

Santa Barbara Museum Of Art Celebrates 75th Year With Religious Art From India

SANTA BARBARA, CALIF. —“Puja and Piety: Hindu, Jain and Buddhist Art from the Indian Subcontinent” and the debut of Lewis deSoto’s most recent work “Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)” will open at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art on April 17.

“Puja and Piety” presents the diverse art of India’s native religions and devotional practices. It will be on view through August 28 as one of the major presentations of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art’s (SBMA) 75th anniversary year, 2016.

This exhibition is the first in North America to celebrate the diversity of South Asian art by examining the relationship between aesthetic expression and the devotional practice, or puja, in the three native religions of the Indian subcontinent. “Puja and Piety” showcases one of the areas of the museum’s Asian art holdings that has expanded the most in recent years.

Drawn primarily from SBMA’s permanent collection and augmented by loans from regional, private lenders, the exhibition presents more than

160 objects of diverse media created over the past two millennia for temples, home worship, festivals and roadside shrines. From monumental painted temple hangings to portable pictures for pilgrims, from stone sculptures to processional bronzes and wooden chariots, from ancient terracottas to various devotional objects for domestic shrines, this exhibition aims to examine and provide contextualized insights for both classical and popular works of art.

The Indian subcontinent today consists of three sover-

eign nations: India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. While the two latter countries are predominantly Islamic, in the past they, too, had large populations practicing the three principal religions — Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism — that originated in the subcontinent. In India, Hinduism and Jainism continue to be vibrant traditions, while Buddhism is enjoying a revival after disappearing from its homeland centuries ago.

“Puja and Piety” is organized by Susan Tai, SBMA’s Elizabeth Atkins curator of Asian

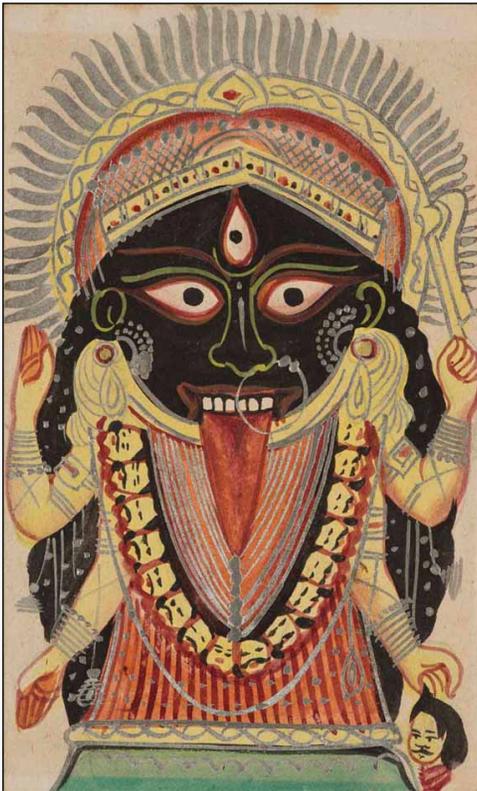
art, in collaboration with Pratapaditya Pal, guest curator and editor of the catalog.

On view concurrently is a newly commissioned work installed in the SBMA’s historic Ludington Court. Lewis deSoto’s multimedia work, a 26-foot-long “Paranirvana (Self-Portrait),” is activated — or rather brought to life — with an industrial fan, which inflates (inhales) when switched on at the beginning of the day, and deflates (exhales) when switched off at closing.

On view through July 17, the work is inspired by the Twelfth Century Buddha at Gal Vihara in Sri Lanka, and conceived in the wake of deSoto’s father’s death. It serves as not only a representation of universal life, death and supreme consciousness, but also is embellished with features similar to the artist, a self-portrait.

This is the fourth “Paranirvana” that deSoto has created, each differing in color. This newest version, black with silver paint, provides allusions to the spiritual breath (Prana) in Hindu philosophy, prevalent in the common practice of yoga. Enormous yet ephemeral, witty and thought-provoking, “Paranirvana” rouses reflections upon existence, loss and spirituality. “Lewis deSoto: Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)” is organized by Julie Joyce, curator of contemporary art at SBMA.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is at 1130 State Street. For further information, 805-963-4364 or www.sbma.net.



“Paranirvana (Self-Portrait)” by Lewis deSoto, 1999–2015. Painted vinyl-infused cloth, electric air fan, third in a series with color variations. Courtesy of Chandra Cerrito Contemporary.

Goddess Kali, manifestation of Devi (Great Goddess), India, West Bengal, Kolkata (Calcutta), late Nineteenth Century, color and silver on paper. SBMA, Gift of Pratapaditya and Chitra Pal.