



*January*

**Seated Gaṇeśa**

**Schist. Ht. 102.5 cms**

**India. Orissa. c. 13th century A.D.**

Gaṇeśa is shown seated in *lalitāsana* with his consort on his lap. He is shown with five heads, *pañcamukha*, and ten hands.

In his trunk, Gaṇeśa holds an upturned water-pot, while his consort grasps a lotus stalk bearing a large bloom. Beneath the throne is an opulent floral spray flanked by small figures of devotees, an elephant and the vehicle of Gaṇeśa, a rat. Gaṇeśa is best known for his fidelity and celibacy, qualities which allow him proximity to Pāravati and other goddesses as an attendant. In this

extraordinary sculpture, Gaṇeśa has appropriated some of the key emblems of the great gods: the trident of Siva and the discus and club of Viṣṇu. The image is uniquely five-headed, a form commonly associated with Siva and indicative of omniscience.



*February*

**Head of Amenophis III**

**Brown quartzite. Ht. 131 cms.**

**Upper Egypt. Thebes. Reign of Amenophis III, 18th Dynasty. c.1390 - 1352 B.C.**

The ancient Egyptians believed that a statue acted as a dwelling for the non-physical element of the individual represented, allowing the *ka* (spirit) resident within the statue to receive offerings. The actual image was usually strongly idealized and examples of true portraiture are rare.

Amenophis III reigned at the height of Egypt's prosperity. He is depicted wearing the red crown of Lower Egypt. The sculptors carefully exploited the variations in the

colour of the stone, carving and polishing the surface selectively to emphasize and contrast different areas of the face.

*March*

**Headdress**

**Gold, carnelian and lapis lazuli.**

**Length 19.2 cms.**

**Southern Iraq. From the Royal Tombs of Ur. c. 2600 B.C.**

The Sumerians formed the first great Mesopotamian civilization. The excavations at Ur provide impressive evidence of their elaborate ceremonies and their links with other regions. The gold leaves of this headdress must have been made with imported metal.

Ancient texts identify one of their sources of gold as Meluhha, usually identified with the Indus valley region and there are several possible sources of the carnelian, most notably Gujarat, in India, while the lapis lazuli probably originated in northeast Afghanistan.



*April*

**Red-figured amphora**

**Ceramic. Ht. 63 cms.**

**Greek. Found at Vulci, Italy. Made in Athens; attributed to the Euergides Painter. 525 - 500 B.C.**

On a red-figured vase, the figures are reserved in the red clay against a black slipped background, with inner details painted in black or brown with a brush, which allowed a great fluidity of line.

One side of the vase shows Dionysos (the wine-god) in the centre; he is holding a vine and drinking cup. He is accompanied by

a satyr, Briachos, and a maenad named Erophylis, who holds an ivy-caped fennel rod and a snake. The other side shows a hoplite warrior, his horse, and a man named Serague wearing Scythian dress.



*May*

**Portrait Bust of a Woman**

**Marble. Ht. 43 cms.**

**Roman. A.D. 80-96.**

This beautiful portrait depicts a woman, with a simple dress and an elaborate hairstyle typical of the last years of the first century A.D. Her hair is piled up at the front into a series of snail-shell curls, drawn back over her head in several braided strands secured in a coil of braids at the back.

A few wispy hairs escape this formal and elegant arrangement to lie on the woman's neck. The dark shadows, caused by the

drilling of the curls at the front, contrast with the sensitively carved smooth skin and sharp facial features. Portraits of the Roman period were intended to represent the individual as he or she actually appeared, in contrast to the idealizing tendencies of the Greek tradition.



*June*

**Dish**

**Silver, chased. Diameter 18.8 cms.**

**Romano-British. Found at Mildenhall, Suffolk, England, U.K. 4th century A.D.**

This small decorated dish belongs to a large hoard of late-Roman silver vessels, hidden for safe-keeping at a time of trouble during the fourth century A.D. It was unearthed in the 1940s.

The silver tableware used by wealthy people in the Roman world was frequently very richly ornamented. Religious and mythological themes, especially related to the cult of Bacchus the god of wine, were typical subjects for decoration. The rich silverware found in this hoard is decorated with classical themes. There are also some references to Christianity.



*July*

**Head Reliquary of Saint Eustace**

**Hammered silver-gilt plaques, pinned to a wooden core; crown and base with plaques of gem-set filigree with granulations. Ht. 34 cms. Central Europe.**

**Basel, Switzerland. c. A.D. 1200.**

From at least the ninth century onwards, containers for the holy relics often assumed an idealized form of the relic within. In this head were housed fragments of the skull of Saint Eustace, a Roman military saint.

Around the base, the twelve nimbed figures standing within arcading are presumably the twelve Apostles. The casket is first mentioned in 1477 in the Basel Cathedral records.



*August*

**A Seated Buddha, perhaps Maitreya**

**Gilt bronze cast. Ht. 28 cms.**

**Nepal. 10th century A.D.**

Unusually, this magnificent bronze sculpture depicts a Buddha image with the feet pendant. This posture is sometimes taken to be a sign of Maitreya, the next Buddha in the line of which the historical Buddha, Gautama, was the most recent.

The Buddha usually wears a monastic robe, as here, a feature which often clearly reveals the body beneath it. This is a stylistic feature which, in India, reached back at least to the Gupta period. The Kathmandu Valley is renowned, not only for its high quality of metal-workmanship, but also for the extent to which Indian styles continued long after

they had fallen out of fashion in the lowlands. The Gupta inheritance of this image, although many centuries later, is still apparent.





September

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**The Bodhisattva Guanyin**  
Porcelain, moulded and carved. Ht. 91 cms.  
China. From the Dehua kilns, Fujian province,  
South China. Qing Dynasty. 18th century A.D.

Guanyin is depicted here in typical form, wearing long, flowing robes with beaded jewellery and holding a flask in her right hand. She stands on clouds, supported by crests of waves, a reference to her home in the Southern Ocean.

Guanyin is a sinocized, female version of the Indian male Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara. As the Chinese Goddess of Mercy, Guanyin is all-compassionate. She is revered as she has the power to save

souls, and can also bestow fertility on those who esteem her. This domestic figure is one of the largest extant porcelain images of Guanyin made at the Dehua kilns, in southern China.



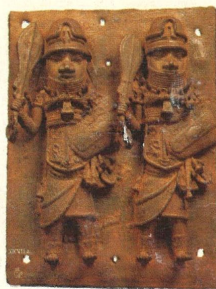
October

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**Samurai Armour**  
Lacquered iron platelets. Overall Ht. 1.25 m.  
Japan. Signed (cuirass) Unkai Mitsunao.  
Cuirass and sleeves, Momoyama  
period, late 16th century A.D. Helmet,  
17th century A.D. Other parts, 18th - 19th  
century A.D.

The basic form of the armour of the samurai changed little from the Heian period (A.D. 749-1185) until the end of the feudal era in A.D. 1867. In this example rows of lacquered iron platelets are linked together with silk braid to allow ease of movement. The small size of the plates indicate that armour was now required to protect against gun-shot rather than arrows.

Armour remained in use throughout the peaceful Edo period (A.D. 1604 - 1867) for ceremonial use and though made in the ancient style, tended to be lighter for the sake of comfort as well as appearance.



November

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**Royal plaques**  
Brass. Ht. 48.5-52.5 cms.  
Nigeria. Benin, Edo people.  
16th century A.D.

Brass was intimately associated with kingship in the Benin empire. Plaques cast by the lost-wax process, were used to cover the wooded beams that supported the roof in the royal palace.

This building was the centre of the religious activities that controlled the well-being of the entire empire. The plaques show scenes of court life and ritual which involve rulers, warriors and officials. Naked figures are royal pages, their nudity contrasting with the splendid cloth and coral-bead costumes of royalty.

December

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**Engraved plaque**  
Jade. Ht. 14 cms.  
Mayan, Central America. Found at  
Teotihuacan, Mexico. A.D. 600 - 800.

This exquisite plaque is one of the finest examples of Maya jade carving. The suspension holes drilled near the top of the plaque indicate that it was worn as a personal ornament, possibly due to its size, as a separate pectoral pendant.

The design represents a Maya ruler in full ceremonial regalia sitting cross-legged on a throne. His head is shown in profile, while his body faces to the front. He wears an elaborate plumed headdress incorporating

part of the head of a monstrous animal. He is richly decorated with personal ornaments, many of which would have been made of jade. These include ear flares, a bar pectoral, wristlets, anklets and an impressive belt with a mask. On his left arm he wears a war shield bearing the image of the Jaguar God of the Underworld. The king inclines slightly to the right towards an attendant. A scroll issues from his mouth indicating either speech or song.

The historic collections of The British Museum displayed in **The Enduring Image** are drawn from eight of the Museum's ten departments. The geographical boundaries of these departments are indicated on the map below. The geographical origins of the main monthly visuals, numbered 1-12 in the Plate Descriptions are also located on the map.

