
ART SMART

6th Grade / February

THEME:

Asia

WORKS:

1. *Camel & Rider - Tang Dynasty*
2. *Horse Tomb Figure - Tang Dynasty*
3. *Thangka of Bhaishajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha*
4. *Dancing Ganesha - 10th Century*

1.



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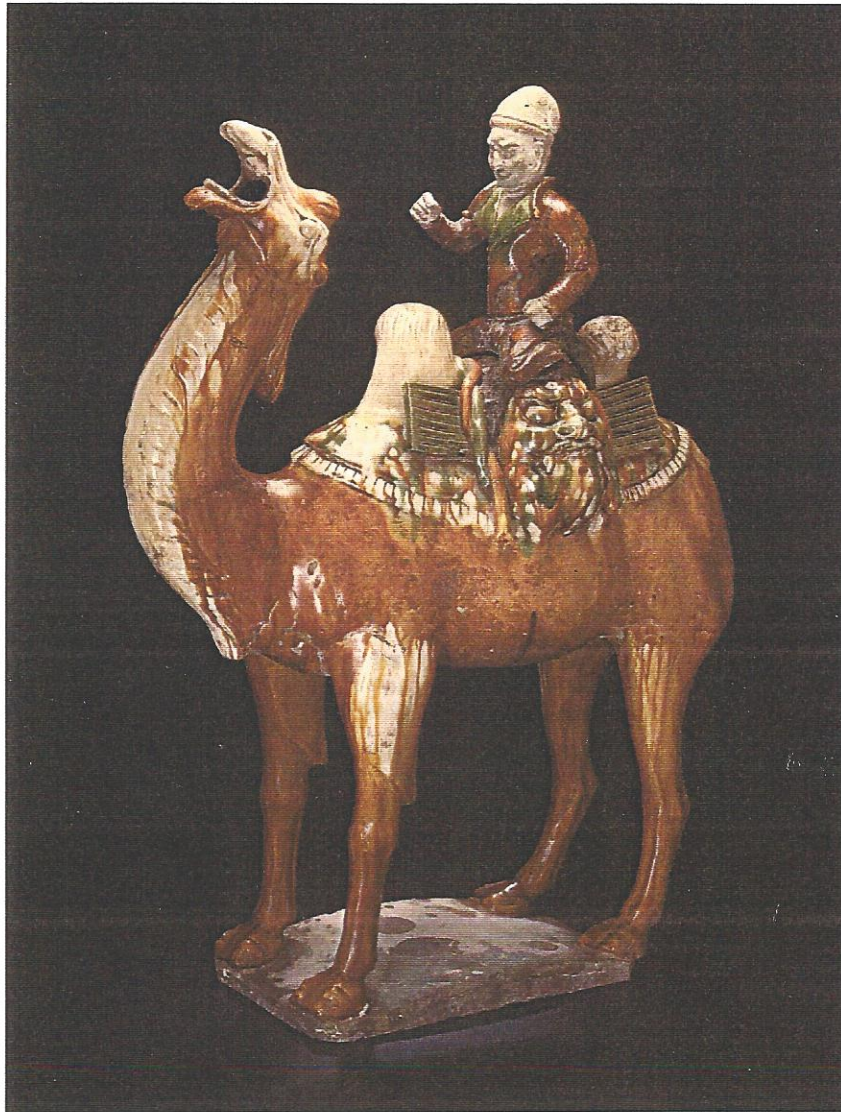


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Camel and Rider

China; Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907), first half of the 8th century



THE
ART INSTITUTE
OF
CHICAGO

Poster Packet

Department of Museum Education

Division of Student and Teacher Programs

The Elizabeth Stone Robson Teacher Resource Center

Camel and Rider, China: Tang dynasty (A.D. 618-907)

Earthenware with three-color (sancai) lead glazes

Intro: One of the most fascinating periods of Chinese history is the Tang dynasty, when China embraced influences from many foreign cultures. Cities flourished along the Silk Road, a network of land and sea trade routes between China and the Mediterranean. This ceramic sculpture of a camel and a rider is an example of the mingqi (pron. Mingchee), meaning "spirit object," a figure or model made for a burial in a tomb. During the Tang dynasty rich and powerful members of society were buried with clay objects depicting people, animals, and fantastic creatures.

Discussion Questions:

Look at the camel, does it look realistic to you? Is it moving?

Possible answers: This camel is somewhat stylized, but it has many realistic details like the wavy hair on its neck and the outlines of bone and muscle on its leg. The camel's head looks like it is moving but his legs remain still. Unlike a real camel, it has spots of several different colors including brown, white, and green.

Why were camels used on the Silk Road?

Possible answer: Traders often used camels on the Silk Road since these animals can travel long distances and endure very hot and cold temperatures. Bactrian (modern day Afghanistan) can travel up to 30 miles a day, carry hundreds of pounds, and go for more than a week without water.

Look at the man riding on the camel. Based on the way the artist depicted him, what adjectives would you use to describe him?

Possible answers: Strong, authoritative, skilled and proud. Originally, the groom may have held reins of leather rope, but these have been lost.

Why do you think the artist chose to place monstrous faces on the sides of the camel's saddlebags?

Possible answers: There is a face on each side of the sculpture, and they have big bulging eyes, flaring noses and large lips. These monster faces may have meant to scare away evil spirits from the tomb.

What other cultures have you studied that emphasize tomb decoration and the importance of the afterlife?

Possible answer: The tombs of some ancient Egyptian Pharaohs also included realistic depictions of servants, boats, food and other everyday items to be used by the deceased in the afterlife. One way that historians have learned about everyday life during the Tang dynasty is through beautiful ceramic tomb figures known as mingqi. The Tang dynasty elite built their tombs below ground and filled them with ceramic depictions of servants, animals, that were designed to provide for every need of the deceased's spirit, and to protect from evil.

How do you think the artist made this sculpture?

Answer: Tomb figures are hollow ceramic sculptures, made by pressing thin sheets of earthenware clay into reusable fired ceramic molds. Before the clay had completely dried, the sections were removed from the molds and details were incised and stamped onto them. Once the clay pieces were dry enough to support their own weight, they were joined together. All the handmade details, look the features on the rider's face, were added on. If you look under this camel you would see a large hole in its belly, showing the sculpture is hollow. This sculpture is 2 1/2 feet tall.

How did you think the color was created for this piece?

Answer: After the sections are pieced together, the figure is ready for glazing. Glazes are a mixture of tiny crystals and ground minerals, which are added to create different colors. On this figure the pouring method of glazing is most evident on the faces of the camel's saddlebags.

Summary: Knowledge of the construction methods, subjects, and burial context of these tomb sculptures deepen our appreciation of the accomplishments of Tang artists.

Camel and Rider

China; Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907), first half
of the 8th century
Earthenware with three-color (*sancai*) lead glazes
Gift of Mrs. Bertha Palmer Thorne, 1969.788a-b

One of the most fascinating periods of Chinese history is the Tang dynasty (A.D. 618–907), when China embraced influences from many foreign cultures, consolidated its power, and became the cultural center of Asia. Cosmopolitan cities like Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an) and Luoyang flourished along the Silk Road, a network of land and sea trade routes between China and the Mediterranean. This ceramic sculpture of a camel and rider is an example of a *mingqi* (pronounced *ming-chee*), meaning "spirit object," a figure or model made for burial in a tomb. During the Tang dynasty rich and powerful members of society were buried with clay objects depicting people, animals, and fantastic creatures.

Trying to restrain his animal, the bearded groom atop this camel wears the belted coat, leggings, and soft felt cap characteristic of Central Asian dress. Originally the groom may have held reins of leather rope, but these have been lost. The camel's mouth is open to bray, and it wears a saddle and saddlebags molded as monstrous masks with wide eyes and protruding fangs. These monster faces may have been designed to frighten evil spirits and thereby protect the deceased in the afterlife.

China during the Tang Dynasty

Through most of the Tang dynasty, the capital cities of Chang'an and Luoyang were characterized by a cosmopolitan atmosphere where men and women of different races and religions lived together in relative freedom. China dramatically expanded its territory during this period, and foreign goods and ideas—materials, technologies, philosophies, and religious beliefs—were brought to the Tang capitals from other areas of Asia as well as the Near East. The streets of the Chinese capitals were often filled with traders and missionaries, and among the nearly two million residents of Chang'an one could hear many different languages being spoken. In the arts, new forms, designs, techniques, and subject matter blossomed. New and different foods, spices, and wines were imported, and exotic songs, dances, games, habits, fashions, and literary styles were adopted.

Life along the Silk Road

Traveling west from the Tang capital at Chang'an, the best-known segment of the Silk Road branched into northern and southern routes in the Central Asian Taklamakan Desert, crossed the Iranian plateau, and ended on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. From China's seaports, the routes continued as far west as Egypt and Turkey and east to Korea and Japan. Both overland and sea routes served as major conduits for the transport of knowledge, information, and material goods between Europe and Asia and stimulated the exchange of artistic, literary, religious, and political traditions.

Silk composed a relatively small portion of the goods traded along the Silk Road. Eastbound caravans brought musicians, horses, gold and other precious metals and stones, woolen rugs, glass, ivory, and coral, while westbound caravans transported paper, fine ceramics, cinnamon bark, and rhubarb as well as bronze weapons. The oasis towns that made the overland journey possible became important trading posts, commercial centers where caravans would take on fresh merchants, animals, and goods. These cities prospered considerably, extracting large profits on the goods they bought and sold.

Travel along the Silk Road was very difficult and extremely dangerous. Dry deserts with no water for miles and mountain passes with avalanches, heavy snow, and spring flooding made the road perilous at all times of year. Very few traders, if any, or the animals and goods they transported completed the entire route. Instead, goods were passed along through an intricate network of middlemen. To protect themselves from thieves, traders often traveled in large groups and relied on expert Central Asian drivers and grooms to move the caravans across the desert.

Traders often used camels to travel the Silk Road and carry their goods from one place to another because these animals could travel a long distance without water. Sculptors of tomb figures depicted in clay the caravans of double-humped camels from Bactria (modern-day Afghanistan) that carried goods along the Silk Road. Bactrian camels can travel up to 30 miles a day, carry hundreds of pounds, and go for more than a week without water. They can endure very hot and very cold temperatures, which allowed them to travel across the forbidding deserts and the high mountain ranges that extend west from China into Central Asia. Camels are known to have a bad temper, and if you look closely at the sculpture you can see a dissatisfied expression on this camel's face as he stretches his long neck to bray.

In Tang funerary art, foreigners are shown as servants, musicians, grooms, and merchants. Persians are often depicted with full beards, and Central Asians are shown with square faces, braided hair, and long robes. The rider on this sculpture can be identified as a foreigner by his exotic dress and exaggerated facial features. He may be from Sogdiana (modern Iran) or Turkistan. This tomb sculpture of a foreign groom on a camel—a typical mode of transport for trade—is indicative of the cosmopolitan nature of the Tang dynasty, and the sculpture reveals not only evidence of the details of everyday life during the Tang but also the attitudes the Chinese held toward the world beyond their borders.

Tang Tomb Figures

One way that historians have learned about everyday life during the Tang dynasty is through beautiful ceramic tomb figures known as *mingqi*. Ceramic figures like this camel made for the tombs of princes and officials vividly evoke the vibrant, multicultural court life during this period. The Tang dynasty elite built their tombs below ground and filled them with ceramic depictions of servants, animals, and even models of buildings that were designed to provide for every need of the deceased's spirit, and to protect them from evil. Tombs were considered very important because the ancient Chinese believed the human soul had two parts that separated at death; one entered into the spirit world and the other stayed here on Earth in the tomb.

Having a large number of *mingqi* figures in one's tomb signified a person's wealth and significance in society. Figures found in a single tomb often include officials, armored guardians, imaginary guardian beasts, horses, and camels. Although the Tang government attempted to limit the size and number of figures according to a person's official rank and status, discoveries in excavated tombs indicate that these laws were generally ignored.

Tang Ceramic Techniques

Tomb figures are hollow ceramic sculptures, made by pressing thin sheets of earthenware clay into reusable, fired ceramic molds. Before the clay had completely dried, the sections were removed from the molds and details were incised and stamped onto them. Once the clay pieces were dry enough to support their own weight, they were joined together and (in many cases)

attached to a flat rectangular base. All the handmade details, like the features on the rider's face, were added on. The seams were trimmed, smoothed, and covered over with clay. If you were to look underneath this camel you would see a large hole in its belly, showing that the sculpture is hollow. This sculpture is about two-and-a-half feet tall, which makes it one of the larger *mingqi* surviving today.

When all the sections had been pieced together and allowed to dry completely, the figure was ready for glazing. Glazes are a mixture of tiny crystals and ground minerals, which are added to create different colors. Tang tomb sculptures often have multicolored glazes—referred to as *sancai*, or “three-color” glaze. The vivid caramel, straw, and olive-green colors covering this camel and rider illustrate this technique. Tang artists used lead glazes to create rich, smooth surfaces and they added coloring oxides to create pure, bright colors. Adding copper to the glaze turns it green, while adding iron turns it amber, brown, or yellow.

To apply the glaze, the ceramic was first covered with a white clay slip (clay thinned with water). Then the glazes were brushed, poured, or splashed over the piece and allowed to drip down before firing. When the glazed sculpture was fired, the glazes melted into a hard, glass-like finish. A wax-resist technique (applying wax where the artist wanted the clay body to show) was sometimes used to imitate patterns found on Central Asian textiles and dyed fabrics. During firing the wax melted away, leaving light areas that were not colored.

On this figure, the pouring method of glazing is most evident on the faces on the camel's saddlebags. You can see how the artist mixed the green and brown glaze by pouring it over this area. The face and hands of the rider figure are unglazed and allow us to see the white color of the clay. These areas were hand-painted before the figure was placed in the tomb, but the paint has faded away because unfired pigments are more prone to flaking than lead glaze.

During the Tang dynasty, earthenware figures were very popular and a great variety of them were made, both glazed and unglazed. This sectional molding technique allowed for hollow, thin-walled clay figures that would dry quickly and not explode in the firing process. It also ensured that sculptures could be produced relatively rapidly, and in sufficient quantity to meet commercial demand.

Knowledge of the construction methods, subjects, and burial context of these tomb sculptures deepens our appreciation of the accomplishments of Tang artists as well as our knowledge of daily life during this period in Chinese history.



Horse Tomb Figure
Project

Tang Dynasty

Artist: Tang Dynasty

Print Sculpture: [Horse Tomb Figure](#)

Reference: Art Institute

Horse (Tomb Figure)

- Earthenware with 3-color lead glazes
- China
- Tang Dynasty (618-907), 1st half of the 8th century China
- Gift of Russell Tyson, 1943.1136

Background

The ancient Chinese believed the human soul had two parts that separated at death. One entered into the spirit world, the other stayed here on earth in the tomb.

During the **Tang Dynasty** (618-907, 1st half of the 8th century) whenever a rich and powerful person died he or she was buried with hundreds of clay objects called **mingqi** (ming-chi). **Mingqi** included figures of people and animals, pots and bowls, and even models of buildings. **Mingqi** provided the spirit that stayed on earth with all the things important in his or her life.

Tang Tomb Figures

The [Tang Dynasty in China](#) produced some of the world's most beautiful and significant funerary sculpture. The quantities of figures allowed in a tomb, the tomb size and the length of the funerary procession were all regulated by the government and depended on the rank of the deceased. Court and government officials stocked their tombs with ceramic representations of officials, servants, and entertainers, along with horses and camels bearing luxuries from the western stations of the Silk Road.

The **Art Institute's Horse** is a paramount example of Tang ceramic tomb sculpture. In China, horses signified political power. Why do you think a horse was important? (Remember, there were no cars, trains, or planes). Horses, called the "steeds of heaven," were symbols of wealth and power. During the **Tang Dynasty**, China expanded in all directions, and conquered peoples offered costly objects, including horses, as tribute. The muscular and elegant charger suggests the overpowering might of the **Tang** armies. The fact that horses are among the most impressive sculptures of this period also indicates the disposition of an aristocracy for whom accompanied horsemanship was a prerequisite.

This opulently caparisoned horse's legs are solidly planted, but he waits impatiently. His soft lips are drawn back to bare strong white teeth as he momentarily bows his head. So dynamic is the tension in his long, exaggerated neck and jauntily curled tail, that one expects the creature's head to spring back up at any moment, and listens for the stamping of hooves. Clearly, the artist who designed this figure had keenly observed horses.

There is no date on this horse, so what tells us it belongs to the **Tang** period? First, its decoration; second, the colors of the glaze. Tang artists typically used what are known as "three-color" glazes, but in reality there are as many as six colors. Look on this horse for glazes of green, amber, cream, straw, yellow and blue.

This grand horse is 2½ feet high. The large size tells us that the person in the tomb must have been rich and important. The wealthier the person the larger and more beautiful were the **mingqi**.

No one knows the identity of the gifted artist who modeled this baked clay horse over a thousand years ago. What can we tell about the artist? He must have been a keen observer. Look carefully at the horse's legs. Notice the bone and joint structure. Notice the position of the back legs. A horse stands in exactly this fashion. The artist was also unusually skillful. The animal expresses spirit and energy as he bends to reach his foot. His unusually long graceful neck arches as if in a royal bow to his master. The carefully detailed mane and tail, the elaborately glazed harness, and the handsome saddle are other signs of the artist's skill.

Look at the pose of the horse. What do you think it is doing? Look for the carefully combed mane and decorative harness. Imagine riding the horse that was used as the model of this sculpture.

Is this horse made of solid clay? To make **mingqi** like this horse, craftsmen pressed clay into molds of different parts of the body. These parts were assembled while the clay was still soft. After the figure had dried, it may have been fired to further harden the clay. After drying or firing, craftsmen painted the horse with glazes, which are a mixture of tiny crystals with ground minerals added to create different colors. When the glazed sculpture was fired, the glazes melted into a hard glass-like finish. This mold process means that copies of a sculpture can be made, or that a number of sculptures can be made from one mold and that many examples of duplicate **mingqi** exist, for example, guardian figures or dancers. However, no other horse like this has ever been found, indicating it may be one of a kind and that the mold was destroyed after it was made. If this is indeed the case it would suggest that the **Art Institute's** horse came from the tomb of a very important person.

Find the area that is unglazed. Hint: Look for the part that is not shiny. What color is the bare clay?

Tang Dynasty Horse Tomb Figure

This is a photo of a Chinese horse sculpture. This horse is in the **Art Institute**, in downtown Chicago, where you can all go to see it. It is 2½ feet high, which is up to the top of my leg.

- What do you see?
- When was it made?
- What colors do you see?
- What is it made of?
- What kind of decorations are there?

Look carefully at this sculpture of a horse. Do you find the overall shape pleasing? Do you like the colors? Look at the long, curved neck and neatly parted mane. Do you think the horse looked exactly like that, or did the artist alter the form to make it more expressive? Look at the horse's eyes, nose, and mouth. Do you think the artist was familiar with horses? On what evidence do you base your answer? What other details do you see? What is the horse doing and what emotions are expressed? What sounds might you hear? Is motion implied? Can you imagine the horse suddenly raising its head and looking around? Why do you think the horse is decorated with special ornaments and trappings? Compare this horse to others from China in Gallery 105.

Does this horse look like any other horses you have seen created by other artists? Compare it to other horses in the collection of the **Art Institute of Chicago**. [Frederic Remington](#)'s paintings and sculptures of horses (lower level, Columbus Drive Avenue), **Bernardo Mortorell**'s *Saint George Killing the Dragon* (Gallery 208), **William Morris Hunt**'s *The Horses of Anahita* (Gallery 175), **Raymond Duchamp-Villon**'s *Horse* (Gallery 200). Other interesting works to look at would be anatomical studies of animals by [Leonardo da Vinci](#) or [Michelangelo](#), paintings by horses by **Franz Marc**, and **Pablo Picasso**'s *Guernica* horse. How does each represent the time and culture from which it comes?

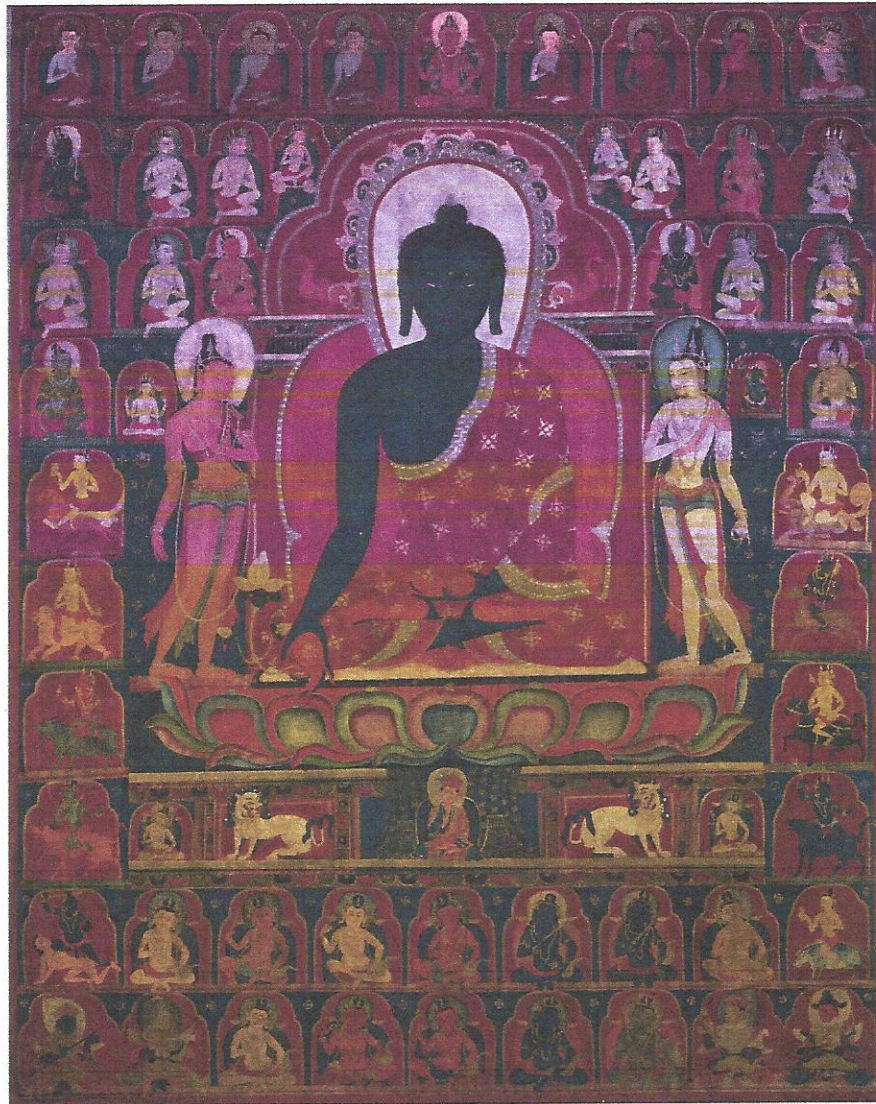
Horses and camels were used to travel along the **Silk Road**. The **Silk Road** had a significant impact on the culture of China. Have the students research what happened along this trade route. Have them identify it on a map. What were some of the influences of this route on the culture and people? How were goods transported? Did the route bring silk only? What other products or ideas were transported?

Discuss **technique**. How do you think this horse was made? What materials were used to make it? This sculpture was made from hollow molded and hand-molded sections of clay. It was later glazed and hand-painted with the colors typically used by artists during the **Tang Dynasty** (brown, yellow, and green) and finally fired. How do the materials used affect the image? Clay is a pliable substance which allows for working in more details. How would it look if it had been made of stone, glass, steel, fabric, or wire? What about its size? If it were much larger or smaller, what would be the effect?

This horse is a **Tomb Sculpture** and was created specifically for burial purposes. Discuss burial rites and the belief in an afterlife. How did these practices and beliefs affect the way in which people were buried and what was buried with them? How do your students feel about the idea of tomb sculpture?

Thangka of Bhaishajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha

Tibet, 14th century



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Thangka of Bhaishajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha, Tibet, 14th century

Intro: This colorful thangka, or scroll painting, represents the Buddha as the master of medicine and teacher of healers. As the patron deity of Tibetan medicine, he is a healer of both the body and the spirit.

Thangkas are intended to serve as a guide for a contemplative experience and to focus the mind during meditation. Buddhism spread to Tibet from India in the 7th century, and it soon became the most important religion in the region.

What shapes, symmetry, and organization can you find in this painting?

Answer: Circles, ovals, straight lines, and rectangles; the Buddha figure is placed centrally on the vertical axis, and the figures are arranged in rows.

Why is color so important in this work of art?

Answer: The artist makes the blue Buddha figure stand out by placing an orange background behind him. Show the color wheel, blue and orange are complementary. The blue is painted from the gemstone lapis lazuli, a rare semiprecious stone that is used to symbolize something that is pure or rare. It is said to have a curative or strengthening effect and for this it is the principal color of the Medicine Buddha. Originally, there was only one Buddha. However, according to later Buddhist doctrine an infinite number of Buddhas work in multiple universes (past, present, and future) for the benefit of all beings.

What is the general mood of this painting?

Possible answers: Calm, soothing, ordered; some of the figures on the bottom appear violent, aggressive, chaotic.

Why do you think this traditional Tibetan art form is painted on fabric?

Answer: A thangka is usually painted on cotton and framed in silk brocade, and is meant to be a portable icon. Because thangkas can be rolled, they can travel easily with monks who move from village to

village. Their vibrant colors brightened the often dark interiors of temples and monasteries.

How can you tell this is an image of a Buddha?

Answer: Artists in Asia have created a standard way to depict Buddha, so that people could always recognize him when looking at a painting or sculpture. The Buddha can be recognized by his ushnisha (prominent bump on the top of his head), urna (dot or mole on the forehead signifying wisdom), short hair and elongated earlobes. Other characteristics of the Buddha include mudras, or hand gestures that signal various roles of teaching, meditating, protecting and urging generosity. Although images of the Buddha have similarities, artists have created many versions, and if you look closely no two depictions are alike.

What is unique about the country of Tibet?

Answer: Tibet is often called “the roof of the world”, it averages over 4,950 meters above sea level with peaks at 6,000-7,500 meters, including Mount Everest.

Why is Tibet politically controversial today?

Answer: Tibet is controversial because its leaders want to regain independence from China and preserve traditional Tibetan culture and religion, while the Chinese government wants to exert control over the region. Buddhism changed and adapted to local beliefs as it spread throughout Asia, and so Tibetan Buddhist culture is somewhat different from other countries. One of its unique characteristics is the importance of lamas, or highly respected teachers. The Dalai Lama, a leader whose name means “ocean of wisdom,” has traditionally been the religious and political leader of Tibet. There have been fourteen Dalai Lamas in succession, and each one is considered a reincarnation of his predecessor. The current Dalai Lama lives in exile in India, where he is free to practice his religion without the oversight of the Chinese government.

Look closely at the painting. What animals and people do you see?

Answer: Orange peacocks on either side of the Buddha’s head, white lions below the Buddha, small deities riding on horses, cattle, an

elephant, a deer, large birds, and other real and imaginary animals. On either side of the Buddha, two bodhisattvas, or compassionate beings, flank the Buddha. A bodhisattva is a person who has attained enlightenment, but chooses to remain in the cycle of life and death in order to help others. Seven more Medicine Buddhas, a goddess, and a sword-carrying god are directly above the Buddha's head. A number of deities surround the central figure of the Medicine Buddha, arrange in neat rows.

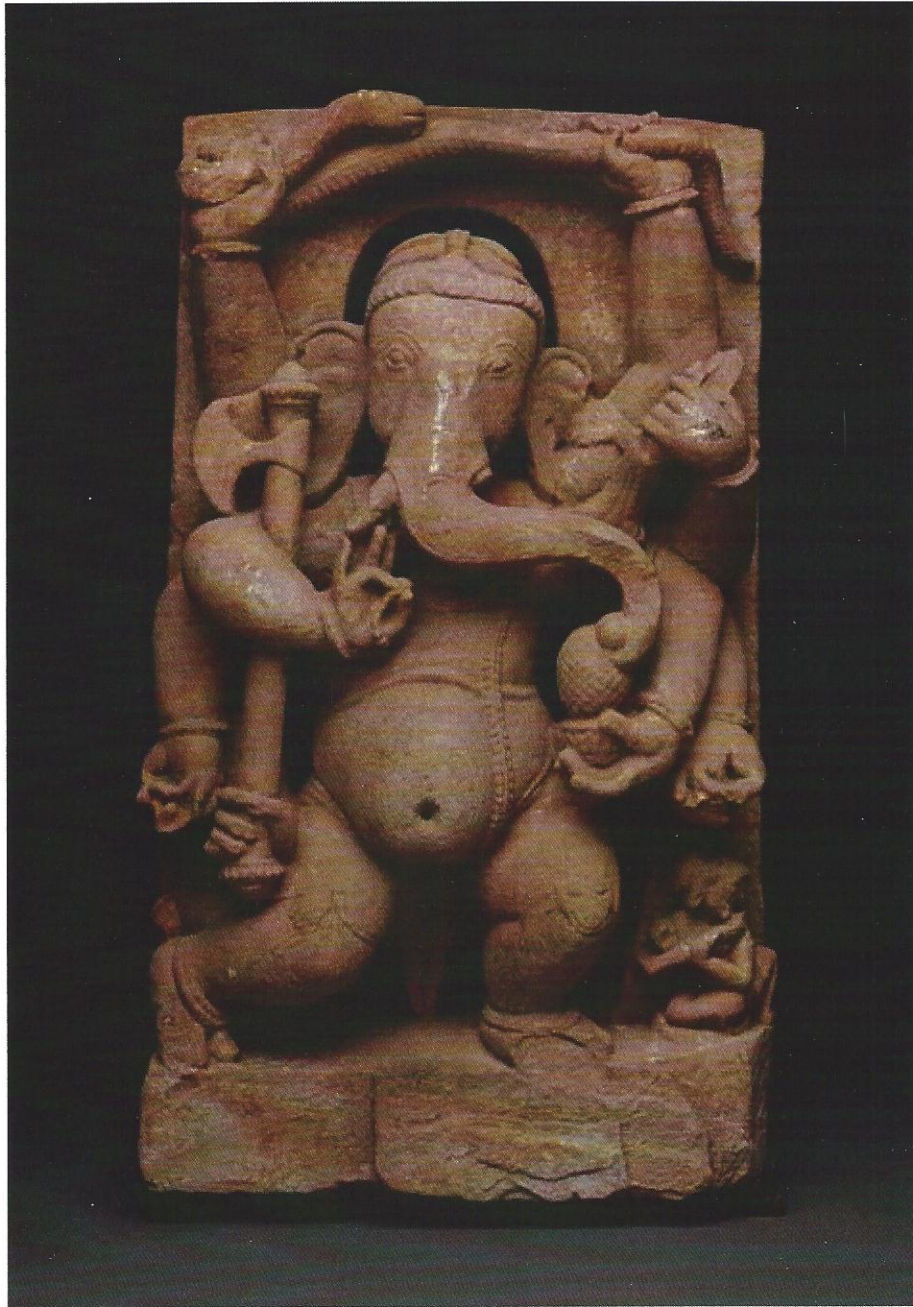
Although you cannot see it, there is an inscription on the back of this painting in Tibetan that is over 100 lines long. It includes prayers and religious verses that honor the Medicine Buddha. The authors of the poem asked to be liberated from the suffering of the earthly world, reborn in the paradise of the Medicine Buddha, and purified of all sins. Although we do not know the names of the patrons who commissioned this painting, the inscription tells us how important the image of the Medicine Buddha was to them.

Project Idea:

One important art form in Tibet is a mandala, which is used as a guide to meditation. A mandala helps believers visualize the universe and their place in it. It is symmetrical, geometrical form consisting chiefly of circles and squares, and usually used 4 colors. Ask each student to create their own mandala that will reveal their own interests and unique qualities. Remind them it should follow some of the basic principles of Tibetan art; it should be symmetrical, colorful, and each figure or object should have symbolic meaning. Students can design their own original piece or there is also a preprinted mandala students can choose to color in a symmetrical pattern.

Dancing Ganesha

10th century
India, Uttar Pradesh



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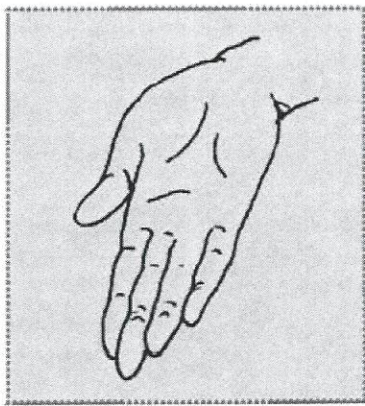
Dancing Ganesha, 10th century

Sandstone; 23 5/8 in. x 12 3/4 in. x 6 in. (60.1 x 32.4 x 15.3 cm)

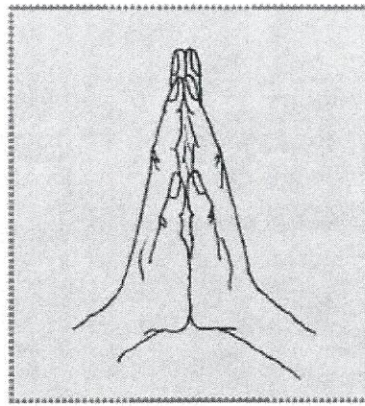
The James and Marilyn Alsdorf Loan Collection, 77.1999

This dancing, elephant-headed creature is Ganesha, **Hinduism's** Lord of Beginnings and Remover of Obstacles. Before beginning a school year, taking a trip, or starting a new business, Hindus pray to Ganesha for assistance, and he is prayed to at the start of all Hindu worship. Most temples have a separate area of worship dedicated to this elephant-headed god, and devotees first visit his image before proceeding to the principle deity's shrine. Sculptures of Ganesha are often washed with water and adorned with

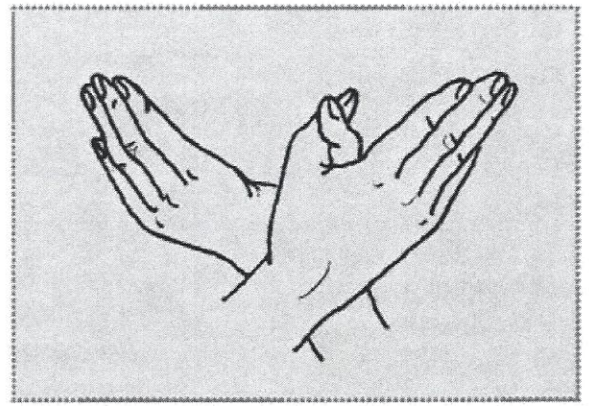
flowers. Like most Hindu gods and goddesses (figure 3), Ganesha has multiple limbs, which indicate his supernatural power and cosmic nature. In some of his many hands, the god holds an attribute, an object closely associated with his personality or history. Other hands form *mudras*, symbolic hand gestures (figure 1). With his oversized elephant head and rotund stomach, Ganesha always amuses. He is most comic when he dances, as shown in this image.



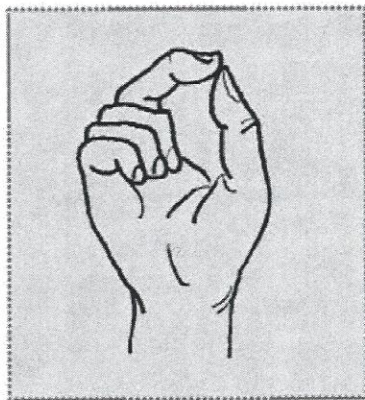
beautiful



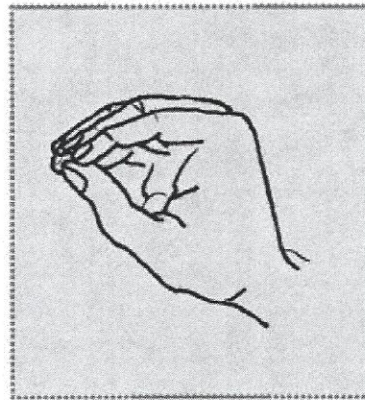
salutation/greeting



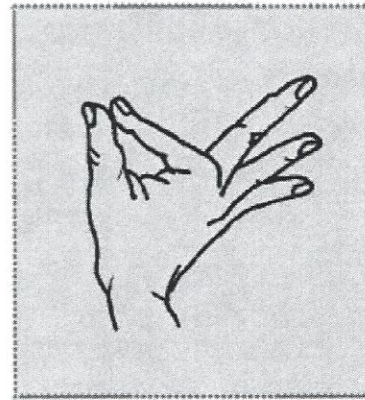
birds



speak



eating



painting

Figure 1
Examples of Various Mudras

Ganesha's Attributes

The most important of Ganesha's attributes is his large elephant head. In one version of his myth, the goddess Parvati, lonely because her husband, the god Shiva, had been away for some years, created a human son Ganesha from the dirt left behind in her bath. As the years passed, the boy grew into a man who did not know his father but was devoted to the needs of his mother. One spring morning, Parvati asked Ganesha to stand guard at the entrance to her bath. A stranger approached and tried to enter, but Ganesha blocked his way. Angered, the stranger attacked Ganesha and ripped off his head and tossed it away. When Parvati came out of the bath, she found her son without his head and her husband (the stranger), who had returned from his long journey. She was filled with sorrow and anger at the sight. Shiva realized the grief he caused and promised to replace the head with that of the first creature he could find. His attendants, *ganas* (GUN-ahs), found an elephant sleeping by the river, and Shiva took this creature's head and placed it on the neck of Parvati's son, thus restoring him to life. Thereafter, Shiva called the young man Ganesha, lord of the *ganas*.

The god may be depicted with 2 to 16 arms. Here he is shown with eight, each holding one of his standard attributes. In one of his left hands, he holds a giant radish, which he is partial to eating. Radishes symbolize abundance, and Ganesha encourages his devotees to grow more radishes than they need—perhaps so that they will make offerings of the excess to him. Ganesha is also very fond of sweets, and he is often shown holding a bowl of fruits or sweetmeats (candied or crystallized fruits). One evening after eating a very large bowl of sweets, Ganesha was riding on his rat, his means of conveyance, when a snake crossed their path. The rat bolted in fright, throwing Ganesha to the ground. When the elephant-headed god fell down, his belly burst open, and all the sweets rolled out. Patiently, Ganesha picked up all the sweets and placed them back into his stomach and then used the snake as a belt to hold them all in. The moon, who saw the incident from up in the sky, laughed at Ganesha, who then snapped off his tusk and hurled it in anger. In this image, Ganesha is shown holding the snake high over his head with one right and one left hand. He is also missing one of his tusks.

Ganesha is most often shown with one broken tusk, and when represented in this aspect, he is called *Ekadanta* (eck-uh-DHAN-tuh)—He of the Single Tusk. Another story tells of Ganesha breaking his tusk off in order to use it as a writing tool. A sage wanted to write down the famous Hindu epic the *Mahabharata* (mah-hah-BAR-ah-tuh) and asked the god Brahma to suggest a suitable scribe to write down his words. Brahma suggested Ganesha for the job, who used his tusk to complete the task.

In the crook of one of his right elbows, Ganesha grasps a large axe. This powerful weapon cuts through obstacles and frightens off demons and the malicious thoughts of those who wish to harm his devotees. With his middle right hand, Ganesha has formed a mudra gesture of power and, when associated with dance, assurance. Faintly in the center of his forehead, a third eye appears. Like all spiritual beings, Ganesha has three eyes, two for seeing the external world and one for spiritual sight. With this eye, Ganesha sees beyond the appearances of the physical world. Also present is Ganesha's rat, which rests on his left knee. The rat was once a wicked demon upon whom Ganesha stomped his large, heavy foot, turning him into a lowly rat. With his kind heart, the elephant-headed god took pity on the rat and made him his tiny transport. Although utterly different in size and nature, the two work well as a team. As the remover of all obstacles, Ganesha clears obstacles from his path, while the rat can wriggle into places where Ganesha would never fit—another means of avoiding obstacles and achieving goals.

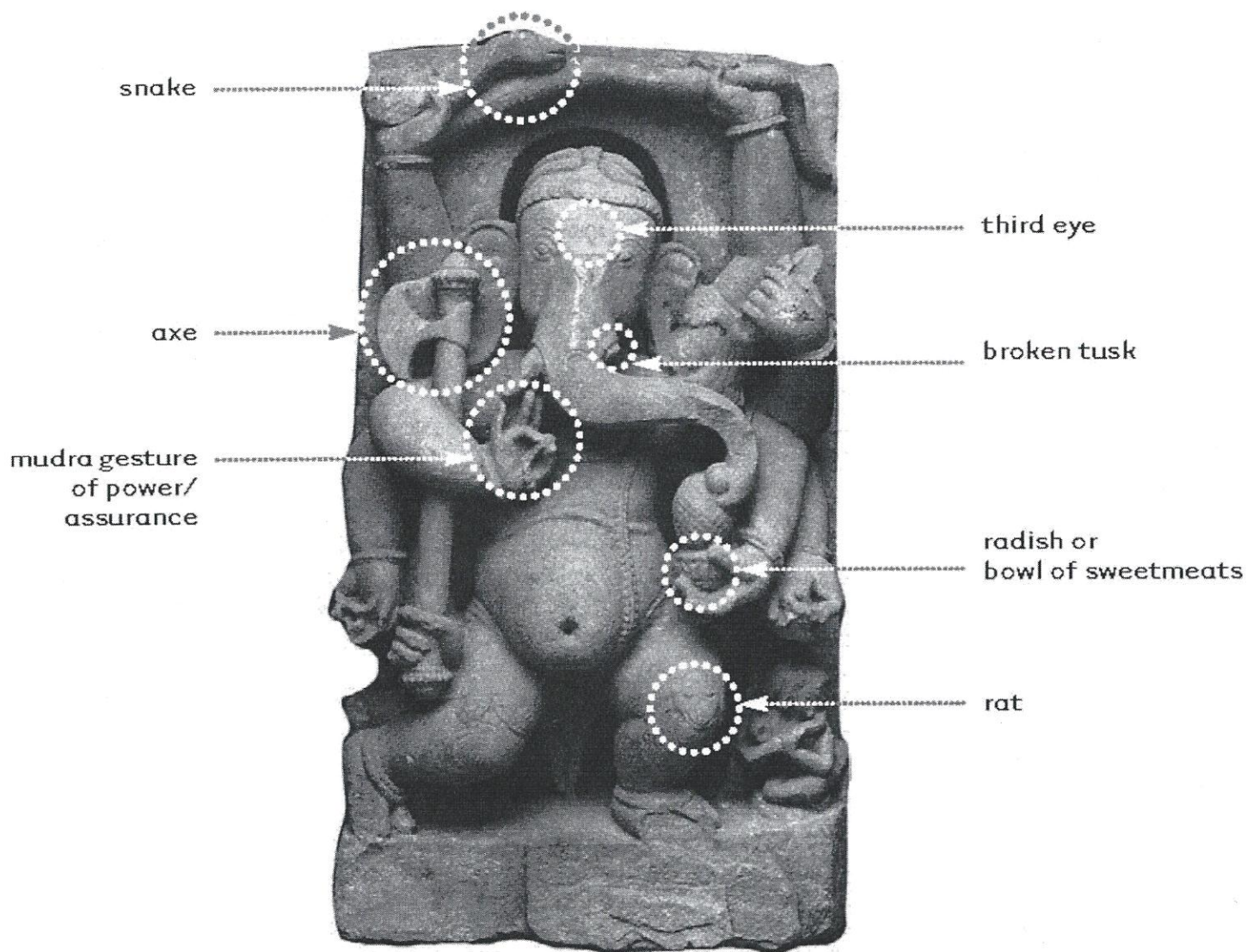


Figure 2
Attributes of Dancing Ganesha

Cosmic Dancing

One of Ganesha's roles is to entertain his parents, which he does by dancing. Shiva, Ganesha, and all the dwarfish ganas love to dance because the act of dancing is spiritually significant in Hinduism. It is related to the perpetual cycle of creation and destruction, called *samsara*, that defines the universe and from which humans seek to escape. Yet, when Ganesha dances for his parents, he is in a comic aspect. One can imagine his oversized ears, his long trunk, and swelled stomach bouncing gently as the god moves his arms and legs. But even though Ganesha's form appears bulky, his movements seem to have buoyancy. He is often shown stepping to the right or left with one foot and thrusting the opposite hip outward, creating a strong sense of action. In this image, his dancing seems to be less sure, with his right leg dragging behind the left. Perhaps this slightly clumsy dance was meant to especially delight his parents.

Elephants and Indian Culture

Besides being a comic figure, a protector, and a god of wisdom, Ganesha holds special significance among the Hindu deities because elephants have a popular place in Indian culture. From the earliest civilization in the Indus Valley, elephants were commonly represented and always had auspicious associations. The elephant brigade was important in the Indian army as the cavalry, and kings often fought from elephants' backs. The animal was also used as a battering ram. They are famous for their remarkable memory and intelligence and associated with clouds, probably due to their large, round gray shape and the way they spray water from their trunks. As clouds, they symbolize rainfall, fertility of crops, and prosperity. Scholars believe that Ganesha may have originated as a deity in a much older elephant cult and was assimilated by Hinduism when it emerged. He appears in the Buddhist and Jain faiths as well, although he always ranks below their gods. Because his image appears in many different religions, Ganesha's birthday is celebrated in modern India as a holiday for national unity.

Shiva and Parvati: Ganesha's Parents

Shiva (SHIH-vah) is Ganesha's father, God of Destruction and Regeneration. His dance sets the rhythm of life and death that orders the universe. Shiva's destruction is not negative, but a positive, nourishing, and constructive destruction that builds and transforms life and energy for the welfare of the world and the beings that inhabit it. He destroys in order to renew and regenerate. Shiva, Brahma, and Vishnu form the Trinity of Hindu gods. Shiva was originally a mountain god and is the most powerful and popular Hindu god. Shiva is depicted young and white with a blue neck, or all dark blue. Between his brow is a third eye—the eye of wisdom, the opening of which destroys our false selves and our myriad illusions. He has four arms and is shown seated or dancing. Shiva chose Parvati, whom he is very close to (they are often depicted together), as his consort and wife. Shiva treats Parvati as his equal and shares his seat with her. She is literally his better half and occupies half of his body. Shiva lives with his family and seems to dote on his two children, Ganesha and Skanda.

Parvati (PAHR-vah-tee) is Ganesha's mother. She got her name because she is the daughter of the mountains (parvatha) and also because she occupies one half (parva) of the universe while the other half is occupied by Shiva. Parvati is the Mother Goddess. She is believed to be the power of consciousness, the giver of knowledge (especially the arts), and the protector. Parvati is often portrayed or described as having a charming personality and is adored by married women who wish for a happy married life. Parvati is often depicted seated by Shiva or in the company of her children, Ganesha and Skanda. She is sometime seated on a pedestal, or shown as a lion or tiger with four hands and a cheerful face. The family of Shiva and Parvati, and their sons Ganesha and Skanda, is considered an ideal example of family unity and love.