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MEDIA RELEASE

The Asian Civilisations Museum Launches Catalogue Of Region's Best Collection of South Asian Art And Culture

The event also marks the launch of the President's South Asia Acquisition Fund for the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore

[25 May 2007, SINGAPORE] In less than 15 years, a humble handful of objects has grown into the region's best collection of South Asian art and heritage material. Today, the South Asia collection of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) stands at over 300 historic artefacts, including beautiful Buddhist and Jain sculptures, bronzes, paintings, jewellery and manuscripts. It is this collection that is captured and fully documented in the museum's latest publication ***The Divine Within: Art & Living Culture of India & South Asia***. The catalogue will be launched today at 7.00pm by Guest-Of-Honour President S R Nathan at the Istana.

The event will also mark the launch of the President's South Asia Acquisition Fund, a fund set up to help the museum acquire key artefacts for its South Asia collection. To date, a total of S\$270,000 worth of cash donations and pledges has been secured from individuals and organisations. The ACM targets to raise \$500,000 each year for the next three years, with the proceeds being invested in high quality artefacts representing all countries in the sub-continent.

"It is only with the support of government grants and donations from committed supporters that we have been able to grow our collection at such a rate. That support has allowed us to continue to build on our collection and in the past 12 months, more than 50 artefacts have been added to our South Asia collection," said Dr. Kenson Kwok, Director of the Asian Civilisations Museum.



While broadly covering regions and periods of South Asian history, one of the collection's focuses is south India due to the region's historical and cultural links with Singapore. In line with the museum's aim to connect multi-ethnic Singaporeans to their cultural roots, the collection presents the cultural legacy of South Asians in Singapore, a relatively small, ethnically diverse but influential group.

This diversity is reflected in artefacts ranging from impressive stone sculptures and massive architectural fragments to temple bronzes and ritual necklaces from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. Artefacts such as a magnificent sandstone gateway from Uttar Pradesh and ritual paintings from Gujarat and Rajasthan in North India complete the picture of the sub-continent's cultural diversity.

Star pieces of the museum's collection include a sandstone Buddha from the Kushana period (96-97 CE), one of only six in the world. Others include a *Kazhuththu Uru*, a gold Chettiar necklace used during weddings, and a bronze icon of Somaskanda, a depiction of the mutual admiration of Shiva and Parvati of their son Skanda. There are also relatively fewer artefacts from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan, a situation that the President's South Asia Acquisition Fund aims to rectify in future.

"Through the catalogue, we hope that more people will gain a greater appreciation of the richness of South Asian art and culture. By setting up this Fund, we also aim to provide an avenue through which the public, and especially the South Asian community, can come forward to support the collection and build it together with us," said Dr. Gauri Parimoo Krishnan, author of *The Divine Within*, and Senior Curator (South Asia) at the Asian Civilisations Museum.

The Divine Within has more than 250 detailed catalogue entries as well as a foreword by President Nathan. An introductory essay explains the rationale behind

the collection, the Museum's acquisition policy, the growth of the collection and the design of the South Asia galleries at the ACM, where the collection is on display. The publication of this catalogue was sponsored by Mr. Hwang Soo Jin, Mr. R. Athappan, Singapore Reinsurance Corporation Limited and First Capital Insurance Limited.

The Divine Within: Art & Living Culture of India & South Asia will be on sale at the Museum Shop by Banyan Tree at ACM and all major bookshops for S\$78.00 (inclusive of 5% GST) from 26 May.

The Asian Civilisations Museum would like to thank:

Sponsors of *The Divine Within: Art & Living Culture of India & South Asia* Catalogue

Mr. Hwang Soo Jin & Mr. R. Athappan
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Sponsors of *The Divine Within: Art & Living Culture of India & South Asia* Catalogue Launch at the Istana, 25 May 2007

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About the Asian Civilisations Museum

The Asian Civilisations Museum's mission is to explore and present the cultures and civilisations of Asia, so as to promote awareness and appreciation of the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans and their links to Southeast Asia and the World. The Asian Civilisations Museum first began its operations at Armenian Street in 1997, which closed at end-2005, and will re-open in 2008 as a brand new Peranakan attraction. ACM's new flagship at the historic Empress Place Building opened on 2 March 2003.

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Opening Hours

Mondays : 1pm – 7pm

Tuesdays – Sundays : 9am – 7pm

(to 9pm on Fridays)