

Galerie Hioco

Stele of Umā Maheśvara (P696)



What do we like in this sculpture?

- The tenderness that emanates from the protagonists
- Its remarkable size, coupled with a sober and delicate modelling
- Its original and sensual iconography

I. Detailed description

Stele of Umā Maheśvara (P696)

Black stone

Eastern India,

11th-12th century, Pāla period

H. 34 inch

Umāmahēśvaramūrti, a tender iconography of the god Śiva

This superb stele depicts the Hindu god Śiva in his Umāmahēśvaramūrti aspect. This iconography is described in two texts: the Viṣṇudharmōttara and the Rūpamaṇḍana (Rao, 1971, vol. II, Part. I, p. 132). It depicts Śiva and his wife, called in this context Umā, the 'Favorite', sitting on the same seat, showing each other signs of attachment and often surrounded by their children and relatives. This subject can be subject to variations in the positions of the protagonists and the number of characters. Several large bas-reliefs in the Ellorā caves (8th century) bear witness to this. In southern India, the theme bears the name of Sōmāskandamūrti and was the subject of numerous processional bronzes. In Nepal, present from the fifth century, Umāmaheśvara became over the centuries the śaiva iconography par excellence.

The richness of detail

Śiva is in a relaxed position, delicately embracing his consort. The two gods seem to be looking at each other; the delicacy of the modelling hints at their tender expression. Umā holds in her hand a mirror symbolising her beauty, while her husband holds in one of his hands his main attribute, the trident (triśūla). Their bodies are richly adorned with various ornaments. The two deities are not alone: at their feet, under the lotiform seat, stand two familiars: the Nandin buffalo and the lion, the respective mounts (vāhana) of the two deities. Above their heads float two flying celestial creatures (vidyādhara), against a background of an ornamental floral frieze. At the very bottom of the sculpture is an orant, a figure in a position of prayer: this is probably the patron of the work.

A sober and monumental work

However, despite these various details, the work is characterised by its sobriety, as well as by its remarkable size. The postures are elegant without being excessive, the ornaments delicate, revealing an underlying sensuality. It is a remarkably well-preserved work, with clear iconography and no superfluous elements. The dark stone also gives the scene a certain intimacy.

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II. Image of the piece – front view



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III. Image of the piece – left three-quarter view



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IV. Image of the piece – right three-quarter view



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V. Image of the piece – front detail view



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VI. Image of the piece – detail view

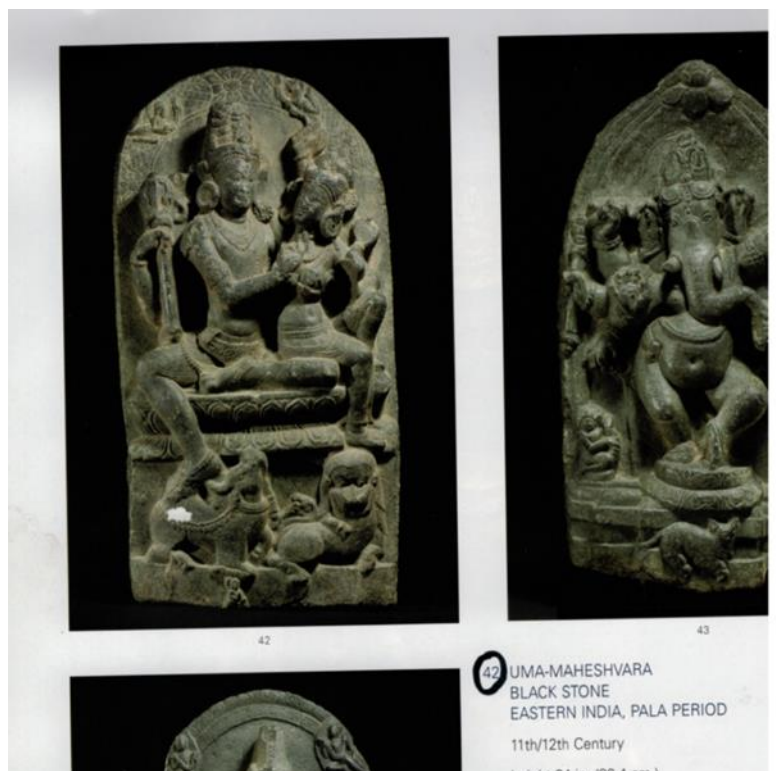
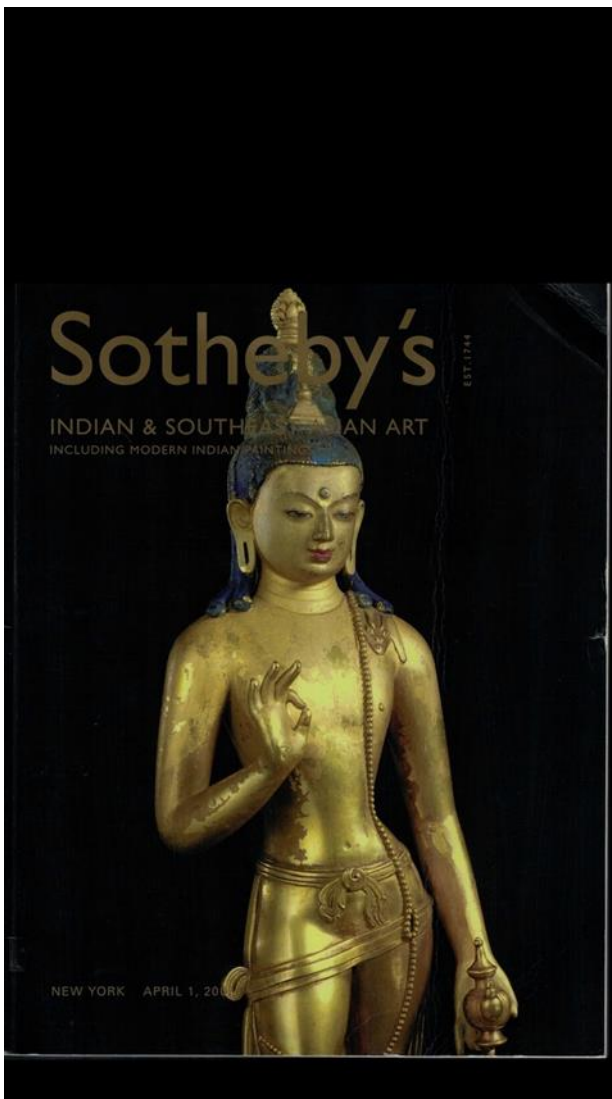


VII. Provenance: in all transparency!

. This piece came from a Sotheby's sale in New York in 2005.

. We are always very cautious and diligent about the provenance of the artworks we offer. Ensuring the seriousness and reliability of the information given by the former owners is one of our priorities and we then guarantee this origin by engaging our responsibility.

. In order to reinforce this guarantee, we systematically verify that these artworks have not been registered as missing or stolen. As Interpol has granted us the right to directly consult their database of stolen or reported items, we verify by ourselves and issue a certificate attesting to this.



VIII. Condition report: our scientific approach

This stele is in a good general state of preservation. Some concretions are visible on the whole piece, and are certainly original due to the stone used. The stone has an eroded appearance in some places, notably on the right hand of the goddess, and the noses of the two protagonists, which have been broken or have suffered from the wear and tear of time and weathering. There is also a slight gap in the knee of the god. Umā's left hand has been broken, as well as the lower part of the mirror she was holding. As for the faces, we notice that some details have been broken or eroded, notably the noses. This finding is not surprising for a sculpture created in a cultic context, which was certainly an integral part of the architecture of a temple, thus being exposed to the vagaries of the climate. It should be noted that the animals in the lower decorative frieze are intact. Moreover, most of the finely carved details are still present, and the richness of the ornaments, headdresses, and delicate decorative motifs of the arch can still be appreciated today. No restoration has been detected.

Please note that since we are not conservators or restorers, it must be understood that any condition report we made is a subjective qualified opinion, even if we do our best efforts. Prospective buyers should inspect the piece to satisfy themselves as to condition.

IX. Our guarantees: for a serene acquisition!

- More photos will be sent to you on request.
- In case of purchase, we will establish an invoice that you can pay by bank transfer.
- You will receive our certificate of authenticity with the photo of the artwork, its detailed description and the mention of the provenance.
- We will define together the shipping modalities and we will take care of all customs formalities if you live outside of France.
- If you do not like the piece, we give you the possibility to return it to us and we will assist you with the resulting terms and conditions.