

**GODS, HEROES
AND CLOWNS
PERFORMANCE
AND NARRATIVE
IN SOUTH AND
SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART**

Artwork labels

INDIAN

Rama or Lakshmana, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Karnataka, India
coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton thread

Purchased, 1975

AS9-1975

The epic *Ramayana* is a favourite subject of the shadow puppet repertoire in Karnataka. The characters include the hero Rama, his consort Sita, Hanuman the monkey general and Rama's antagonist, the demon Ravana. Many other puppets depict soldiers, monkeys, courtiers and kings who complete the cast of characters. This puppet probably depicts a scene from the *Ramayana* in which the hero Rama, or his brother Lakshmana, goes to battle accompanied by the monkey general Hanuman and a member of the monkey army.

INDIAN

Warrior, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Karnataka, India
coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton
thread

Purchased, 1975

AS6-1975

INDIAN

Warrior, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Karnataka, India
coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton
thread

Purchased, 1975

AS10-1975

INDIAN

Two warriors, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Karnataka, India
coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton
thread

Purchased, 1975

AS12-1975

INDIAN

Mounted warrior, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Karnataka, India
coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton
thread

Purchased, 1975

AS8-1975

INDIAN

Warrior, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Karnataka, India
coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton
thread

Purchased, 1975

AS11-1975

INDIAN

Soldier and prisoner, togalu gombeatta puppet

early 20th century Karnataka, India

coloured dyes and inks on parchment, bamboo, cotton thread

Purchased, 1977

AS13-1977

INDONESIAN

Aradeya, wayang kulit puppet

c. 1970 central Java, Indonesia

opaque watercolour and gold paint on parchment, horn, metal, cotton thread

Purchased, 1972

AS6-1972

INDONESIAN

Prabu Suyudana, wayang kulit puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century central Java,
Indonesia

opaque watercolour and gold paint on parchment, horn,
metal, cotton thread

Purchased, 1972

AS2-1972

Prabu Suyudana or Duryodhana is one of the main characters in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, which culminates in the conflict between the ninety-nine Kaurava brothers and their cousins, the five Pandava brothers. Prabu Suyudana is the eldest of the Kaurava brothers and, as befits his status as a powerful ruler, wears symbols of sovereignty including a *mukuta* (high crown), *praba* (back ornament) and the *bokongan* (royal *dodot* or ceremonial wrapping cloth).

INDONESIAN

Prabu Basudewa, wayang kulit puppet

c. 1970 central Java, Indonesia

opaque watercolour and gold paint on parchment, horn, metal, cotton thread

Purchased, 1972

AS5-1972

Prabu Basudewa is a king in the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and father of the Krishna and Balarama, incarnations of the Hindu god Vishnu.

INDONESIAN

Bambang Irawan, wayang kulit puppet

c. 1970 central Java, Indonesia

opaque watercolour and gold paint on parchment, horn, metal, cotton thread

Purchased, 1972

AS3-1972

Irawan is the son of Arjuna, the third Pandava brother, who is a skilled archer and the hero of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. His title *bambang* means 'refined knight'. In Javanese stories about the Pandava brothers, Irawan is portrayed as a *lijepan* character, or one that is small, refined, modest and controlled.

INDONESIAN

Raden Samba, wayang kulit puppet

c. 1970 central Java, Indonesia

opaque watercolour and gold paint on parchment, horn,
metal, cotton thread

Purchased, 1972

AS4-1972



INDONESIAN

King, possibly Sunan Gunung Jati, wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java,
Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton
(thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS17.a-c-1973

Sunan Gunung Jati was one of the nine pious leaders (*wali sanga*) who promoted Islam in Java in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and established the Sultanates of Banten and Cirebon on the Pasisir, the north coast of Java. The repertoire of *wayang cepak* includes local historical chronicles, legendary Javanese tales such as the *Panji* stories, and tales about the history of the Arab kings which reached the Indo-Malay region from Persia via India. These tales include stories of Amir Hamzah, the uncle of the prophet Muhammad.

INDONESIAN

Gatotkaca, wayang golek purwa puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century west Java, Indonesia
painted and gilt-wood, cotton, bamboo, metallic thread,
cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS51.a-b-1973

The *rakshasa*, or demon Gatotkaca, is one of the main warriors featured in the climactic battle scene of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, the battle of Kurukshetra between the armies of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Gatotkaca's mother, the giantess Hidimbi, gave him magical powers including the ability to fly which, combined with his martial prowess, contributed to the Pandava victory in the battle. He is the son of another great warrior, Bima, who features in the *Dewa Ruci* manuscript on display. Gatotkaca himself is portrayed on one of the Balinese ceremonial hangings (*ider-ider*) in the exhibition.

INDONESIAN

Clown, wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS34-1973

This clown puppet, as yet unidentified, exemplifies characteristics of the comic characters found in Indonesian puppet repertoires. These characters function as intermediaries between the heroes and the aristocrats whom they serve and the common people. They also interpret proceedings on stage for the audience, usually with many bawdy asides and references to contemporary events and personalities. Their often grotesque yet amusing appearance, with its exaggerated facial features and physiognomy, is enhanced by distinctive movements on stage and special voices adopted by the *dalang* (puppeteer) for their characters.

INDONESIAN

Semar, wayang golek purwa puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century west Java, Indonesia
painted wood, cotton, bamboo, hair, metal, cotton
(thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS36.a-c-1973

An important and highly entertaining Javanese addition to the cast of the Hindu epics portrayed in puppet plays is the group of clowns known as *panakawan*, or 'clever friend' in Javanese. Those serving the heroes of the Pandavas, the forces of 'good' in the *Mahabharata*, comprise Semar and his three sons, Cepot, Gareng and Petruk. They are characterised by their grotesque appearance and the frequent crudity of their speech and actions.

INDONESIAN

Semar, wayang golek purwa puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century west Java, Indonesia
painted wood, cotton, hair, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS58.a-c-1973

The clown Semar is an androgynous, ageless figure who provides comic relief and commentary that explains the unfolding drama on stage and connects it to contemporary events and personalities known to the audience. Although sometimes described as a servant, Semar inhabits a much more complex position, moving freely between the role of a respected and canny adviser to the gods and a buffoon who represents the voice and concerns of everyman without the usual customs and proscriptions. Semar is also considered a divine figure, an indigenous Indonesian deity and the guardian spirit or *danjang* of Java.

INDONESIAN

Lamsijan, wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java,
Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS44-1973

Lamsijan is the main comic figure in the repertoire of *wayang golek cepak*, a form of puppetry from the region between Indramayu and Tegal on the north coast of Java. He is the local equivalent of the clown Cepot, Semar's eccentric and thieving son created from his father's shadow.

INDONESIAN

Comical soldier, wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, bamboo, wool, silk, cotton, cotton (thread and string) and metallic thread

Purchased, 1973

AS20.a-c-1973

INDONESIAN

Warrior (Ponggawa), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string), metallic thread

Purchased, 1973

AS55.a-c-1973

This puppet depicts a soldier (*pongawa*) from a foreign or overseas (*sabangan*) kingdom. By the seventeenth century these kingdoms, often the realms of ogres, had become a feature of *wayang* performance narratives that developed from the original two-sided conflict of the Indonesian version of the *Mahabharata* to include a third, foreign power.

INDONESIAN

Warrior (Ponggawa), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS29.a-c-1973

The term *ponggawa* refers to a type of *wayang* character who is brave and heroic, such as a warrior. This character type is visualised with less refined features than gentle and polite puppets, and generally has a long, well-shaped nose and large eyes with red pupils. Within this character type there are many different roles and these are differentiated by apparel, facial colour and orientation, gesture and voice. The strong pink colouring and direct gaze of this puppet indicates he is a character with strong emotions which he may sometimes have difficulty controlling.

INDONESIAN

Young knight (Bambangan), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS60.a-c-1973

This young knight wears a headscarf (*bendo*) wrapped in a style that leaves the top of his head bare, revealing his finely modelled hair. The puppet is suitable for the role of Prince Suta of Cirebon in the play *Setan Kober*, in which the prince uses the magic *keris* (dagger) Setan Kober to defeat a demon.

INDONESIAN

Buta Cakil, wayang golek puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century Java, Indonesia

painted wood, cotton, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS38-1973

Buta Cakil is a character in the Javanese version of the *Mahabharata* who fights the Pandava hero Arjuna, but is eventually defeated. *Buta*, or ogre characters, take several forms and may be identified by their oversized bodies and bizarre features, particularly their fangs, large noses and bulging eyes and their vivid colour. The actions, voices and appearance of all the *wayang* puppets except for the *buta* and the *panakawan* (clowns) are largely prescribed. Clowns and ogres therefore provide the *dalang* (puppeteer) with the greatest opportunity for creativity and improvisation.

INDONESIAN

Ogre (Buta), wayang golek cepak puppet

c. 1955 north coast Java, Indonesia

painted wood, rayon, cotton, bamboo, cotton (thread and string),

Purchased, 1977

AS14.a-c-1977

Ogres appear in many narratives in the Indonesian *wayang* repertoire, including Javanese versions of Hindu epics and local histories and romances. This unidentified ogre is possibly a character from the *Panji* tale, a romantic story in which the legendary Javanese prince Panji searches for his lost bride, who meanwhile has taken male form. It is not until they confront each other in battle that they are reunited.

INDONESIAN

Chieftan or official (Patih), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS57.a-c-1973

INDONESIAN

Chieftan or official (Patih), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS39.a-c-1973

Patih is a title for a court official and could denote various ranks, from chief ministers to clerical officers. This puppet represents a minister in the *lanyap* attitude denoted by his forthright gaze and pink face which suggests that although the puppet has the delicate features and body of a refined (*alus*) character type, he has a slightly aggressive or direct personality.

INDONESIAN

Chieftan or official (Patih), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS18-1973

The flat cap with a visor worn by this puppet indicates that this particular official fulfilled clerical duties at court. It is worn over a *bendo*, a fabric head wrap worn by Sundanese aristocrats.

INDONESIAN

Noblewoman (Putren), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, rayon, cotton, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS42.a-c-1973

Noblewomen form a subgroup of refined *wayang golek* characters characterised by white, inclined faces and delicate features and bodies. They usually wear a strapless bodice and a sash over a long skirt. Many noble, female characters may be assigned to one puppet and, unless a specific character is identifiable, they are generally designated *putren* or *putri*, meaning princess or noblewoman.

INDONESIAN

Noblewoman (Putren), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS22-1973

INDONESIAN

Noblewoman (Putren), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS43.a-c-1973

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS30.a-c-1973

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, bamboo, cotton, cotton (thread and string), metallic thread

Purchased, 1973

AS59.a-c-1973

This puppet exemplifies the *kesatriya*, or noble character type of *wayang* puppet in its most genteel form, indicated by his pale skin, finely drawn features and inclined head. These qualities indicate to the audience that he is a gentle, pure personality of noble heritage who can control his emotions and is not easily influenced.

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS19-1973

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS28-1973

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS27.a-c-1973

Although designated as a *kesatriya* or noble character, this puppet's large, carved features, bulging red eyes, strong colouration and *langgak* (upturned face) suggest he is a *gagah* (muscular) type, prone to impetuous actions and outbursts of pride, passion and anger.

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS31-1973

INDONESIAN

Noble (Kesatriya), wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS37.a-c-1973

INDONESIAN

Cleric, wayang golek cepak puppet

early 20th century – mid 20th century north coast region Java, Indonesia

painted and gilt-wood, cotton, rayon, bamboo, cotton (thread and string)

Purchased, 1973

AS23.a-c-1973

INDONESIAN

Mask (Topeng) for Raden Gunung Sari

20th century central Java, Indonesia

pigments on wood, gold paint, hair, leather

Gift of Mrs Summons, 1973

AS12-1973

Raden Gunung Sari, the brother of Panji's love, Candrah Kirana, is one of the main characters in the Panji story cycle.



INDONESIAN

Mask (Topeng) for Raden Panji, Prince of Janggala Kingdom

20th century central Java, Indonesia
pigments on wood, gold paint

Gift of Mrs Summons, 1973

AS13-1973

The Javanese cycle of stories of the life of Prince Panji, legendary ruler of the east Javanese kingdom of Janggala, is one of the main subjects of *wayang golek cepak* puppet performances and *topeng* masked dance-dramas. The core story of the Panji cycle revolves around the disappearance of Panji's betrothed on the eve of their wedding, and the hero's ensuing search. In *topeng* the masks are kept in place by a short leather strap which the performer holds between his or her teeth. Performers in full masks portray their characters through movement, while spoken parts are provided by narrators in half-masks.



INDONESIAN

Figure of a gambuh dancer portraying a king

1930s Bali, Indonesia

wood

Purchased, 1963

580-D5

Gambuh is a form of Balinese dance-drama believed to have developed in the fourteenth or fifteenth century at the Hindu court of the Majapahit kingdom of Java. It combines dance, drama, language and music, and has influenced other Indonesian theatre forms, including *topeng* (masked) dance. It was patronised by the Balinese royal courts and survives today in abbreviated and adapted forms. Traditional *gambuh* performances were held in special *gambuh* court pavilions, *balai pegambuhan*, and drew on the romantic narrative of the *Malat* – poetic stories about the legendary eleventh-century Javanese prince Panji. Puppets and masks depicting characters from this narrative are also on display.

INDONESIAN

Ceremonial hanging for a temple or pavilion (*Ider-ider*) depicting *Ramayana*

mid 20th century, Kamasan, Bali, Indonesia
pigment on cotton

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Asian Art, 2014

2014.247

This *ider-ider* depicts characters from the *Ramayana*, the great Hindu story of the adventures of Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, his wife Sita and their ally and friend the monkey Hanuman as they battle the demon Ravana and his armies. Rama, his brother Lakshmana, Hanuman and other monkey warriors and Ravana are shown in the climactic battle scene in which the fate of Rama and Ravana is decided. Artists from Kamasan, one of the most important centres of Balinese classical painting, were employed by many of the Balinese royal courts that existed until the early twentieth century.



INDONESIAN

Ceremonial hanging for a temple or pavilion (Ider-ider)

20th century Bali, Indonesia
cotton, embroidery

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2011

2011.97

This *ider-ider* depicts several characters from the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, including Arjuna, one of the five Pandava brothers and Krishna's companion; Supraba, one of Arjuna's wives; Gatotkaca, son of the Pandava brother Bima; and Togog, one of the clown servants (*panakawan*) incorporated into the Indonesian version of the narrative. In the figure of a Dutch or Japanese soldier the artist has also incorporated an element of recent history. The cloth includes the word *Beratojudo*, which may be a misspelling of *Baratayuda*, the Indonesian title of the Kurukshetra War, the climactic final scene of the *Mahabharata*.



INDONESIAN

Ceremonial hanging for a temple or pavilion (*Ider-ider*) depicting Ramayana

20th century Bali, Indonesia
cotton, embroidery

Purchased, NGV Asian Art Acquisition Fund, 2011

2011.9

Embroidered *ider-ider* form part of the repertoire of Balinese embroidered cloths produced at Negara and known as *kain sulaman*. There are six types of embroidered narrative *kain sulaman*, each with equivalent Balinese cloth painting forms. Both the embroidered and painted versions are created for use in ceremonies performed in temples or pavilions and associated with Balinese Hindu religion or with life-cycle rituals. They present the storylines, scenes and characters of the principal narratives of Bali; these being Hindu and Javanese epics (in their Balinese forms), folktales and popular stories.



INDIAN

Storyteller's cloth (Par or Phad)

mid 20th century Rajasthan, India

opaque watercolour and ink on cotton

Purchased, 2005

2005.249

This *phad* (storyteller's cloth) depicts the legend of Pabuji, a deified Rajasthan folk hero who may have lived in the fourteenth century. The cloth is considered a dwelling of the god and forms a backdrop for the *bhopa* (storyteller, priest) and his wife (*bhopi*) who narrate and sing the legend of Pabuji to a village audience over a single night. Both the performance and audience's engagement are a form of worship. On the cloth, narrative scenes are arranged around the large central figure of the Pabuji, their relative proximity and size determined by their spiritual significance and geographic location in relation to the hero's village, rather than chronological order.



Niranjan MAHARANA

Indian 1971–

Patachitra depicting scenes from the life of Krishna

c. 2004 Chandanpur, Puri district, Orissa, India
tamarind seed gum, chalk, conch shell, elephant apple gum, natural pigments on cotton

Purchased NGV Foundation, 2007

2007.395

Patachitra (painted cloths) are produced for display in temples and in public spaces during religious festivals devoted to Krishna, such as Krishna's birthday. More than sixty incidents from the life of Krishna are depicted in this painting, including his birth, childhood pranks, flirtations with the *gopis* (female cowherders), his love for Radha, the destruction of demons and the flight from Gokul to Vrindavan. The artist's family has worked for several generations as painters associated with the Sri Jagganath temple in Puri, a focus for Krishna worship in eastern India.

Taa SAENGLAO

Thai/Laotian c. 1903–07 – c. 1980–82

Buddhist narrative scroll depicting the Vessantara Jataka (Pha yao Phra Wet)

1958 Wang Tau village, Capital (Muang) District, Khon Kaen Province, Thailand
watercolour and ink on cotton

Purchased, NGV Supporters of Asian Art, 2013

2013.933

The scroll depicts the complete *Vessantara Jataka*, the story of the penultimate incarnation of the historic Buddha Shakyamuni (563–483 BC) as Prince Vessantara, known as Phra Wetsandon in northeast Thailand and Laos. The narrative illustrates the virtue of charity and is one of the most frequently depicted subjects in Southeast Asian Buddhist art, particularly in Thailand and Laos. This type of visually complex scroll has narrative, spiritual, social and performative aspects and plays an integral role in the annual Bun Phra Wet ceremony held in northeast Thailand and Laos to celebrate the anniversary of Prince Vessantara's return to his kingdom.



KASHMIRI

Bhagavad Gita

mid 19th century Kashmir

ink, opaque watercolour and gold paint on paper, cotton and cardboard cover, stitched binding

Purchased, 1965

1515-5

Bhagavad Gita (the *Lord's Song*, that is, *Krishna's Song*) is part of *Mahabharata* (*The Great Tale of the Bharata Dynasty*), an Indian epic which has been dated between the fourth century BC and the fourth century CE. It describes the battle of Kurukshetra, including the scene before battle in which Krishna counsels Arjuna. The illustration conforms to the following text from the *Bhagavad Gita*: 'Then conches, cymbals, drums, tabors and kettledrums burst into sudden sound; tumultuous was the din. Then too did (Krsna), Madhu's son and Pandu's [third-] born (Arjuna), standing erect on their great chariot yoked to white steeds, their godly conches loudly blow'.

INDONESIAN

Illustrated manuscript of Serat Dewa Ruci

1886 Java, Indonesia

book: watercolour, gouache, ink and gold paint on paper,
160 pages,
cardboard and leather cover, stitched binding

Presented by the Friends of the Gallery Library in memory of Tina Wentcher, 1982 AS29-1982

This album was probably produced at the palace (*kraton*) of the sultanate of Yogyakarta in central Java. It tells the story of Werkudara, otherwise known as Bima, from the Javanese version of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. The story of Dewa Ruci (*Serat Dewa Ruci*) describes how Bima sets out to find the elixir of life, but instead discovers his true nature in the form of Dewa Ruci, a tiny, wise being. The story dates from the sixteenth century, during a period of transition from Hinduism to Islam in Java when Islamic teachers incorporated Sufic concepts into familiar Hindu narratives, and reveals the influence of Islamic mysticism on Javanese Hinduism.

Jai RAM

Indian active 1730s

**Maharana Jagat Singh II attending
the invocation before a Raslila
performance**

1736 Udaipur, Rajasthan, India opaque watercolour and
gold paint on paper

Felton Bequest, 1980

AS129-1980

In this painting the Maharana and his male relatives, including the diminutive figure of his son Pratap Singh, appear in a palace courtyard at night under a full moon. The occasion is the preliminary invocation and offering of an *arati* lamp before a dance-drama held to celebrate Lord Krishna, portrayed by a dancer shown at the top of the painting. Props for the performance include a model of Mount Govardhan and a backdrop painted with a stormy sky. Both are associated with the story in which Krishna lifts the mountain to shelter cowherders from a storm unleashed by the god Indra.

Jai RAM (attributed to)

Indian active 1730s

Maharana Jagat Singh II attending a Raslila performance

1736 Udaipur, Rajasthan, India opaque watercolour and gold paint on paper

Felton Bequest, 1980

AS130-1980

This painting and *Maharana Jagat Singh II attending the invocation before a Raslila performance* belong to a set of at least ten paintings dated by inscription to the month of Kartik 1736. Kartik is the eighth month of the lunar Hindu calendar and corresponds to the months of October and November. The dances depict Raslila dance-dramas performed before Maharana Jagat Singh II at the Udaipur palace, which enact episodes from the Krishna narrative with additional scenes of Brahma, Shiva and Ganesha. A dancer playing the elephant-headed god Ganesha is shown three times to portray the dynamic of the performance.

SVAY Sareth

Cambodian 1972–

The Vessantara Jataka

2015 Siem Reap, Cambodia

cotton, cotton embroidery thread, kapok, rattan, metal wire

Vivien Knowles Fund for Asian Art, 2015

Svay Sareth lives and works in Siem Reap, Cambodia. This work explores ideas of power, corruption and futility through the lens of the revered Theravada Buddhist canon, in particular the popular Vessantara story which extolls the virtue of perfect charity. By depicting a scene at the beginning of a series of 'selfless' acts by Vessantara, in which he gives away not only his worldly goods but also his wife and children, Svay questions the acceptance, continuity and effect of such stories and ideologies of power, royalty, war, family, charity and ownership, and condemns a repeating past.

