

# Durga Mahishasuramardini

## Public and Private Devotion

Students will engage with a close-looking exercise that explores various devotional practices and their significance in *darshan*. Darshan is the Hindu practice of “seeing and being seen.”

A bronze sculpture, such as this *Durga Mahishasuramardini* goddess figure, typically takes a place of honor in worship ceremonies, particularly in the home, allowing worshipers to engage in *darshan*—the act of seeing and being seen.

Durga as Mahishasuramardini  
Bangladesh, 12th century  
Brass  
Gift of David Nalin  
National Museum of Asian Art Collection,  
Smithsonian Institution, Arthur M. Sackler  
Collection, S1992.46



Highly skilled  
artisans who  
create bronze  
sculptures such as  
*Durga* are  
respected and pass  
on the tradition  
within families  
from father to son.

*Durga as Mahishasuramardini* measures only roughly six inches tall. Where do you think this small sculpture was worshipped?



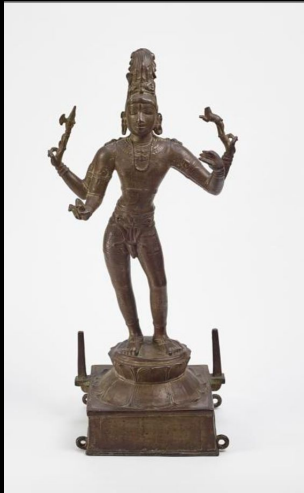
Vasudhara ("Bearer of Gems")  
Nepal, dated 1082  
Gilt copper with semi-precious stones and traces of vermillion  
Gift of Susanne K. Bennet in memory of Felicja "Lusia" Arendt (1928–1942?)  
National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Arthur M. Sackler Collection, S2012.2



National Museum of Asian Art Collection, Smithsonian Institution, Arthur M. Sackler Collection, Gift of David Nalin, S1992.46

Deities are believed to manifest within their images. Blessing is passed through a mutually empowering exchange of gazes, called *darshan*, the act of seeing and being seen by the goddess or god. In some Hindu traditions, bronze sculptures are carried in devotional processions, such as the one in this video, so that *darshan* can extend outside the temple walls.

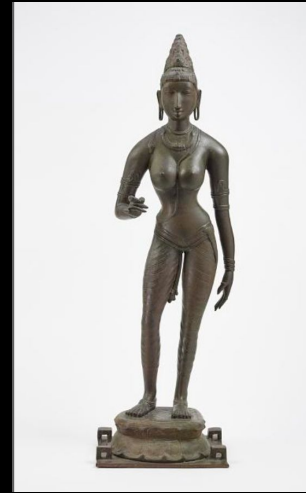
# Examples of portable bronzes that were created for use in Hindu ritual processions:



Shiva Vinadhara (Holder of the Lute)  
India, Chola dynasty, ca. 950  
Bronze  
Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment  
National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian  
Institution, Freer Collection, F1997.28



Shiva  
India, Tamil Nadu state, 15th century  
Bronze  
Gift of Arthur M. Sackler  
National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution,  
Arthur M. Sackler Collection, S1987.911



Queen Sembian Mahadevi as the Goddess Uma  
India, Tamil Nadu state, 10th century  
Bronze  
Purchase—Charles Lang Freer Endowment  
National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian  
Institution, Freer Collection, F1929.84



The religious processions pictured above are from diverse traditions. What observations can you make about the purpose of religious processions?





"Buddhist procession in Marpha" by AllOverThePlanet is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

"-Religious procession-" by Vít Hassan is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.

"Hindu Procession IMG\_3757" by Dhammika Heenpella / CWSSIP Images of Sri Lanka is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0.

## Processions take place in many religious traditions:

- Tibetan Buddhist
- Italian Catholic
- Nepalese Hindu

*Darshan* is also important in private devotion, even in the home. What differences might there be between engaging in *darshan* in a public setting versus a private setting? How might the two contexts be similar?

National Museum of Asian Art  
Collection, Smithsonian Institution,  
Arthur M. Sackler Collection, Gift of  
David Nalin, S1992.46



## Summative Discussion

What rituals do you observe both at home and in a community? Why do you engage with them in both places? How do each of these experiences contribute to a sense of community?