

Women in South Asian Art
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[Animated ROM logo appears with sound sting]

[Panning view of a female sculpture of Yogini goddess on display in the Sir Christopher Ondaatje South Asian Gallery] Deepali Dewan: Images of women are pervasive in South Asian art. You find them on old paintings, you find them on the sides of temples. *[Still image of sculptured relief displaying female goddess]* Some of the earliest are from the Indus Valley civilization which dates back to 3500 B.C.E. *[Still image of terracotta relief of South Asian goddess]* and they tend to be small fertility goddesses *[Still image of a small terracotta fertility goddess]* that fit into ones hand *[Deepali speaking in the Ondaatje South Asian gallery]* um...made of terracotta, and having the sorts of decoration that one finds later in goddess figurines...um...those ones moved onto images of *Yakshis*... *[Still image of a small terracotta figurine depicting a female figure]*...and *Yakshis* are nature divinities, that came about, in about the 3rd century BC and ah those get used um as also fertility goddesses *[Still image of a small metal sculpture of a female figure holding a tree branch]* and they tend to have a pose where the feet are crossed and the *Yakshi* raises her arms and grasps the branches of a tree over-head of her *[Deepali speaking in the Ondaatje South Asian Gallery]* and the story goes is that when the *Yakshi* grabs the branches of the tree it bursts into bloom. So it's very symbolic of her sort of procreative aspects.

These sorts of symbolisms get adopted into later depictions of goddesses, particularly from the Hindu and Jain religions. So for example, the sculpture here, directly right beside me, is an image of a *Yogini*. *[Panning view of a figure of Yogini goddess on display in the Ondaatje South Asian Gallery]* She dates to the tenth century, but she has the aspects of both the earlier *Yakshi* that are procreative as well as the aspects of destructive qualities, *[Deepali in the Ondaatje South Asian Gallery]* and this sort of symbolizes the Hindu concept that both life and death are part of a cycle. So for example, she has the ample figure and she holds the tools of a craftsman that symbolize her creative aspects, yet the destructive side is shown through her fangs, the skull that's in her headdress, her hair that goes out in all directions, and she holds a skull cup. And this idea of having both the creative and the destructive in one image reflects the idea of life

and death as part of one cycle and the Hindu concept of duality being unified in one.

[Panning contemporary sculpture of a large blue woman] Representations of women continue into contemporary art as well in South Asia. *[Deepali standing beside the contemporary sculpture in the Ondaatje South Asian Gallery]* This sculpture was done by a contemporary artist named Navjot, she lives in western India and it represents the iconic female. Um, she's slightly over large...uh...life size, um, she has a very ample figure just like the earlier goddess figurines that we saw. Um, as well she's in the seated posture that resembles giving birth. Yet she's painted this brilliant blue which refers back to how goddess...gods, gods and goddesses get coloured in South Asia...particularly the gods Krishna and Vishnu, and so she has that kind of divine quality.

[Camera zooms in to hands of sculpture] Her hands are posed in very symbolic gestures, but unlike the *mudras*, or hand gestures that we see in earlier art these ones the artist herself has made up. So one hand is posed as if receiving information and the other hand is posed as if giving it away. So this is really about the transmission of knowledge, about oral traditions, about the passing of information from one generation to another.

Her head resembles um some of the groups of indigenous people that the artist often works with in tribal communities. Um, this strip of metal behind the head, um is a reference to a particular region called Baster which often does metal sculpture, but the entire figure is carved of teak wood and then covered with this brilliant blue paint ... and the figure then sits on what is an old fashion bottle rack...*[Camera pans to bottle rack the sculpture sits on]* And this piece, this stool, um refers to one of the ah most famous pieces by the iconic master of western modernism, Marcel Duchamp... and he was an artist that worked with industrial objects and called them art.

And so this whole piece is a wonderful way, using the representation of the woman as a way to question what is high art and what is low art, what is hand-crafted versus industrial, what is traditional versus modern and in many ways brings together this dialogue between east and west *[close shot of the blue face of the sculpture]*.

[Podcast ends with animated ROM logo and sound sting]