

AGSA's extensive provenance research results in the Siva Nataraja Idol rightfully repatriated to India

The Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA)'s provenance research has resulted in the 16th Century bronze, 'Siva Nataraja' or Dancing Siva being rightfully returned to India. The repatriation took place in New Delhi at an intimate ceremony on 11 September 2019 hosted by the Archaeological Survey of India, who has commended AGSA for their response to the provenance findings.

Dr A.M. Gondane, High Commissioner of India to Australia says, 'We thank the AGSA team for their extensive efforts in repatriating the 'Nataraja' idol from AGSA to its rightful place in India. This is a very propitious beginning of cooperation between AGSA and the Government of India which will open new vistas in near future.'

AGSA was pleased to work closely with the High Commission of India, the Archaeological Survey of India and the Idol Wing of Tamil Nadu Police to ensure the successful return of the statue to India.

Following the revision of its Due Diligence Policy, AGSA initiated collection provenance research in 2014. In September 2016, Curator of Asian Art, James Bennett, commenced research into the extensive photographic archives of Indian art at the French Institute of Pondicherry and subsequently identified a 1958 photograph which appeared to depict the *Siva Nataraja* sited in a south Indian temple. The following year, Bennett visited the temple and was able to confirm this in consultation with the temple's local custodians. Working closely and collaboratively with the Indian High Commission since then, AGSA has successfully repatriated the *Siva Nataraja* (Dancing Siva) to India.

Rhana Devenport ONZM, Director AGSA said on 11 September, 'AGSA's rigorous, ongoing and transparent research into its collection has revealed the provenance of the *Siva Nataraja* (Dancing Siva), which, as a result, was rightfully and formally returned to India today.'

There is no indication of other provenance concerns with works of art in AGSA's collection, however research and due diligence remains an ongoing practice.

AGSA Provenance research timeline – *Siva Nataraja*

- AGSA acquired the *Siva Nataraja* (Dancing Siva) in 2001 following standard protocols that were at the time widely accepted as professionally rigorous.
- Following the revision of AGSA Due Diligence Policy, AGSA initiated ongoing collection provenance research in 2014.

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- In 2016 AGSA Curator of Asian Art, James Bennett, identified a photograph in the French Institute of Pondicherry that led to Bennett's suspicion that the *Siva Nataraja* had been improperly removed from a temple in Tamil Nadu.
- In 2017 James Bennett visited the temple and temple custodians confirmed that the *Siva Nataraja* once belonged to the temple, Indian authorities were then advised.
- The process of deaccessioning and repatriation of the sculpture was commenced as soon as AGSA received a First Information Report from the Government of India in February 2019 to which AGSA immediately agreed.
- The sculpture was formally deaccessioned by AGSA Board on 16 April 2019 in readiness for its repatriation to India.
- The sculpture was repatriated at a small ceremony hosted by the Archaeological Survey of India on 11 September, 2019 in New Delhi.
- The *Siva Nataraja* was returned to Tamil Nadu arriving at the Chennai Central Station on 13 September 2019 to a reception, where the *Siva Nataraja* idol was welcomed by priests, police officials and devotees.
- AGSA looks forward to seeing the *Siva Nataraja* reinstalled in the temple of its origin in Tamil Nadu, India.

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