

AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR LANKAN STUDIES

WORKSHOP ON
DEVELOPING PERSPECTIVES ON THE ART HISTORIES
OF SRI LANKA

ABSTRACTS & BIOS

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interaction between these two regions during the first half of the first millennium of the Common Era. Not only do specific sculptures reveal significant artistic exchange between these two regions, but a broader view of the material and textual evidence also suggests that the Buddhist communities of Andhra and Sri Lanka—both of which were located far from the main sites associated with the life of the Buddha—employed interrelated strategies to construct legitimate but distinctly local Buddhist homelands.

Pia Brancaccio, Drexel University

Monumentality in Buddhist Sculpture

By the eighth century colossal images carved in the living rock punctuated the Buddhist landscape from Central Asia to China, to Western India and Sri Lanka. The diffusion of monumental rock cut images constitutes a significant chapter in the art historical tradition of Sri Lanka where a few impressive icons still stand today. Moving away from discussions dealing with chronologies and iconographies of specific images, the goal of this presentation is to characterize the phenomenon of monumentality in the rock-cut sculpture Sri Lanka, and to suggest an alternative framework of analysis that explores issues associated with patronage, placement and function of images in the landscape, and long distance trade. I hope to show that monumentality is interwoven with ideas of kingship, and with the formation of a Buddhist collective memory.

P. Ahilan, University of Jaffna

Political Boundaries or Cultural Zones? Decontextualizing the Iconography of Post Polonnaruwa Buddha images

In a way one could argue that the search for the unique culture specific image that belongs exclusively to Sinhala Buddhism is the major pre occupation of most of the art historical narrations in Sri Lanka. This was mainly cultivated by the racial polarity model of history writing operated by the British during the Colonial era for implementing the colonial political policy of 'divide and rule'. This was placed 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' in Sri Lanka as a substitute for 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian'. This is also strongly connected with religious mythology of 'Sri Lankan island as a chosen place for only the Buddhists (Singhalese)' by Buddha; which made the Tamils as aliens and the conquerors of Buddhist country through out the ages in the minds of Singhalese in deeper level. This background creates an anti Tamil sentiment through out the history and also encompasses even the South India and plays a crucial role of erasing or omitting or marginalizing the South Indian factor in the Sri Lankan History.

This paper explores the possibility of exclusiveness in Sri Lankan Art history by interrogating the iconographical features of the post Polonnaruwa period in Sri Lanka, in comparison to the Buddha images of Nagapattinam in Tamil Nadu. By resituating these images in their cultural condition and their art world connected to migration and patronage and argues for the necessity of understanding South India and Sri Lanka as one

cultural zone and the Palk Strait as a mode of connection rather than the separation as a political border in Art history.

Divya Kumar-Dumas, University of Pennsylvania

Reception to Sigiriya Paintings: Present and Past

The Sigiriya painted figures have been studied as works of fine art for more than a century. Scholars have offered various interpretations for the images in order to better identify the painted figures as court ladies, apsaras, personifications of clouds and lighting, bodhisattvas, to name a few. Yet, study of these images has not been explicit about how we are looking at them. Do we access these images in books, framed museum reproductions, or *in situ* rock paintings? I would argue that our framing of the images affects our understanding of the meanings they encode. I consider the 'period eye' perspective provided to us by early visitor response poetry. I also reconstruct the visual experience of the paintings in their architectural context. Within these frames, the Sigiriya figures seem to act more as a 'hook' for receptive self-reflection on the act of seeing rather than as objects with intrinsic meaning. Similar to contemporary installation art in which the viewer's perception of the work of art is the subject of the work, I would like to suggest the possibility of visual deixis at work in the painting program at Sigiriya.

Janice Leoshko, University of Texas at Austin

Bodh Gaya and Sri Lanka

In the 19th century Alexander Cunningham, the first director of the Archaeological Survey of India, was greatly pleased when Chinese inscriptions were actually discovered at Bodh Gaya. It seemed to support his choice to privilege Chinese pilgrim texts in his identification and explanation of what he found at many long abandoned Indian Buddhist sites. Cunningham's views and those who still adhere to them, however, have also constrained an understanding India's Buddhist past. One consequence is that the remarkably complex character of the extant remains at Bodh Gaya is still unrecognized. This paper largely addresses only one aspect of this issue, how can these remains enrich our understanding of its ties with Sri Lanka during the last centuries of significant Buddhist practice in eastern India (c. 6th through 12th centuries). It is through a wide-ranging but careful consideration of inscriptions and material remains at Bodh Gaya with those in Sri Lanka that allow us to define Bodh Gaya's significance and the influences upon its character in ways that include the dynamics of interaction rather than using models that emphasize distinct local or uni-directional flows.