

Spring 2025 Arts of Asia Lecture Series

Visualizing the Divine

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## Fluid Icons: Śleṣa and the Mutability of the Sacred Image

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### Temple Terminology:

alaṃkāra: adornment

śleṣa: synthesis, simultaneous narration, double interpretation, and “an embrace”

acalamūrti: immovable icon

calamūrti: movable icon

calācalamurti: a moveable and immovable icon (often mineral of gemstone)

mūlavigraha: lit. “root form or embodiment”; sanctum icon

uṭsavamurti: festival icon

vāhana: (usually animal) “vehicle” that carries icons in procession

pūjā: worship from the Tamil, pū cey “done with flowers” or pūsai “to smear”

pūccattai: dress made of flowers

kavaca: lit. “armor,” often silver crowns, hands feet and eyes that fit over the icon

### Gods & Saints:

Chennakeśava: “The One with Handsome Hair,” a form of Viṣṇu

Kāntimati Amman: “Goddess of the Luminous Mind,” a form of Pārvatī

Nellaiyappar: “Lord of the Rice Paddy,” a form of Śiva

Nātarāja: “King of the Dance” a form of dancing Śiva that symbolizes his Five Perfections

Gajendramokṣa: Viṣṇu “Who Grants Liberation to the King of the Elephants”

Tripurāntaka: “Destroyer of the Three Cities,” a form of Śiva. Aka Tripuravjāya “Victor Over the Three Cities”

Vinādhāra: “Holder of the Vinā,” a form of Śiva as the sublime musician

Nātarāja: “King of the Dance” a form of dancing Śiva that symbolizes his Five Perfections

Sundarar (Cuntarar): “The Handsome One” a canonized poet saint (nāyaṇār, “leader”) in Śaiva Siddhānta

Sambhandar (Campantar): a canonized child poet saint (nāyaṇār, “leader”) in Śaiva Siddhānta

Āṇāya: a flute playing canonized poet saint (nāyaṇār, “leader”) in Śaiva Siddhānta

Āṇḍāl: “She Who Rules;” a canonized poet saint in Śrī Vaiṣṇava who is also regarded as a goddess

Raṅgamaṇṇār: “Lord of the Stage/Color

Varāha: The third avatāra of Viṣṇu in the form of a boar

Arjuna: Son of Indra and hero of the *Mahābhārata*

Bhagīratha: Legendary king who brings the Ganges River down to the Earth through his austerities  
Buddha: the Enlightened One  
Avalokiteśvara: the Bodhisattva of Compassion  
Tārā: Buddhist Goddess of Mercy

### **Suggested Reading:**

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