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The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe

Through art, performance and masterful storytelling, new exhibition at Asian Art Museum showcases ageless tale of love, bravery, friendship, and fiery battle



San Francisco, July 7, 2016 — This fall, the Asian Art Museum presents *The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe*, an exhibition of ancient and contemporary artwork depicting sacred stories that together are as old as the Bible, longer than the *Odyssey*, and a source of creative inspiration from India to Indonesia.

Countless generations around the world have grown up with this extraordinary tale, also known as the *Ramayana* — yet many Western audiences remain unfamiliar. By exploring the characters behind this beloved classic, the exhibition immerses visitors in the enduring appeal of Rama: the legendary prince, Sita: his long-suffering love, Hanuman: their faithful monkey lieutenant, and Ravana: the ten-headed lord of the demons whose abduction of Sita sets the principal drama in motion.

On view Oct. 21, 2016 – Jan. 15, 2017, *The Rama Epic* will be unprecedented in scale and scope, with 135 sculptures and paintings, masks, puppets, and examples of temple architecture originating from India, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia and borrowed from museums across the U.S., U.K. and Europe.

“This exhibition does more than introduce one of the world’s greatest adventure stories for new audiences. It’s about gaining fresh insight into its chief characters, the hero Rama, his heroine Sita, their ally Hanuman, and their foe Ravana,” says exhibition curator Forrest McGill. “We’ve organized our presentation around these figures so that each one can shine in a different light, bringing out the nuances in an ancient story that has continued to be retold in art and performance to emphasize new, relevant meanings. Its eternal — and vividly human — values of compassion, loyalty, and valor are values all audiences can connect to in their daily lives.”

To highlight the four key figures in the story and their regional variations, *The Rama Epic* will feature works from 1,500 years ago to today, from rare temple reliefs to paintings made for 17th-century royal courts to works by recent artists reinterpreting the story in modern terms. During the exhibition, the museum will also host screenings of television mini-series and movies that are cherished touchstones for hundreds of millions of Rama epic enthusiasts across southern Asia.

The Asian Art Museum will be the only exhibition venue for visitors to experience these unique artworks together, many of which have never travelled before to America. Through the interpretive magic of storytelling guides and sophisticated multimedia, *The Rama Epic* will invite visitors of all ages to discover the rich history of art-making, theatre, and live performance that continue to inspire audiences around the world.

Museum to celebrate Diwali with FREE Sunday on opening weekend

Opening weekend of Oct. 22 - Oct. 23, 2016 will coincide with the celebration of Diwali, the festival of lights that is perhaps the most important Hindu celebration during the year. Signifying the victory of light and hope over despair and darkness, Diwali at the Asian Art Museum will be an unforgettable experience for religious observers as well as visitors interested in understanding the timeless beliefs and traditions of communities spanning southern Asia.

The museum's decade-long partnership with the Target corporation means this bustling weekend of programs and activities will be FREE to all-comers on Sunday Oct. 23, drawing thousands of revelers and their families to the Asian Art Museum for hours of song, dance, storytelling, and legendary art.

Exhibition Organization

The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe is organized by the Asian Art Museum. Presentation at the Asian Art Museum is made possible with the generous support of Helen and Rajnikant Desai, The Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Fund for Excellence in Exhibitions and Presentations, Martha Sam Hertelendy, Society for Asian Art, Meena Vashee, and Nordstrom.

Exhibition Publication

The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated publication produced by the Asian Art Museum and featuring essays by Forrest McGill, Pika Ghosh, Robert P. Goldman, Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, and Philip Lutgendorf, and with contributions by Qamar Adamjee, Jeff Durham, and Natasha Reichle. (\$35 softcover, \$50 hardcover). Major support of the exhibition publication is provided by Society for Art & Cultural Heritage of India.

About the Asian Art Museum

The Asian Art Museum—Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture is one of San Francisco's premier arts institutions and home to a world-renowned collection of more than 18,000 Asian art treasures from throughout Asia spanning 6,000 years of history. Through rich art experiences, centered on historic and contemporary artworks, the Asian Art Museum unlocks the past for visitors, bringing it to life while serving as a catalyst for new art, new creativity and new thinking.

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