

Lance Dane (1923–2012)

Dealer and Collector

Lance Dane (1923–2012) was a British-born commercial photographer who lived for most of his life in India. He is known to many as a photographer; a collector of Indian antiquities who left his collection of ancient Indian coins, books, and photos to the Hinduja Foundation in Mumbai; and as the editor of an illustrated book on the *Kama Sutra*. He lived in Bombay (Mumbai) and Madras (Chennai) from the late 1940s until his death in Mumbai on May 17, 2012. By the end of his life, he lived alone, had never married, had no children, and was reportedly not a wealthy man.

Very little is known about Dane's life, and even less so about him as an art dealer or his role in the international movement of Indian antiquities during the 1950s through at least the 1970s. A fuller picture of Dane as an individual and as an art dealer is only very slowly emerging.

Born in Nottinghamshire, United Kingdom, in 1923, the son of an officer of the British Army's Sherwood Foresters infantry regiment, Dane came to India as a child. Like his father, he enrolled in the British Army and served in Burma (Myanmar) during World War II, stationed with the Royal Artillery near Rangoon (Yangon). His name appears in association with the 1947–1948 trials against the Burmese politician U Saw (1905–1948) for the assassination in 1947 of the newly independent Burma's first prime minister, Aung San (1900–1947). Major Lance Dane was accused of being one of four British Army officers who had sold stolen army-issue artillery to U Saw, which was used in the fatal attack against Aung San. While two of the officers were convicted for their roles in the political assassination, Dane was neither charged nor convicted.

Dane returned to India after 1947, and by 1957, he was working at Ratan Batra Studios, Inc., in the advertising company's Bombay branch. In December 1957, he accepted a new job in Madras, presumably as a photographer, with the company Grant Advertising, Inc., and relocated to Madras, although he continued to keep a home in Bombay. By this time, Dane was known, at least within the circles of Bombay's European emigres, as a collector of ancient Indian stone and metal sculptures and as one whose collection was rapidly growing in numbers, quality, and scale of objects. Dane displayed the artworks in his apartment in the Cumballa Hill neighborhood and, in 1955, according to his contemporary Emanuel Schlesinger (d. 1968), Dane's collection was on the verge of outstripping the well-regarded art collection of Bombay's Sir Jehangir Cowasjee (1879–1962) in both size and quality. While Schlesinger's description may perhaps be a little hyperbolic and also hint at envy, the rapid growth of Dane's collection and its comparison with Cowasjee's is worth noting. It is not yet known from where Dane was getting the money to invest in art. In September 1962, 263 objects from Dane's collection appeared at auction in New

York. These included Indian sculptures in stone, bronze, and wood as well as ancient Persian Luristan bronzes, Persian ceramics and paintings, and a small assortment of pre-Columbian and Chinese objects.

Publicly, Dane was an art collector, not an art dealer. However, many in the art circles were confused about his status, as is indicated by the private correspondence of the Tokyo-based dealer of Asian art, Alice Boney (1901-1988), who remarked to a mutual friend, “I saw some very good pieces in his collection in 1959 when I was in Madras, but he insisted he was collecting—not selling—but I know that was all malarkey.” We get glimpses of Dane’s interest in the business of Indian antiquities through his correspondence of 1957 to 1959 with Samuel Eilenberg (1913–1998), a renowned professor of mathematics at New York’s Columbia University and a collector of South Asian and Southeast Asian art. The two men presumably met in Bombay, where onwards from 1953, Eilenberg was periodically invited to teach or lecture at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research. Their correspondence during these two years occasionally mentions the names of their contemporaries, including individuals such as James D. Baldwin (1914-1987; Kansas City), Boman Behram (Bombay), J.R. Belmont (1896-1981; Basel), S.K. Bhedwar (Bombay), George P. Bickford (1915-1979; Cleveland), M.F. Hussain (Bombay), Emanuel Schlesinger (1896-1968; Bombay), and Paul Zils (1915-1979; Bombay, Munich).

It appears that by 1957, Dane had established a network of contacts with middlemen and dealers in locations across India, including Bombay and Calcutta, through whom he could secure high-quality antiquities. While more research needs to be done on Dane’s sources for artworks, his involvement in the illicit movement of Indian antiquities became public in the infamous 1974–1976 legal case of the Shivapuram Nataraja: a thirteenth-century, Chola-period South Indian bronze sculpture that was found in 1951 with six other bronzes in the ruins of a Tamil Nadu temple and was photographed *in situ* in the Shivapuram temple in 1956; it was purchased by the California collector Norton Simon (1907-1993) in 1972 and was returned to India in 1986. According to the research of scholar Richard H. Davis, Madras officials hired Dane to photograph the Shivapuram sculptures for a souvenir volume being prepared to commemorate the February 1961 visit of Queen Elizabeth II (1926-2022) to Madras. At this time, in collusion with two local “low-level antiquities dealers,” brothers Thilakar and Doss, and a well-reputed icon-maker, Sthapathy Ramasami, Dane persuaded the local authorities to send the sculptures to Ramasami for cleaning; he made replacement images that were then returned to the temple. The original Nataraja from this group was sold to Dane, who then sold it to the Bombay collector Boman Behram, and it was eventually purchased by Norton Simon from the New York dealer Ben Heller (1925-2019). The Tamil Nadu police department’s subsequent investigations found Dane, Thilakar, Doss, and Ramasami guilty, and they were charged and arrested. It is unclear if Dane served any jail time for this offense.

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