ASIA SOCIETY MUSEUM TO PRESENT FIRST EXHIBITION IN THE WEST FOCUSED ON LOANS FROM COLLECTIONS IN MYANMAR

Buddhist Art of Myanmar on view in New York February 10 through May 10, 2015

Asia Society Museum presents a landmark exhibition of spectacular works of art from collections in Myanmar and the United States. *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* comprises approximately 70 works from the fifth through the early twentieth century and includes stone, bronze, and lacquered wood sculptures as well as textiles, paintings, and ritual implements. The majority of works in the exhibition on loan from Myanmar have never been seen in the West.

On view in New York from February 10 through May 10, 2015, the exhibition showcases Buddhist objects created for temples, monasteries, and personal devotion, presented in their historical and ritual contexts. Exhibition artworks highlight the long and continuous presence of Buddhism in Myanmar since the first millennium, as well as the unique combination of style, technique, and religious deities that appeared in the arts of Buddhist Myanmar.

*Buddhist Art of Myanmar* includes loans from the National Museums in Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw, the Bagan Archaeological Museum, Sri Ksetra Archaeological Museum, and the Kaba Aye Buddhist Art Museum, as well as works from public and private collections in the United States.

The exhibition is organized by guest curators Sylvia Fraser-Lu and Donald M. Stadtner in conjunction with Adriana Proser, Asia Society’s John H. Foster Senior Curator for Traditional Asian Art.

A fully illustrated catalogue, copublished by Asia Society and Yale University Press, accompanies the exhibition and features new photography of the loans from Myanmar. The book is the first publication to critically examine works of art from collections in Myanmar with contributions by art historians, historians, and religious studies specialists. It includes scholarly essays and an extensive bibliography. It also has a glossary of Myanmar, Pali, and Sanskrit terms; geographical, historical, and religious names and places; and mythical figures.
Exhibition organization

*Buddhist Art of Myanmar* is organized into three sections—*Images of the Buddha, Lives of the Buddha,* and *Devotion and Ritual*—which showcase the multiplicity of styles throughout the country, in part a reflection of the localization of religious practice. The objects bring into relief such issues as state support of Buddhism, the effects of trade and international relations, and the role of local myths and ethnicity, all of which have inextricably linked Buddhism and Myanmar for more than two thousand years.

Buddhism has been present in Myanmar since the third century BCE. *Buddhist Art of Myanmar* features objects from the eras when Theravada Buddhism—the predominant religion of continental Southeast Asia for many centuries—was rooted in Myanmar history. These include the Pyu period, an era of significant overland trade with the Indian subcontinent and China; the Bagan period (849–1287), a time of strong Indian Pala-period Buddhist influence that was notable for stunning stone and bronze sculptures; the Ava period (1287–1782) from which relatively little Buddhist material survives; and the Konbaung Dynasty (1752–1885), when Myanmar’s rulers extended their domain into parts of Laos and Thailand (Siam) and a period from which resplendent gilt and inlaid lacquer Buddhist sculpture survives.

A highlight of the exhibition is a large twelfth-century sandstone panel depicting the death of the Buddha and which was until very recently in its original temple niche at the Kubyauknge Temple.

![Buddha Severing His Hair. Pagan period, 11th–13th century. Sandstone with traces of pigment. 31 x 18 x 9 in. (78.7 x 45.7 x 22.9 cm). Bagan Archaeological Museum. Photo: Sean Dungan.](image)

![Parinibbana. Kubyauknge Temple, Myinkaba village. Pagan period, ca. 1198. Sandstone with pigment. 35.5 x 51 x 13 in. (90.2 x 129.5 x 33 cm.). Bagan Archaeological Museum.](image)
**Exhibition support**

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**Related programming**

Asia Society has organized a series of public programs to coincide with the exhibition, including talks on the history of Buddhism in Myanmar, as well as performances and other cultural programming. These include two, rare performances of *Zat Pwe*—a Myanmar tradition that combines elements of dance, music, comedy, and drama; a retrospective of films made by director Midi Z., who was born and raised in Myanmar and is currently based in Taiwan, exploring the lives of the Chinese community and other displaced people in Myanmar. Panel discussions on a range of topics—such as the state of civil society, government and economic reform, and the status of minority populations are planned. More information about public programming is available at AsiaSociety.org/nyc.

**About Asia Society Museum**

The Asia Society Museum presents a wide range of traditional and contemporary exhibitions of Asian and Asian American art, taking new approaches to familiar masterpieces and introducing under-recognized arts and artists. The Asia Society Museum Collection comprises a traditional art collection, composed of the initial bequests of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, and a contemporary art collection focused on new media.

Founded in 1956, Asia Society is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational institution headquartered in New York with new state-of-the-art cultural centers and gallery spaces in Hong Kong and Houston, and offices in Los Angeles, Manila, Mumbai, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, Sydney, and Washington, D.C.
Asia Society Museum is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 A.M. – 6:00 P.M. and Friday from 11:00 A.M. – 9:00 P.M. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is $12, seniors $10, students $7, and admission is free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00 P.M. – 9:00 P.M. The Museum is closed Fridays after 6:00 P.M. from July 1 through Labor Day. AsiaSociety.org/museum

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