

MEDIA RELEASE
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National Gallery of Australia returns two sculptures to India

The NGA is to voluntarily return two sculptures to the Government of India following the discovery of new evidence about their provenance and removal from India.

The *Goddess Pratyangira* (Tamil Nadu, India, 12th Century) and *Worshippers of the Buddha* (Andhra Pradesh, India, 3rd Century) antiquities were purchased by the NGA in 2005 from New York dealership 'Art of the Past'. The dealership owner Mr Subhash Kapoor was arrested in 2011 and is awaiting trial in India for his alleged involvement in the illicit art trade, with further charges pending in the USA.

In February this year, the NGA published an independent review of the Asian Art Provenance Research Project conducted by the former High Court Justice, Susan Crennan, which confirmed that 11 works purchased from Mr Kapoor have 'highly problematic' provenance. The NGA has been investigating these works as part of its Asian Art Provenance Research Project established in December 2014. New information about the origins of the sculptures formed the basis of the NGA Council's decision to deaccession both works.

Last year, the NGA research team examined new photographic evidence from the French Institute of Pondicherry in India that indicated *Goddess Pratyangira* (purchased for USD 247,500 / AUD 328,244) was in India in 1974. This contradicts the dealer-supplied provenance, suggesting the NGA was supplied with false documentation and it was likely to have been illegally exported from India. It is believed that the work has now been reported missing to the Idol Wing of the Tamil Nadu Police.

In relation to *Worshippers of the Buddha* (purchased for USD 595,000/AUD 790,000), the NGA has been provided with and has verified new photographic evidence that indicates the sculpture was in India as late as the 1990s. This also contradicts provenance documentation supplied by the dealer. The work has also been linked in media reports to the Indian art dealer Deena Dayalan, who was recently arrested in India in relation to the illicit art trade. 'This new evidence means the NGA cannot legally or ethically retain these works, and returning them to India is unquestionably the right thing to do,' said Gerard Vaughan, NGA Director. 'We have been working closely with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Indian High Commissioner in Australia to find the best outcome.'

Australia is signatory to and respects the UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* 1970 which is internationally recognised as the legal standard in these matters.

'We welcome the return of these sculptures and commend the National Gallery of Australia for its approach to dealing with this complex and difficult issue,' said His Excellency, Mr Navdeep Suri, Indian High Commissioner to Australia.

It has not yet been confirmed when the sculptures will return to India and they have not been on display since August 2015.

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