

## **Statement from ACM**

*For immediate release*



# ASIAN CIVILISATIONS MUSEUM

## **Asian Civilisations Museum returns an 11th-century bronze sculpture to India**

19 October 2015 – The Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) under the management of the National Heritage Board, will return to Indian authorities an 11th-century bronze sculpture of the Chola dynasty, purchased from the New York dealer Art of the Past. The sculpture (“Sculpture”) is a religious icon depicting the Hindu goddess, Uma Parameshvari. This intention has been conveyed to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the High Commission of India to Singapore.

ACM purchased the Sculpture from the Art of the Past in 2007 for USD650,000. In July 2012, it was made aware through the international media that the Sculpture could be a subject of a criminal court case in New York concerning the illicit trafficking of artefacts from India.

In January 2015, the National Heritage Board (NHB) invited the ASI, the national agency of the Indian government overseeing its antiquities, to visit Singapore to discuss the Sculpture. ASI visited Singapore from 12 to 15 May 2015 to discuss the bases for its claim and requested for documentary evidence for the procurement of the Sculpture from NHB. ACM provided the information and documents requested by ASI, including that of the process for acquisition. ACM also facilitated ASI’s viewing of 29 other objects acquired from Art of the Past. On 16 June 2015, NHB received an official request from the ASI for the return of the Sculpture.

### **Decision to return the Uma Parameshvari sculpture**

ACM has carefully considered this request and reviewed the information provided by the ASI. While there is no conclusive proof that the Sculpture was stolen from a Shiva temple in Tamil Nadu, India, ACM took note of the confession of Aaron Freedman, who was the manager of Art of the Past, of dealing in looted Indian antiquities and of criminal possession of 150 stolen objects. The Sculpture was specifically identified by Mr Freedman as one of the 150 stolen objects.

ACM is committed to acquiring works of art legally and ethically. The Sculpture was acquired in good faith and after strict due diligence. However, as its provenance is

now found to be suspicious, ACM has decided to return the Sculpture to India. ACM will commence legal proceedings to demand compensation from Art of the Past, its owner/director Subhash Kapoor and/or its manager Aaron Freedman.

#### Update on other objects purchased from the Art of the Past

In its earlier public statements, ACM had confirmed that from 1997 to 2010 it purchased a total of 30 objects from the Art of the Past. These cost a total of US\$1,328,250. The Art of the Past has operated since 1976 and had a strong reputation among international museums until 2012 when its owner was charged with dealing in stolen property. None of the 30 items that ACM had purchased from the Art of the Past were found in any national or international register of stolen objects at the time of its purchase.

Aside from the Sculpture, none of the other 29 objects were cited in Freedman's confession, nor has any information been forthcoming in other international registers of stolen artefacts or in courts of law.

As a publicly funded state museum, ACM exercises strict due diligence in accordance with the museum's prevailing procedures in acquisition which have been benchmarked with international practices.

NHB values its strong ties with Indian cultural institutions. Its museums such as the ACM and the newly opened Indian Heritage Centre have presented various shows in India and Singapore as well as displayed objects donated or loaned from India. In June 2015, ACM had worked with ASI to present an Indian Buddhist art exhibition from the Indian Museum of Kolkata in Singapore. ACM and ASI will continue to work closely to develop exhibitions and joint projects in the future.

Issued by Asian Civilisations Museum