



## KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA

### NATION RELIGION KING

#### MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND FINE ARTS

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Phnom Penh, 03 July 2024.

#### PRESS RELEASE

### Recovery of Cambodia's National Treasures: 14 Cambodian Artifacts from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York return to Cambodia

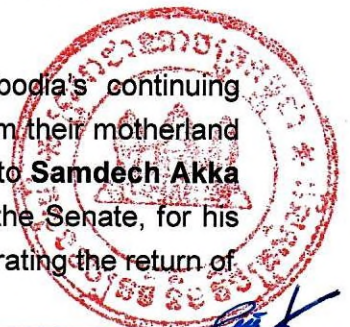
The Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts is delighted to inform the public that the 14 Cambodian cultural artifacts announced to be returned to Cambodia in December 2023 have now arrived at the National Museum of Cambodia in Phnom Penh on 3 July 2024. This historic homecoming of our national treasures from one of the largest cultural institutions in the world, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the "MET"), followed several years of negotiations between the Cambodian restitution team, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York (SDNY), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and representatives of the MET.

The repatriation includes the extraordinary stone sculpture of a 10<sup>th</sup> century female goddess (Uma) from the ancient royal capital of Koh Ker. In 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts successfully located her foot at Koh Ker temple complex, and based on testimony from former looters, determined that the body of the sculpture had been looted in 1997. At last, the Uma can be reunified to achieve its full magnificence as one complete statue.

Another exceptionally rare and expertly crafted statue is a late 10<sup>th</sup> early 11<sup>th</sup> century bronze Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, designated by the MET as "Seated in Royal Ease". The sculpture was sold to the MET by Douglas A.J. Latchford in 1992, whom the MET itself described as a nefarious dealer. Moreover, a significant returned artifact is a 10<sup>th</sup> century bronze head of the deity Avalokiteshvara, which the Ministry highly anticipates finally being reunited with its matching torso, currently on display at the National Museum of Cambodia. The head is believed to have been looted in the 1990s and the torso was found in a river in the 1930s, in Battambang.

H.E. Dr. Phoeurng Sackona, Minister of Culture and Fine Arts, stated: "This return of our national treasures, held by the MET, is of utmost importance not only for Cambodia, but for all of humankind. We have many more treasures at the MET which we also hope will be returned to Cambodia. We are thrilled that a number of private collectors and museums have reached out to us in recent months, and we expect many more significant returns in the future."

H.E. Minister further remarked: "This repatriation shows once again Cambodia's continuing commitment to finding and bringing back our ancestors' souls that departed from their motherland during past decades of civil war. We would like to express my utmost gratitude to **Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN**, former Prime Minister and President of the Senate, for his wise leadership and peace with the win-win policy. Cambodians are today celebrating the return of



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our ancestors' souls as a blessing to our new Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, **Samdech Moha Borvor Thipadei HUN MANET.**"

The Minister would like to sincerely thank and praise the efforts of United States Attorney Damian Williams of the SDNY, the prosecutors from SDNY, especially Jessica Feinstein and Shiva Logarajah, the investigators from HSI, especially Special Agents John P. Labbat and Robert Mancene, and all relevant authorities both abroad and in Cambodia, with particular thanks to the US Embassy in Phnom Penh, and the Ministry's team of archaeologists and researchers. The Minister would also like to extend special thanks to Bradley J. Gordon of Edenbridge Asia, Steven Heimberg of Apex Advisors, Melina Antoniadis of NOSTOS Strategies, and Professor Ashley Thompson of SOAS who assisted with the negotiations.

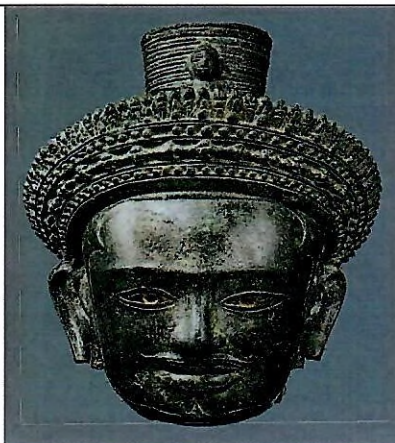
The Minister concluded: "These returns contribute to the reconciliation and healing of the Cambodian people, who endured decades of civil war and suffered tremendously from the tragedy of the Khmer Rouge regime. They also demonstrate the truly positive partnership we have developed with the United States."



**Female deity (Uma)**  
Sandstone, Angkor period, Koh Ker style, 10th C.



**Ardhanarishvara**  
Bronze, Pre-Angkor period, 7th-8th C.



**Head of Bodhisattva  
Avalokiteshvara**  
Copper alloy, Angkor period,  
10th C.



**Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara**  
Copper alloy with silver inlay,  
Angkor period, 10th-early 11th C.



**Head of Shiva**  
Bronze with silver inlay,  
Angkor period, Koh Ker style,  
10th C.

