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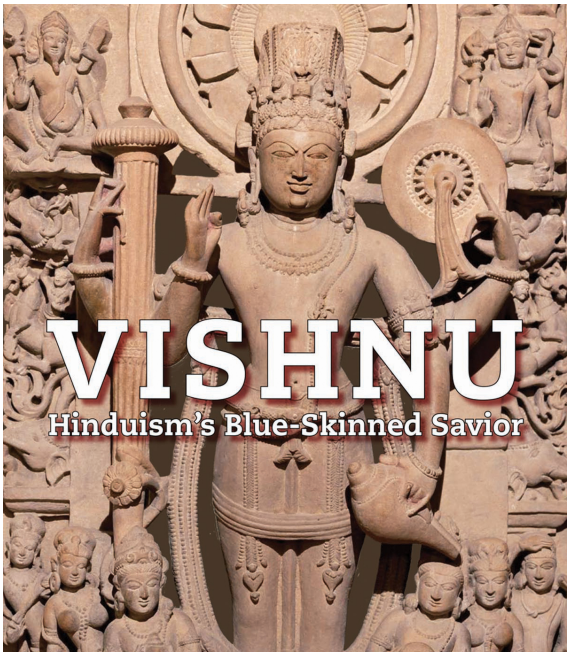

Vishnu

Hinduism's Blue-Skinned Saviour

Edited by Joan Cummins

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- Vishnu-Hinduism's most important and powerful deity

Vishnu-Hinduism's most important and powerful deity. He is the great Preserver, vanquishing those who seek to destroy the balance of the universe. For his followers he is also the Creator and the Destroyer, the cause of all existence. His many traits are embodied in his impressive physical form, the weapons he carries, the goddesses who are his consorts, and the eagle, Garuda, on whom he flies down from heaven. In Hindu legend, Vishnu descends to earth in many manifestations, known as avatars, to fight powerful demons and to save his devotees. The avatars range in form from Varaha the boar to Parashurama the Brahmin warrior, and in character from Narasimha the ferocious half-man half-lion, to Krishna the charismatic prince-cowherd. The legends of Vishnu have inspired some of the greatest art, literature, and ritual traditions in India. This catalog examines the many faces of Vishnu and the ways that the god has been represented, from antiquity to the present. Essays by noted historians of South Asian art delve deeply into the regional and sectarian traditions of Vishnu worship in India. Illustrations and discussions of almost two hundred works of art, in a wide range of media and borrowed from collections throughout the United States and Europe, reveal the rich diversity of India's art and religious culture. With contributions from Doris Meth Srinivasan, Leslie C. Orr, Cynthia Packert, Joan Cummins and Neeraja Poddar. Co-published with Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville.

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