



Forms of the Goddess Lajja Gauri in Indian Art (Monographs on the Fine Arts) (College Art Association Monograph)

Gillen Wood

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Striking images of a certain Indian goddess have been variously referred to as the 'shameless woman' the 'nude squatting goddess,' the 'mother goddess,' or because her historical name remains unknown, but more than twenty-five names, among them Aditi, Lajja Gauri, Renuka, and Nagna Kabambdha. The best-known images of this goddess have a female torso and a lotus flower in place of a head, while her legs are bent up at the knees and drawn up to each side in a position that has been described as one of giving birth of self-display. This type of goddess figure is explained as part of a long, highly sophisticated tradition of expressing fertility and well-being in Indian art. The artists creating images of Lajja Gauri drew on various ancient symbols of fortune, fertility, and life-force to communicate her power through their rich heritage of meanings. As these historical-religious symbols and images were constantly reused and reincorporated, they formed a new and enriched religious context. In the process of recycling they became empowered cultural metaphors, visual morphemes in the language of Indian art. Because there are no texts to explain the figure, the study proceeds from the basis of the objects to derive their meaning. Carol Bolon charts the changes in the goddess's form over a period of more than four centuries, including its possible adoption from tribal worship into Hindu temples, and brings a new appreciation of Lajja Gauri's rich symbolic meanings and cultural context.

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