

Islamic & Indian Art

The Collection of the
Late Jean-Pierre Yonan

Friday 29 April, 1 pm

Islamic & Indian Art

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Highlight viewings at our South Kensington Showroom, by appointment only

Monday 28 March, 10am to 5pm
Tuesday 29 March, 10am to 5pm
Wednesday 30 March, 10am to 5pm
Thursday 31 March, 10am to 5pm
Friday 1 April, 10am to 5pm

Monday 4 April, 10am to 5pm
Tuesday 5 April, 10am to 5pm
Wednesday 6 April, 10am to 5pm
Thursday 7 April, 10am to 5pm
Friday 8 April, 10 am to 5pm

Full Viewings at our Chiswick Saleroom

Friday 22 April, 10am to 5pm
Saturday 23 April, 11am to 4pm
Monday 25 April, 10am to 5pm
Tuesday 26 April, 10am to 5pm
Wednesday 27 April, 10am to 5pm
Thursday 28 April, 10am to 5pm

Front Cover Lot 205
Back Cover Lot 200

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The collection of the late Jean-Pierre Yonan

A man of great values and charisma, Jean-Pierre's memorable character touched the lives of many throughout his time.

His passion for collecting Buddhist art led him on worldwide travels in search of unique pieces which could reflect his taste, aesthetics and beliefs.

When he came across a piece with which he instantly felt a connection, Jean-Pierre would be drawn to the artwork with a sort of impulsivity characterised by deep emotion rather than superficial materialism or a desire to display possessions. He, in fact, conserved many of his pieces with a degree of privacy which allowed said connection to maintain its integrity.

His spirituality dominated much of his decision-making, and purchasing art was no exception. With a profound interest for philosophy and metaphysical ideologies - his knowledge of which he continuously furthered throughout his life - Jean-Pierre would never turn down the opportunity of acquiring a piece which could embody and represent in a tangible manner the beliefs which resonated with his essence. His collection of Buddhist art is the very culmination of this notion, as it perfectly concretised the intersection between his spiritual interests and his devotion to art. Despite his ability to immediately identify works which reflected his ideas, Jean-Pierre nevertheless tended to carry out extensive research on artists and their art, so as to refine his selection and align meaning and aesthetic, which in turn allowed him to create a coherent and harmonious collection.

Distributed between his homes in New York, London, Geneva and the South of France, his carefully selected artworks constituted a personal element which imbued these spaces with great energy and aesthetic beauty.

PAKISTAN

ARABIAN
SEA

INDIA

SRI LANKA



TIBET

NEPAL

BHUTAN

BANGLADESH

BURMA

BAY OF
BENGAL

THAILAND

CAMBODIA

SUMATRA



*"I have always believed, and
I still believe, that whatever
good or bad fortune may come
our way we can always give it
meaning and transform it into
something of value."*

– Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha: An Indian Poem* (1922)

Introduction

When one thinks of Asia, I am sure that all sorts of images populate that person's mind. Sushi? Manga? The Great Wall? Mangrove groves, crystal-clear blue waters and fancy retreats in Thailand and Bali in the style of Eat, Pray, Love?

The cultural, anthropological, religious and historical richness of every country in Asia is so vast that trying to assimilate it all into a single word or concept may be considered a short-sighted and futile experiment. And yet, there is an undisputed fil rouge connecting most Asian countries, and I'm not only talking here of the Far East. Indeed, when I think of Asia, one word immediately jumps to my mind: Buddhism.

Much more than just a mere word, Buddhism is one of the largest, most long-standing and influential philosophical traditions and one among the eight oldest religions in the world, originated in India between the 6th and 4th centuries BCE and developing at the same time of Confucianism and Taoism in China. Its foundation is based on the spiritual journey and teachings of a man, Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the (historical) Buddha. No other movement, religion or event has permeated every corner of Asia to the degree Buddhism did. During its 2500-year history, the faith enjoyed widespread success throughout Asia; a success that in some cases led to a gradual absorption (Hinduism), complete integration (Japanese culture) and sadly, at times, suffered persecution and competition (Confucianism)¹.

Today, Buddhism remains the dominant faith of countries like Burma, Sri Lanka and mainland South-East Asia, where the art and architecture act as a constant reminder of this faith's principles and core values. Fisher once described Buddhist art as *"an elaborate assemblage of images of divinities and objects, ranging from a humble teacher and compassionate saviours to multi-headed, ferocious deities and extending to mysterious images and objects of bewildering complexity"*². Studying, researching and appreciating Buddhist art is an exercise not dissimilar to looking into a kaleidoscope. Infinite patterns and ever-changing images will run in front of your eyes, but if one observes closely, it is possible to reconnect each image to the main source, the Buddha.

It is not incongruous or unheard of that several collectors of Buddhist art surround themselves with artworks produced in a variety of Asian countries. Naturally, some collectors may adopt a more "purist" approach and only collect Buddhist art from specific regions, like Kushan Gandhara, or India, or China. However, this was certainly not the case of Jean-Pierre Yonan. He was an admirer of beauty and the different aesthetics in which Buddhist art expressed itself charmed him. In his interiors, he tastefully blended these creations with 20th-century Western design furniture, European modern paintings, tribal souvenirs, and antiques of all sorts. His approach to collectorship was to respect what his heart loved and what his eye admired. And if the old Italian saying proves to be true, *"Al cuore non si comanda"* (the heart decides on its own), so does the eye of the collector:

It is with great pleasure that Chiswick Auctions offers six unseen sculptural works of Buddhist art from the late Jean-Pierre Yonan collection in our next Islamic and Indian Art auction (29th April 2022). Our wish is to hand them over to the next generation of passionate collectors that can not only admire them, but also fulfill their potential by researching them further and keeping their legacy alive.

¹ Robert E. Fisher, *Buddhist Art and Architecture*, 1993, p.7

² Ibidem p.11

Gandhara

Our journey starts in the ancient region of Gandhara, an area roughly corresponding to modern-day north-western Pakistan. From the first to the third century AD, this region was under the control of the Kushan dynasty - Central Asian people who first invaded Bactria and subsequently settled in north-western India³.

The Kushan kingdom was centred in two main areas: Mathura, in North-Central India, and Gandhara. Both areas distinguished themselves in the production of remarkable Buddhist artworks. The style of Mathura had a distinctive Indian flare and could be rightly considered the precursor of Gupta sculptural art. Meanwhile, the stylistic rendering of the image of the Buddha in Gandhara was the product of the aftermath of Alexander the Great's campaigns, yielding a unique fusion of Western art canons and Eastern religious and philosophical concepts. This blend of Greco-Roman stylistic influence and Buddhist subjects led to a very prolific output of sculptures and figural panels, typically carved out of grey schist, the most readily available material in the region, which can be admired in numerous important private and public collections around the world.

Our example (Lot 200) presents several elements of the standardised sculptural canon of Gandharan art including the naturalistically rendered wavy hair tied into a round topknot, covering the Buddha's cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*); the oval face with perfectly arched eyebrows, a straight Greek nose, full bow-shaped lips, and deeply cut, stylised eyes; lastly, the heavy monastic robe (*sanghati*) with numerous deep pleats, reminiscent in style of a Roman toga. The halo at the back (now in a fragmentary state) and the dot in the middle of the forehead (*urna*) act as visual reminders that the figure we are looking at is the historical Buddha, Siddhartha, and not one of the many deities of the Greek Pantheon. Another identifying feature would have been the hands and their position (*mudra*).

Looking at the mild disproportion in the damage to the arms, one could speculate that the left limb was once resting on the Buddha's lap with the palm facing upward and the right arm raised with the palm fully open and extended facing the beholder in the typical *abhaya mudra* ('Fear Not' gesture).

The production of Gandharan Buddhist reliefs and sculptures started declining in the third century and completely ceased by the sixth century AD. Nevertheless, the innovative artistic vocabulary introduced by this region's creations provided an ideal platform for the development and evolution of Buddhist images, not only in India, but throughout the Asian continent⁴.

³ Christian Luczanits in *The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: Art of Gandhara*, 2011, p. 13

⁴ Ibidem, p. 22-23

Lot 200

A CARVED GRAY SCHIST BUST OF THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA, SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA SHAKYAMUNI

Ancient region of Gandhara, 2nd - 3rd century

Carved on three sides, the back flat and plain, possibly once attached to a stele or part of an architectural niche, the Buddha's bust and shoulders covered in full by his monastic robe (*sanghati*) featuring many thick folds giving the plain cloak a classical Greco-Roman flare, the neck marked with several posture lines showcasing naturalism and realistic rendering, the elongated earlobes pierced, the Buddha's face characterised by a tranquil, timeless expression with arched eyebrows, heavy lids, wide almond-shaped eyes, tight full lips and straight nose, in the middle of his forehead a raised urna or Third Eye, his cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*) rendered with a large high bun pulling up thick wavy hair; behind his head a fragmentary halo, the bust mounted on a rectangular black stone base, 76.3cm high including the base.

Provenance: In the private collection of Jean-Pierre Yonan in his London since the 1980s - 1990s.

For analogous gray schist Gandhara Buddhist sculptures offered in recent international auctions and showing the Buddha dressed in the same attire and posture of our lot, please see Christie's New York, 16 September 2014, lot 212; Sotheby's New York, 20 September 2021, lot 355; and Bonhams Hong Kong, 2 December 2020, lot 1032.

£6000 - £8000



Southeast Asia

Jumping forward a few centuries in time and eastward in space, our journey of discovery brings us to warmer shores, specifically to Thailand and Cambodia. As Fisher explains, the migration of peoples and ideas from India was one of the main cultural catalysts in South-East Asia, shaping not only art and mythology, but also written language, religion, mathematics, and science⁵. Hinduism preceded Buddhism in the region, but in the 6th and 7th centuries AD, its influence started growing and Buddhist faith became more and more established.

South-East Asian sculptural art and architecture witnessed their Golden Age in the period between the 10th and the 15th centuries AD, when large templar complexes were built and the ruling classes commissioned exquisite sculptures in a variety of media (mostly terracotta, sandstone and bronze). The South-East Asian sculptures here presented as part of the Late Jean-Pierre Yonan collection all belong to this rich and prolific period, and their different dates of production and features guide us step by step through the iconographic and stylistic evolution of the sculptural arts witnessed in this region, sublimating Indian and Sri Lankan artistic influences with local forms of expressions, canons of beauty and aesthetic sensitivity.

In Cambodia, pre-Angkor Wat sculptures were characterised by lively physicality and subtle animation, the faces always ignited by a gentle smile⁶. However, during the classical Khmer period (10th – 13th centuries), the sculptural canon became much more hieratic, stylised and prone to stasis instead of movement (see lots 201 and 204). This change was fostered by a shift in political ideology, whereby kingship and divine power were conceived as one, and therefore, sculptures were signs of divine authority on earth, intended to demonstrate power and success, and not human nature. With the rule of Jayavarman VII (1181 – 1219), a new chapter began for Buddhist art. The creations of this period saw the introduction of a wider range of figures, such as Bodhisattva Lokeshvara (Lot 202) and Prajnaparamita (Tara). The need to represent their individual features provided an unprecedented evolution of the iconographic vocabulary. What was established at this time, was continued successively throughout the generations of sculptors and artists who learned the craft. This adherence

to the canon enhances each sculpture, bestowing on it a sense of timelessness.

Around the same time, Thailand was a divided country. The period between the 8th and the 12th centuries was quite tumultuous, with the country torn by both Indo-Javanese and Cambodian Khmer influences⁷. Mon art (the art produced by the inhabitants of Thailand in the first millennium AD) became less and less in demand and it eventually ceased in Central and North-East Thailand in the 10th century under the impact of Khmer influence. Nevertheless, the last stronghold and artistic centre of Mon art, called Haripunjaya (modern Lamphun), continued producing images, especially of Buddhist subjects, right up to 1292-1293, leading to the creation of a new style⁸.

Haripunjaya sculptures (like our lot 203) are usually characterised by square faces; a thick band framing their faces along the hairline, a feature adopted from Khmer art; slightly swelled heads above the temples, with flatter tops and foreheads; joint, horizontal eyebrows; broad noses; and the hair is worked in small, spiky curls. Differently from the Mon period, when stone was the primary material for sculptures, terracotta and stucco became favoured materials in the Haripunjaya production, as the Wat Kukut stupa (early 13th century) and its five-storey tower housing stucco Buddha images in the Dvaravati style testify⁹.

When the Thai people took over at the end of the 13th century, considerable changes were introduced. Firstly, the prime materials used in the past such as stone and terracotta were largely replaced by bronze (either plain or often gilt). Secondly, the sources of aesthetic inspiration shifted from the locally available Javanese and Khmer productions to the Indian Pala and Sinhalese canons.

With the rise of a new capital in 1350, Ayutthaya (Central Thailand), the Thai kingdom was fully formed and ready to be the dominant power in the region until 1767¹⁰. The art of this period, often referred as Early Ayutthaya style or U-Thong C style (mid-14th – mid-15th centuries), is characterised by a wise and charming blend of features present in Sukhothai and Khmer sculptures, and the introduction of innovative elements, leading to the creation of a brand new aesthetic. If we take lot 205 as an

example, the gentle, oval face and elongated silhouette of our Buddha present a clear Sukhothai influence. The band framing the hairline and the engraved contour around the lips are instead features typical of Khmer sculptures.

On the front of innovation, one can admire the flame-like element on top of the Buddha's cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*), also called *rasmi*, a symbol of spiritual radiance inspired by Sinhalese examples and developed into a unique flaming conch-shell form in U-Thong C style art. Hands and fingers become much more elongated and mudras are revisited, introducing original solutions like the Calming the Ocean gesture (both hands in *abhaya mudra*), which appears to have been very popular at the time¹¹.

⁵ Robert E. Fisher, *Buddhist Art and Architecture*, 1993, p. 167

⁶ W. Felten and M. Lerner, *Thai and Cambodian Sculpture from the 6th to the 14th centuries*, 1988, p. 19

⁷ Dorothy H. Fickle, *Images of the Buddha in Thailand*, 1989, p. 6

⁸ Ibidem, pp. 36 - 37

⁹ Gilles Beguin, *Buddhist Art: An Historical and Cultural Journey*, 2009, p. 177

¹⁰ Dorothy H. Fickle, *Images of the Buddha in Thailand*, 1989, p. 72

¹¹ Gilles Beguin, *Buddhist Art: An Historical and Cultural Journey*, 2009, p. 186



Lot 201

A KHMER CARVED BUFF SANDSTONE HEAD OF THE HINDU GOD SHIVA

Cambodia, South East Asia, Baphuon Style, circa 1010 - 1080

Carved in the round on four sides, possibly from a once free-standing statue, the rounded face of Shiva marked by a stern and contemplative expression, the sculpture featuring typical characteristics of Khmer Baphuon style creations like fleshy, full lips, almond-shaped eyes, a wide flattened nose, and elongated earlobes, the hair arranged in matted thick braids and pulled up in a tight high bun kept in place by a decorative jewelled hair-ring, possibly a necklace of *rudraksha* beads, the dried seeds traditionally carried by Shaivite ascetics, in the centre of the bun a stylised rosette or lotus flower; the austerity and simplicity of the iconographic vocabulary in line with the aesthetic of asceticism promoted in the Baphuon period, mounted on a black stand, 43.5cm high including the stand.

Provenance: In the private collection of Jean-Pierre Yonan in his London since the 1980s - 1990s.

During the Baphuon period (1010 - 1080), the main practiced religion in Cambodia was Hinduism with a predominant orientation towards Shiva's cult. Khmer sculptures of this period are imbued with austerity, often expressed in stern looks; a predilection for stasis and perfect symmetry, rendered with flat, full-on, stiff standing postures; a deep feeling of gravitas and internal contemplation, deprived of the serenity and contentment emotion transmitted by later creations in the Angkor period lighten up by their 'Angkor smiles'; and most importantly, the focus is on the representation of the aesthetic of asceticism, promoted by the example of Lord Shiva himself.

Although in a fragmentary state, our head can be compared to some outstanding standing Shiva sculptures attributed to the Baphuon period and published in the publication by W. Felten and M. Lerner, *Thai and Cambodian Sculpture from the 6th to the 14th centuries*, 1988. In particular, the hair braiding style; the *rudraksha* jewelled band; the symmetrical arrangement of the hairline around the temples; and the wide flat forehead show great affinity to sculptures cats. 22 and 27 (pp. 206 - 207 and 213 - 214). A similar sandstone figure of Shiva attributed to the Baphuon style once belonged to the Asian art collection of Robert H. Ellsworth, and was sold at Christie's New York, 17 March 2015, lot 24.

£1500 - £2000





Lot 202

**A KHMER CARVED BUFF SANDSTONE HEAD OF
THE BODHISATTVA LOKESHVARA, THE LORD OF
THE WORLD**

Cambodia, South East Asia, Angkor Wat style,
circa 1100 - 1175

Carved on three sides with a flat back, possibly once attached to a stele or part of an architectural niche, the strict and yet elegant rounded face of the Bodhisattva Lokeshvara (*Avalokiteshvara* in Sanskrit and *Guanyin* in Chinese) realistically carved with the impression of the third eye on the forehead, further enhanced with arched eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, a wide flattened nose, full, fleshy lips flanked on the lower part by small fangs, the cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*) covered with tight, rounded curls and at the top showing a miniature seated Amitabha in meditation, the Buddha of the West, of Eternal Life, and one of the five Cosmic Buddhas of Esoteric Buddhism, the elongated earlobes weighed down by heavy precious earrings, a reminder of his royal status (*isvara* - Lord, Ruler), the head surrounded by a cusped flaming halo, mounted on a black wooden stand, 43.4cm including the stand.

Provenance: In the private collection of Jean-Pierre Yonan in his London since the 1980s - 1990s.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, with the rise of the Angkor Wat style (1100 - 1175) and the increasing importance acquired by secondary figures in the Buddhist Pantheon, the iconographic vocabulary of Khmer sculptures expanded to an unprecedented level. It is around this time that Bodhisattvas like Lokeshvara, Padmapani, and the female deity of Prajnaparamita (Tara) became more and more present in the repertoire of the religious arts of South East Asia, especially in Cambodia and Thailand.

Gilles Beguin explains this relevant transformation with the rise to power of the Mahayana Buddhist King Jayavarman VII (1181 – 1219), often considered by historians the most powerful of the Khmer monarchs and a devoted disciple of Buddhist teachings (Gilles Beguin, *Buddhist Art: An Historical and Cultural Journey*, 2009, pp. 150 - 154). Under his rule, Buddhism became the main state religion and the only path towards rebuilding a credible religious system after the catastrophic collapse set in place by previous rulers. Around the same time, sculptures of Lokeshvara/ Avalokiteshvara started populating Khmer buildings, presented mostly in two forms with either a

four-armed Lokeshvara with Buddha Amitabha seated in meditation in the front of his hairdo, each one of his arms carrying specific, identifiable attributes such as the *padma* (lotus), a rosary, a book and a flask of *amrita* (elixir); or a Lokeshvara whose body was fully covered with small icons of meditating Buddhas. Our lot is likely to have belonged to the first group.

£1500 - £2000



Lot 203

A STANDING TERRACOTTA FIGURE OF BUDDHA

Haripunjaya (modern Lamphun), Northern Thailand,
South East Asia, 11th - 13th century

Carved on three sides with a flat back, possibly once attached to a stele or part of an architectural niche, the historical Buddha presented standing in *samabhanga* (lit. without bending), his right hand lifted in *abhaya mudra* (the 'Fear Not' gesture) and marked with a spiral, one of the supernatural signs (*lakshana*) common in Indian iconography to all Great Persons (*mahapurusha*), whether Universal Emperors (*chakravartin*) or Buddhas, the left hand resting wide open against his leg, wearing his typical diaphanous monastic attire (*uttarasangha* and *samghati*) secured by a belt around the waist, the robe clinging to his slim body, his neck marked with three lines, his face with a serene, timeless expression, showing downcast eyes almost closed with heavy eyelids under pronounced eyebrows marked as a continuous wavy line crossing the forehead horizontally, above them the rounded bindi marking the Buddha's third eye, the elongated earlobes now freed from the heavy princely regalia worn by the Buddha in his young age, the cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*) and head enhanced with individually crafted terracotta snail shell curls, the overall style and iconography indebted to Indian Gupta sculptures portraying the Buddha in his monastic phase, the back plain, mounted on a black stand with a brass plaque reading 'Haripunjai Terracotta Buddha, 10th - 11th century', 99cm high including the stand.

Provenance: In the private collection of Jean-Pierre Yonan in his London since the 1980s - 1990s.

Around the 10th century, Mon art (the art produced by the inhabitants of Thailand in the first millennium AD) went into a steady decline in the territories of Central and North-Eastern Thailand under the impact of Khmer influence. Nevertheless, further up north, at a Mon centre called Haripunjaya, (modern Lamphun), Buddhist images continued being produced until 1292 - 1293 in a style that combined Mon, Khmer, and Thai elements in an original solution, making Haripunjaya and its creation the last stronghold and artistic production centre of Mon art (Dorothy H. Fickle, *Images of the Buddha in Thailand*, 1989, p. 36).

Haripunjaya sculptures like our lot here are usually

characterised by square faces; a thick band framing their faces along the hairline, a feature adopted from Khmer art; slightly swelled heads above the temples, with flatter tops and foreheads; joint, horizontal eyebrows; broad noses; and the hair is worked in small, spiky curls. In the Mon period, stone was the primary material for sculptures but at Haripunjaya, terracotta and stucco became the favoured materials, as the Wat Kukut stupa (early 13th century) and its five-storey tower housing stucco Buddha images in the Dvaravati style testify. The slight forward bend evident in the profile of our sculpture suggests that it could have once been part of a similar templar complex, housed within one of the higher niches and looking down to the devotees during their circumambulation of the temple ground.

£4000 - £6000



Lot 204

**A KHMER CARVED SANDSTONE STANDING STATUE
OF A FEMALE GODDESS (UMA)**

Cambodia, South East Asia, Angkor Wat style, circa 1100 - 1175

Carved in the round on four sides as a free-standing statue, the naked torso highlighting the goddess's gently sloping shoulders, her full and rounded breasts, her slender waist, and wide, curvy hips, the typical *sarong* skirt showcasing multiple narrow pleats, a long vertical hem forming a triangular ruffle (also called fish-tail pleat) near the left ankle, and a double-folded drape around the waistline, both head and arms now missing, mounted on a black stand with a copper plaque reading 'Goddess *Uma*, Angkor Wat Period, 12th century', 56.3cm including the stand.

Provenance: In the private collection of Jean-Pierre Yonan in his London since the 1980s - 1990s.

In terms of style and content, this sculpture can be easily attributed to the artistic production dating to the Khmer Angkor Wat period, often considered by art historians an extension of the Baphuon style and the true apogee of Cambodian art. Harmonious symmetry; perfected balance; thorough understanding of the employed media; and enhanced decorative quality and compositional genius all mingle into the creation of an immortal aesthetic unaffected by the passing of time.

Our naked torso shows a clear understanding of the human body presented with youthful breasts, a slim waist, and most importantly, a refined and sensitive rendition of curves both in silhouette and profile. The proportions are rather realistic and accurate, pre-dating the increased volumes and almost caricatural quality of sculptural creations in the Bayon style. The emphasis is still on stasis rather than movement like in the Baphuon period, but here, an element of elegance is blended into the apparent stiffness of the body. The absence of limbs and head of this statue forces the viewer to concentrate on the remaining details, which are by no means scarce. Indeed, the pleated *sarong* terminating in the flaring 'fishtail' motif showcases fine carving skills and it also helps us with the attribution of this lot to the Angkor Wat period thanks to comparable visual references to the fashion of the time and the contemporary trends of how *sarongs* were worn, as evident in the case of the rare free-standing sculptural survival of Female Divinity in the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh (acc. no. Ka 1867). For further



examples of *sarong* patterns, please refer to this website <http://www.tevoda.com/khmerart.html>, last accessed: 03/03/2022.

For further comparison with similar 12th-century naked torsos of Khmer Goddesses, please see W. Felten and M. Lerner, *Thai and Cambodian Sculpture from the 6th to the 14th centuries*, 1988, pl. 28, p. 215; H. Ibbitson Jessup and T. Zephir, *Sculpture of Angkor and Ancient Cambodia: Millennium of Glory*, 1997, cat. 71, p. 264; the Walters Art Museum Female Deity, possibly presenting Vishnu's consort, the Goddess Lakshmi (acc. no. 25.212 - <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/32938/female-deity/>, last accessed: 03/03/2022); and the torso offered last year at auction in Germany at the auction house Hermann Historica, 26 May 2021, lot 476.

£3000 - £5000





Lot 205

A LARGE GILT BRONZE STANDING FIGURE OF THE HISTORICAL BUDDHA, SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA SHAKYAMUNI

U-Thong C style, Ayutthaya, Thailand, South East Asia, mid-14th – mid-15th centuries

Cast as a free-standing statue, made of gilt bronze, the preferred material in early Ayutthaya production, the historical Buddha presented standing in samabhanga (lit. without bending, the body placed upright in perfect balance representing the serenity of the soul), both hands in *abhaya mudra* (the 'Fear Not' gesture), also called 'Calming the Ocean' posture, wearing his typical diaphanous monastic attire (*uttarasangha* and *samghati*) secured by a belt around the waist, the robe clinging to the body and clearly showing the curves and nipples of the Buddha's body, his neck marked with three lines, his face with a serene expression, downcast eyes with heavy eyelids under arched eyebrows, a content smile and full lips, elongated pierced earlobes acting as a reminder of his past as a prince wearing heavy golden jewellery, the hair arranged in small tight curls resembling 'snail curls' of Indian Gupta sculptures, on top of his ushnisha an eternal flame (*rasmi*), a symbol of the Buddha's spiritual radiance inspired by Sinhalese examples, mounted on a large black stand with a copper plaque at the front reading 'Buddha U-Thong period 14th century', 184cm high, 137cm high excluding the base.

Provenance: In the private collection of Jean-Pierre Yonan in his London since the 1980s - 1990s.

The impressive size, accurate details, and fineness of this statue link it to the earliest phase of Ayutthaya Buddhist sculptural production in the mid to late 14th and 15th centuries, often also referred to as U-Thong C period (Dorothy H. Fickle, *Images of the Buddha in Thailand*, 1989, p. 73).

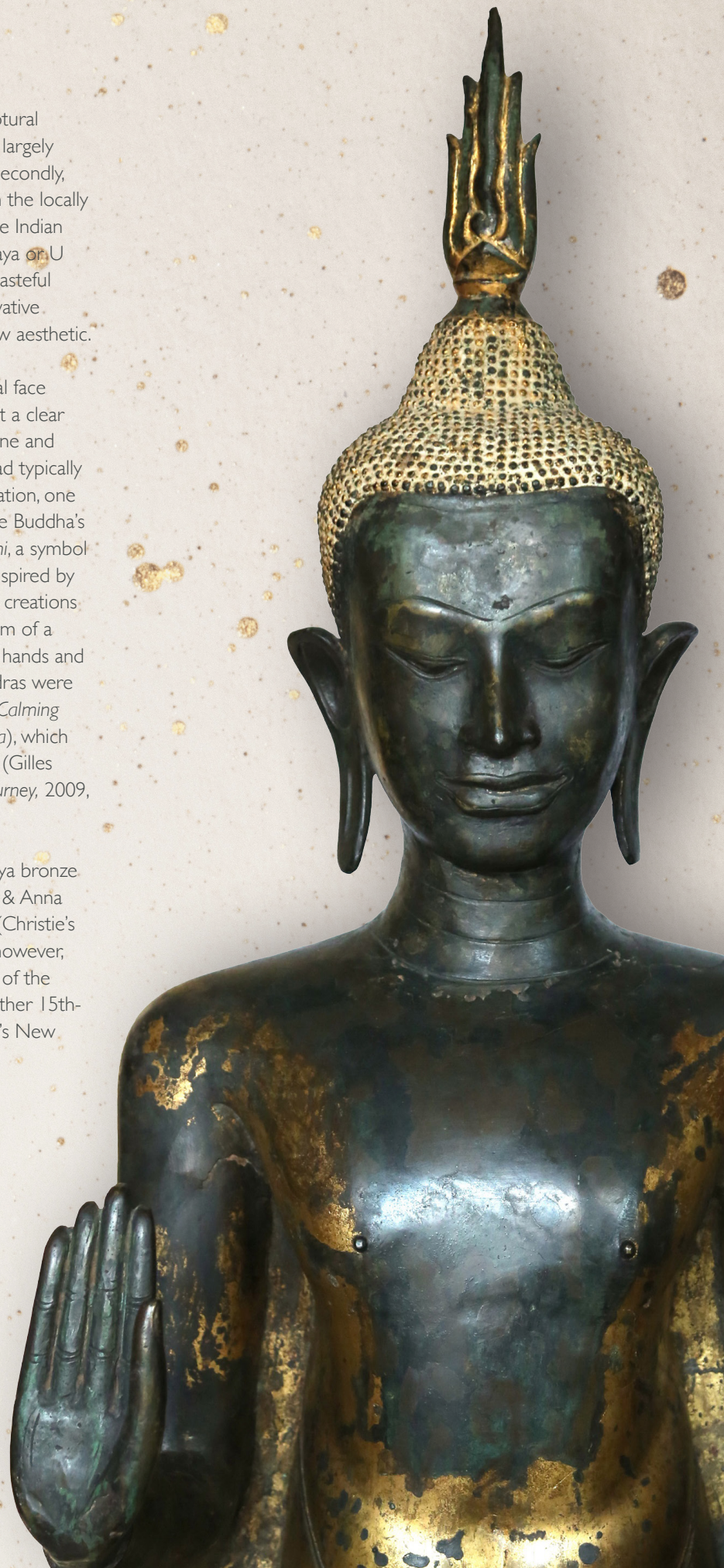
The year 1431 marks a very important victory for the Thai people over the Khmer rulers, which is celebrated as the Siege or Fall of Angkor, a seven-month-long siege on the Khmer capital of Angkor by the Kingdom of Ayutthaya. With the rise of a new capital in 1350, Ayutthaya (Central Thailand), the Thai kingdom was fully formed and ready to be the dominant power in the region until 1767 (*Ibidem*, p. 72). This shift in socio-political powers was deeply felt in the arts too, where considerable changes were introduced.

Firstly, the main materials used in previous sculptural productions such as stone and terracotta were largely replaced by bronze (either plain or often gilt). Secondly, the sources of aesthetic inspiration shifted from the locally available Javanese and Khmer productions to the Indian Pala and Sinhalese canons. Indeed, Early Ayutthaya or U Thong sculptures are often characterised by a tasteful blend of Sukhothai and Khmer styles with innovative elements, leading to the creation of a brand new aesthetic.

If we take our lot as an example, the gentle, oval face and elongated silhouette of our Buddha present a clear Sukhothai influence. The band framing the hairline and the engraved contour around the lips are instead typically featured in Khmer sculptures. In terms of innovation, one can admire the flame-like element on top of the Buddha's cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*), also called *rasmi*, a symbol of spiritual radiance which, although originally inspired by Sinhalese examples, in the Thai U Thong artistic creations it developed and transformed into a unique form of a flaming conch-shell. In this period, the Buddha's hands and fingers became much more elongated and mudras were revisited, introducing original solutions like the 'Calming the Ocean' gesture (both hands in *abhaya mudra*), which appears to have been very popular at the time (Gilles Beguin, *Buddhist Art: An Historical and Cultural Journey*, 2009, p. 186).

A similar but later and smaller standing Ayutthaya bronze Buddha figure was successfully sold in the Dani & Anna Ghigo Collection at Christie's London in 2016 (Christie's London, 12 May 2016, lot 213). Our example, however, presents much larger dimensions and the aging of the bronze suggests an earlier date, similarly to another 15th-century Ayutthaya bronze head sold at Christie's New York (21 March 2007, lot 304).

£8000 - £12000





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