown among his flying locks. This figure refers to the story of how the Ganges River, which originally flowed into the heavens, came to flow on earth. When the gods permitted the river to come down, Shiva agreed to break the crushing fall of its descent to earth by catching it in his hair.

NARRATOR:

With snakes around his arms and a tiger pelt tied around his waist, this Shiva is a masterful evocation of the triumphal warrior venerated by the Chola rulers.

JENNIFER CASLER PRICE:

This fantastic flaming aureole, the multiple limbs, all the ways that his hands are moving and turning and twisting, very evocative of the rhythms of Indian dance—this really represents a *tour de force* of Chola bronze casting.

