



DECEMBER 2015

Sitting Still

Water-Moon Guanyin



VISIT THE BMA

and see *Water-Moon Guanyin* in the Asian art galleries.

Detail, *Water-Moon Guanyin*. 15th century. China, Hebei province. Bronze, originally gilded, with blue and red pigment. 61¾ inches tall. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Julius Levy Memorial Fund, BMA 1944.80

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It's not easy to sit absolutely still. We wiggle, we squirm, we get distracted. But in Buddhist belief, Guanyin sits quietly day after day, listening to all the sounds of the world. When worshippers tell her their troubles and pray for help and protection, Guanyin remains calm and serene. She hears stories of sickness and sadness, floods and droughts, and disappointments and fears as well as appeals for good health, wealth, and children. In the Chinese Buddhist tradition, Guanyin is a beloved Goddess of Mercy and Compassion, who understands people's struggles, performs miracles, grants wishes, and alleviates pain.

Guanyin is a *bodhisattva*, someone who has followed the rules for good living prescribed by the Buddha and has earned the right to pass into the blissful state called *nirvana*, where she will never again have to face the hardships of living. Nevertheless, the kind and wise Guanyin has decided to remain on earth to hear the cries and prayers of people who are suffering and help them find peace of mind.

Worshippers of Guanyin believe that she can change her physical appearance in order to reach people in need. Here she is *Water-Moon Guanyin*, meditating on the reflection of the moon in water. Adorned with beaded necklaces and clothed in flowing robes that ripple around her feet, she allows one leg to dangle over the edge of the pedestal. With the grace of a dancer, she extends her arm, resting it ever so gently on top of her bent knee, letting her fingers fall without a trace of tension. Do not mistake this gentle pose for weakness, however. Her other arm is strong and straight as a pillar, supporting Guanyin just as she supports the worshippers who appeal for her help.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Study Guanyin's relaxed position. This pose is called "royal ease." Compare other examples of the same pose at <http://bit.ly/1Olq2Ax>. Which sculpture looks most relaxed? Look for Guanyin in two of her other forms: "White-Robed Guanyin" and "Thousand Eyes and Thousand Arms Guanyin."

In the flickering candlelight of a Buddhist temple, the sculpture would have appeared to be made of gold. Look for a place where the gilding has been rubbed off by worshippers who touched it as a sign of affection. (In the BMA's Asian art galleries, please do not touch!)

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



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