

graphic adaptations? To what extent can similarities among local iconographic adaptations be identified? These important questions raised during the course of the Pulitzer workshop surely deserve further reflection.

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Reflections on *Reflections* Marsha Haufler

The graduate student workshop “Buddhist Art: Objects and Contexts” was an unusual event. Like *Reflections of the Buddha*, the exhibition it addressed, it was in constant dialogue with its physical setting, the singular Tadao Andō building home to the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, as the four sessions moved through the four galleries in changing light. The event was also distinguished by its spirit of openness, a very genuine receptivity to whatever anyone wished to say, however prepared or spontaneous, about either the objects or the fluid notion of “context.” Perhaps the luminous building deserves some credit for this spirit, but Emily Rauh Pulitzer, founder and chair of the Pulitzer Foundation, and senior curator Francesca Herndon-Consagra set the tone for the two days. Both actively took part in the formal gallery sessions and the informal discussions that spilled over into coffee breaks and meals, sharing their knowledge of the architecture and resident art. We followed Emily outdoors and into the massive spiral of Richard Serra’s weathering steel sculpture, *Joe*, to feel the power of the form and take shelter from the cold Midwest wind—an experience that defied photography. Later, however, my iPhone caught a conversation between Francesca and Yukio Lippit dramatized by geometric patterns of light and shadow created by the raking sunlight pulled into the Andō building from the sky over the long, rectangular reflecting pool that bisects most of the U-shaped structure (Fig. 9).

The event was further distinguished by an invigorating lack of focus attributable to the geographic and chronological range of the exhibit, as well as the deliberate ambiguity of the workshop theme, and to the charge given the speakers by workshop organizer Phillip Bloom. Bloom asked each one to provide “a brief provocation to spur debate,” and the participants took him

at his word. As if to defy the controlling geometry of the dramatic gallery spaces, the presentations took off in all directions.

The program began in the main gallery, partially illuminated by the shifting light of the late-autumn afternoon sun. Windows run along the lower half of the wall looking out to the reflecting pool. Because the natural light precludes showing light-sensitive objects in this space, our first subjects were stone sculptures that lost their colorful pigments long ago. (The lacquered, gilded, and polychrome objects in the entrance gallery were shrouded in black cloth, waiting to be unveiled and discussed the next morning, before the light grew too strong.)

While the exhibition had a discernable geographic organization, the illustrated brochure that substituted for gallery labels identified the galleries thematically. Works from India and China in the main gallery introduced “Buddha Śākyamuni.” A life-sized, marble, late sixth-century standing Buddha from China anchored the space. Jungmin Ha threw out the first “provocation” by articulating what we can and cannot know about this Buddha using traditional methodology, namely, close examination of material, forms, and style, and comparative analysis, dramatizing her presentation by draping scarves over fellow participant (Ye-Gee Kwon) to explain the arrangement of the Buddha’s robe (Fig. 10).

William Ma considered the provenance of the same sculpture, tracing its journey through Japan to the United States in the early twentieth century in the context of the art market and international exhibitions, notably the 1935 International Exhibition of Chinese Art at the Burlington House. Ma reminded us of the nineteen-foot marble cousin of the exhibition’s Buddha that starred in the Burlington exhibition and now resides in the British Museum, allowing us to imagine what this towering sculpture would look like juxtaposed with Ellsworth Kelly’s 28-foot-high *Blue Black* installed on the south wall of the Pulitzer gallery. Now that would be a “conversation” between equals. The Buddha actually installed in the exhibition barely holds his own. Even though this strong, self-contained, columnar marble form is over five feet high and was placed on a high white cube, it was overwhelmed by the gallery space and the visual power of Kelly’s looming “modern ‘icon.’”

Yueni Zhong confronted the power of *Blue Black* directly, and more than any other speaker, she answered the call for “cross-cultural comparison.” But she did not take the easy route and meditate on the three verticals at the core of the show—the marble standing Buddha, Kelly’s painted aluminum panels, and the two-story

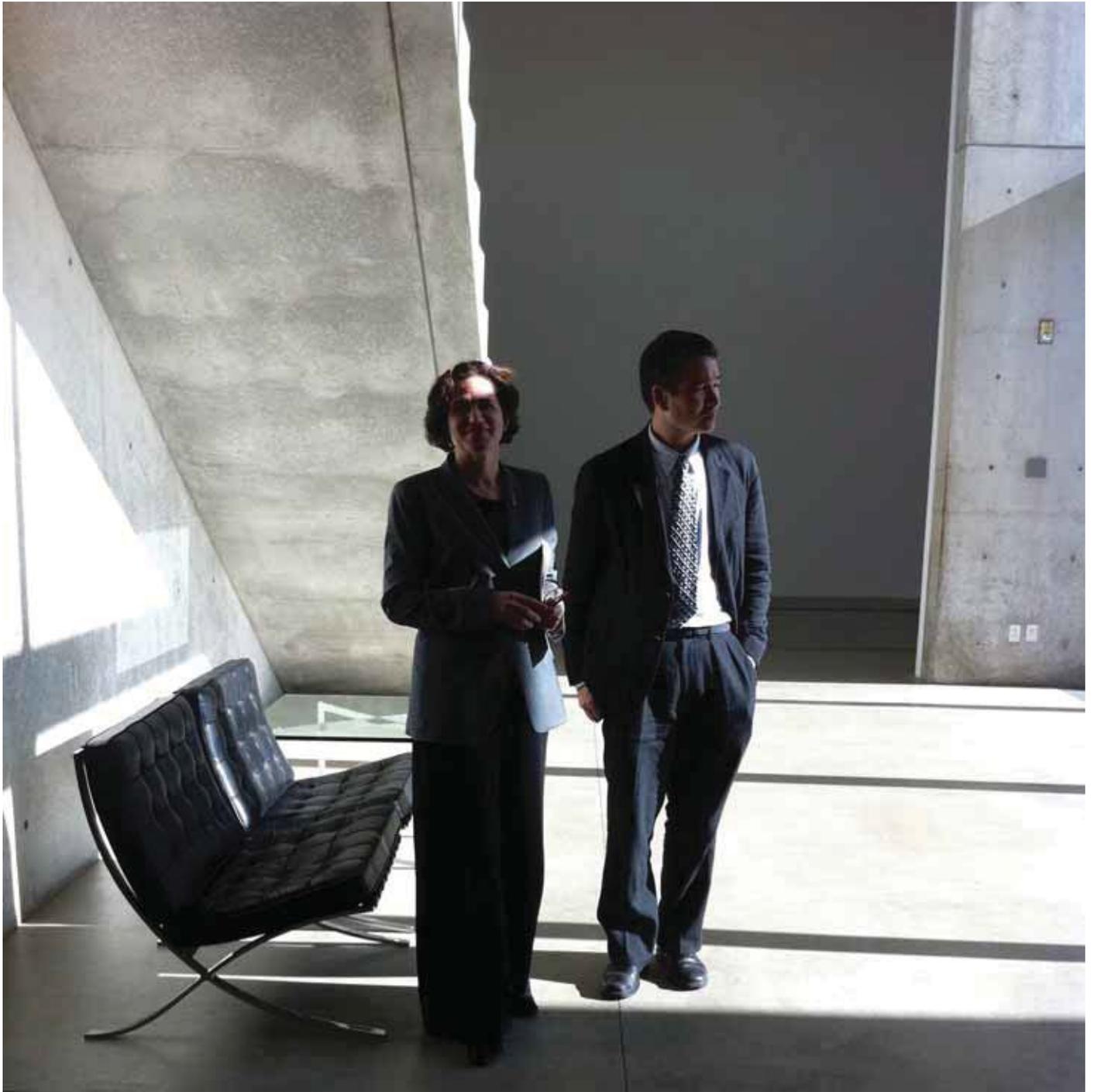


FIG. 9. *Left*, Francesca Herndon-Consagra. *Right*, Yukio Lippit. Photograph by Marsha Haufler.



FIG. 10. *Left*, Ye-Gee Kwon. *Right*, Jungmin Ha. Photograph by Marsha Haufler.

wall behind the panels. Zhong ventured instead onto the much more challenging terrain of color and cosmological correspondence between *Blue Black* and the Indian stone image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the form of Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara displayed below the monumental Kelly composition (Fig. 11).

Back in the main gallery, Catherine Roche, like Ma, took an historical approach focused on the modern period, but brought her narrative up to the present in proposing a “continuum of contextualization.” She used the Buddha torso from Mathura (Fig. 12) to consider issues of display in a sequence of contexts from India’s first colonial museum in Calcutta to her current exhibition at the Seattle Art Museum.

No one talked about Ānanda (Fig. 1). Yet there he stood, nearly in the middle of the main gallery, a solid limestone figure, in front of (and just slightly taller than) the star of the show, the marble Buddha. The young disciple looked lonely, as if wondering why he was not in his normal position beside the Buddha and where his old friend Kaśyapa had gone. I wondered why no one had elected to talk about the most accessible, human figure in this gallery.

Kerry Brown felt a similar sense of loneliness in looking at the gilded and jeweled Bodhisattva from Nepal (Fig. 13). Bringing several years of experience in working with the Newar Buddhist Community in Nepal to her “provocation,” she spoke to the common problem of recognizing Nepal within the dominant paradigm of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism and to her personal response to seeing such an object totally removed from its ritual environment. To her, the Nepalese Bodhisattva “felt naked and lonely.”

As remarked on repeatedly over the two days, all of the objects in the exhibition are fragments of larger and lost environments, physical, religious, social, and political. After sketching the Qing court and colonial contexts of an eighteenth-century Tibeto-Chinese *kesi* thangka (Fig. 13), Kevin Greenwood proposed thinking of these objects as relics “that consecrate our museum space with their status as true, original works of Buddhist art.”

The themes of relic and fragment carried over to the next morning, when the Japanese sculpture in the entrance gallery was uncovered. Visitors to the exhibition were welcomed by *Prince Shōtoku at the Age of Two* (Fig. 14), a hollow wooden statue that was found to contain dozens of relics of various kinds. Ye-Gee Kwon attended to this phenomenon, but was more concerned with the distinctive subject of this statue, a historical figure depicted as an adorable small child, and on the uses of such child images in Buddhism. The ensuing discussion also considered the figure’s gesture of reverence

to Amitābha Buddha. This respectful salutation, of course, made the chubby child an especially appropriate greeter at the museum door.

Like the child prince, a disembodied hand (Fig. 7), once the left hand of a colossal thirteenth-century Japanese Buddha, did double duty in the gallery, in this case as both an object for contemplation and a directional indicator pointing the way to the next gallery. Katherine Brooks and Kristopher Kersey were both drawn to the floating hand, and their presentations were complementary by design. Kersey’s wide-ranging provocation offered historical and philosophical perspectives on “art-historical contexts of fragment and colossus.” Brooks dealt with the “social lives” of the hand, from its production and original setting and function through its “afterlives” as a “relic, a collector’s piece, and a displayed object,” and brought the story down to the moment by asking: “Do we encourage the viewer to imagine the whole with a ‘devotional eye’ or does it stand alone as a work of art?” Herndon-Consagra gave one answer by describing how the curators moved the hand to find just the right angle to display it, and simply knew the perfect position when they saw it.

The cross-cultural theme of the exhibition and workshop reemerged in the last session, which was held in the Lower Gallery where golden objects from East Asia were gathered as evocations of “The Buddha’s Light.” Bing Huang and Shea Ingram discussed Chinese Bodhisattva images in very different mediums, gilt bronze versus gold on indigo paper, respectively. Bing Huang engaged the three-dimensionality of her chosen object, a small Tang-dynasty seated bodhisattva (Fig. 6), in discussing the body language of this sensual seated figure and questioning its possible ritual dispositions, principal icon versus flanking figure. Shea Ingram, the lone representative of a field outside of art history (Buddhist history), asked us to look very closely at the iconography of a Ming-dynasty accordion-fold volume of the “Universal Gateway of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara” from the Lotus Sutra (Figs. 5, 15), and pointed out the syncretic aspects of the illumination characteristic of the Ming period. Sooa Im McCormick’s consideration of a Korean Buddhist triad (Fig. 8) contemporary with the Ming illustrated Sutra was likewise broadly conceived and historically grounded, encompassing early-Joseon court patronage and the cult of the Diamond Mountain (Geumgang), as well as archaeological discoveries in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

No one talked about the Chinese Yuan-dynasty gilt-bronze image of Vaiśravaṇa, the Guardian King of the North (Fig. 5), although it is a stunning piece in excellent condition, with hands, feet, attributes, and most



FIG. 11. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in the Form of Khasarpaṇa Lokeśvara*. Late 11th or early 12th c. Pāla period. India, Bihar or Bengal. Schist. 95.3 × 47 × 17.1 cm. Asia Society, New York: Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection. Acc. no. 1979.040. Photograph by Sam Fentress.



FIG. 12. *Torso of a Buddha*. 5th c. Gupta period. Mathurā, Uttar Pradesh, India. Mottled red sandstone. 113 × 54.6 × 21.6 cm. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Purchase: William Rockhill Nelson Trust. Acc. no. 45-15. Photograph by Sam Fentress.



FIG. 13. *Left*, *Acala Candamaharosana (Budong Mingwang)*, “*The Immovable One*,” *One of the Five Great Wisdom Kings*. 1764. China. *Kesi* thangka mounted as a hanging scroll. Silk in *kesi* tapestry weave with some details painted on the surface in gold and light colors. 89.5 × 54 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Morse, 1958.8. *Center*, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Karunamaya)*. Late 10th or early 11th c. Transitional period. Nepal. Gilt copper alloy with inlays of semiprecious stones. 67.9 × 29.2 × 13.3 cm. Asia Society, New York; Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection. Acc. no. 1979.047. *Right*, *Seated Bodhisattva Tārā* in her “*Green Manifestation*” (*Duoluo pusa*). 1403–1424. Ming dynasty. China. Gilt bronze. 17.7 × 11 × 9 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Gift of Hester C. Clapp and Susan C. Wolkoff in memory of their parents, Usher P. and Sylvia S. Coolidge. Acc. no. 1992.289. Photograph by Sam Fentress.

of its gilding intact. Placed deep in the Lower Gallery, like Ānanda in the main gallery, he seemed adrift and unemployed.

While the speakers burrowed into the historical recesses of their Chinese and Korean subjects, the cave-like gallery glowed distractingly, not with the sunlight pervasive elsewhere in the building, but with radiance of the objects themselves. A Kamakura-period mandala executed in gold on indigo silk and splendidly mounted in golden silk (Fig. 5) was impossible to ignore, yet was another work not chosen for discussion. Had it been

placed in the Vajrayāna gallery, its proximity to mandalas from the Tibetan tradition would have indeed been provocative. Instead it simply offered illumination in the dual sense of the word.

All of the gold reminded me of a meeting I had with a museum director several years ago to explore the possibility of staging an exhibition of Ming-Qing and Joseon Buddhist painting. It was a short meeting. I pitched the show, and the director succinctly responded: “I don’t do jewel box exhibitions.” I wondered what she would think of the glitter in the Pulitzer gallery.



FIG. 14. *Standing Prince Shōtoku at Age Two (Shōtoku Taishi Nisaizō)*. c. 1292. Kamakura period. Japan. Japanese cypress (*hinoki*) wood. Assembled woodblock construction with polychromy and rock-crystal inlaid eyes. 67.9 × 24.8 × 22.9 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Promised gift of Walter C. Sedgwick in memory of Ellery Sedgwick Sr. and Ellery Sedgwick Jr. Acc. no. 99.1979.1. Photograph by Sam Fentress.

Actually, I am fairly certain she would like it. She is not hostile to beautiful things, but more importantly, this jewel box would likely be acceptable to her because it is part of a larger show that participates in a current museum trend to which she subscribes, that of visually and intellectually stimulating juxtapositions, “conversations” or “dialogues” between things new and old, Western and non-Western, often centering on a “big idea.” In *Reflections of the Buddha*, Buddhism is the big idea.

The workshop program described the Pulitzer exhibition as defying “the dominant trend in museology and academic art history,” namely “the attempt to recontextualize religious artworks.” Historical contextualization is certainly alive and well in our museums. Indeed, our discussion of the disembodied Japanese Buddha hand brought to mind an exhibition that raises contextualization to a new level, *Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan*, which “restores” fragments into their original stone cave-temple locations by



FIG. 15. “The Universal Gateway of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara,” Chapter Twenty-Five of the Lotus Sūtra (*Miaofa lianhua jing Guanshiyin pusa pumen-pin*), with an appended Heart Sūtra (*Xin jing*). 1432. Ming dynasty. China. Accordion-fold book. Gold ink on indigo-dyed paper. Palace copy. Overall: approximately 33.9 × 1377.6 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum. Gift of Alan Priest. Acc. no. 1926.46. Photograph by Sam Fentress.

means of 3-D imaging technology.¹ A video of a rotating disembodied hand posted to the exhibition website provides some of the same type of physical information about the object as does the installation of the Buddha hand in the Pulitzer Entrance Gallery.

While such aggressive recontextualization represents one museological path, many museums and special exhibitions are well launched down the path of staged encounters between very different sorts of objects and environments, from the simple insertion of a few non-Western objects into Western galleries (and vice versa) to larger thematic installations like the one at the Pulitzer. I was struck by the vitality of this trend in Germany and Austria several summers ago. It is nearly as pervasive as the narrative or historically contextualized trend that Pulitzer exhibition ostensibly eschews. (I say “ostensibly”

because the Foundation has been at pains not only to provide powerful aesthetic experiences that are authentic on their own terms, but also, through outreach programs like this graduate student workshop, to increase our store of art-historical knowledge.)

Reflections of the Buddha adds an engagingly retro twist to the objects-in-conversation trend. However contemporary (or “Buddhist”) the dialogue between old objects in the show and the new Tadao Andō building, and however elaborately the dialogue is theorized in contemporary or “Zen” terms, the twenty-first-century head of the snake is still eating its early twentieth-century tail. The aesthetic enterprise encapsulated in *Reflections of the Buddha* casts us back to a time when objects were collected as the finest examples of their kinds and displayed in imposing buildings modeled on

classical temples that cast an aura of sanctity on the viewing experience. At the Pulitzer, exquisite objects are governed by an exquisite building—by its structural elements, materials, spaces, colors, water, and light. Whatever the reciprocity of the relationship between art and architecture, and regardless of the extent to which the architecture provocatively invites us to view the objects in new ways, the building is the dominant voice in the conversation. The exhibition celebrates the tenth anniversary of the Tadao Andō building, and is, in effect, a reconsecration of the temple, with the workshop participants as officiants.

None of the foregoing is meant to be critical. Everyone who entered the temple and took part in the ceremony left much the richer for the experience. The workshop was an exceptional professional development opportunity for our students, and they more than repaid their hosts (and their professors) with their knowledge, creativity, and intellectual generosity. The bond forged between a remarkable institution and emerging leaders in the field of Asian art history can only serve both well.

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Impressions of the
“Reflections of the Buddha” Workshop
Katherine Brooks

I was engaged in research for the exhibition “Reflections of the Buddha” over several months, collecting information and writing catalogue entries for the four Japanese objects borrowed from the Harvard Art Museums Collection. The workshop at the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts offered a rare and much welcomed opportunity for myself and other graduate students to discuss the “Reflections of the Buddha” exhibition. The character of the galleries, the structure of the workshop, the composition of the panels, and of course, the quality and diversity of the objects included in the exhibition encouraged a lively discussion amongst the participants in a series of informal but highly productive settings. “Informal” can describe a wide variety of different formats, and it is difficult to gauge from such a designation what the tenor of a given event will turn out to be. In this case, during the very first presentation Jungmin Ha used a live model

(*Fig. 10*) to demonstrate how textiles are wrapped around the body—often difficult to identify and envision in sculpture—and the tone was set for an open and enthusiastic discussion space that extended well beyond the scheduled events.

A defining characteristic of the “Reflections of the Buddha” exhibition was that it self-consciously forced a viewer with knowledge of Buddhist image-making to reconsider previously familiar objects in an unconventional environment. The workshop attempted to articulate this interchange through a series of short presentations organized into thematic panels. As a starting point for the discussion each speaker gave a presentation on a single object in the gallery, with the prompt of “contextualization” to frame its significance and generate questions. Most presentations used the conventional method of examining the object’s iconographic, stylistic, and material profile to argue for the possible circumstances of its production before moving on to other issues. Within the presentations and in the subsequent discussions, broader comparisons were made across geographic and temporal barriers, linking or contrasting various inter-regional similarities in sculptural practice.

There was a general agreement that recourse to a standardized iconography is often inadequate for the purpose of identification, given that strategies of standardization are usually a much later development and a retrospective imposition. The objects frequently demonstrated a multivalence of meaning in their original contexts and flexibility of identity over time, which requires a localized approach to identification. This variation was exemplified by the nature of the objects interred within the sculpture of *Standing Prince Shōtoku at Age Two* (*Fig. 14*), which greeted the visitor upon entry to the exhibition. Dated to 1292, it contained a wide variety of dedicatory objects associated with different sects of Buddhism, suggesting that sectarian boundaries were not so clear-cut, or of overriding importance, to lay believers at the time of dedication. The sculpture entered the collection of the Harvard Art Museums with an Edo period (1600–1868) shrine, demonstrating the sculpture’s enduring relevance and its sustained dialogue with the spiritual community as evidenced by the layers of ritual incense residue that still darkens his skin.

The flexibility of these icons prompts us to ask: is the pressure for identification a burden that we place upon ourselves, and not necessarily a question that the sculptures demand of us? Would contemporary temple worshippers recognize the identity of the deity based on the mudra of the main icon, or the postures of the flanking attendants? It is possible that the temple surroundings, ritual practice, and surface ornamentation were