**Technical Examination of a 19th-Century Thai Buddha**

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**History**

In 2002, The Walters Art Museum received a 165-object bequest from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation’s Southeast Asian Art Collection. One prominent object from this collection is a mid-19th century monumental casting of a Seated Buddha from Thailand. This object depicts the figure of the Buddha seated on a tiered throne, surrounded with worshippers and figures representing the defeat of the demon Mara’s armies and Buddha’s subsequent enlightenment. The sculpture is lost-wax cast brass decorated with red, green, and black lacquer, gold leaf, and mirror inlays.

**Technical Study and Outlook**

Few Buddha sculptures from the Rattanakosin period are known, and no technical examination has been published for comparison. A study was undertaken at The Walters to inform upcoming treatment, and add to the technical literature on this time period. It is hoped the preliminary information presented below will increase exposure and encourage future analysis on similar 19th-century Thai sculpture.

**Lacquer**

The entire sculpture is covered in a layer of lacquer, with the purpose of adhering gilding and filling small casting flaws. The horizontal areas of the throne and the upturned back are pigmented. The red lacquer pigment contains mercury, and the green contains arsenic. Lacquer cross-sections were taken from four locations and characterization is ongoing. Preliminary results suggest these lacquer layers and one gilding layer.

**Core & Armature**

We refer the underside image above. The core material was modeled with a hollow central cavity and the throne, an unusual feature not observed in other Thai casting methods. This allowed the core to remain in place after casting to support the thin-walled sculpture, without the work of removing it with a chisel. Handprints visible inside this cavity and metal extruded from a casting tin, confirm the core was created intentionally before casting. Core samples were taken for thin-section analysis.

**Metal**

The sculpture is hollow hot-wax cast brass. The surface ornament was created from wax that was extruded into molds. Casting flaws were not repaired in metal, but filled with lacquer. The thin-mold streamlined mold-making process, and minimal post-casting work may indicate a well-established metal foundry with high production speed.

**Conservation Challenges**

The sculpture was acquired by Doris Duke in Thailand and shipped to her estate in Hawaii, then stored in uncontrolled conditions in a dock warehouse. It was then shipped to her property in New Jersey and stored in an indoor red clay tennis court that subsequently flooded. The surface is covered in a thick layer of dirt and grime, including food debris. The lacquer layers are severely ignited-damaged and soiled. Significant portions of the lacquer and gilding layer are lost. Conservation treatment will begin shortly, focusing on cleaning the lacquer and gilding and visually integrating the losses.