



THE *Six Senses*
OF BUDDHISM

Buddhist practices engage the senses. Incense wafts through the air: smell. Sculptures and paintings dazzle your eyes: sight. The ringing of a bell calls to you: sound. The stimulating flavor of tea passes over your tongue: taste. Silk brocade slides against your skin: touch. And all of this is brought together in your mind...even as you read this text: thought—the essential sixth sense in Buddhism.

The senses play a complex role in Buddhist practice. On the one hand, sensory experience is considered a dangerous temptation because it encourages ties to people, places, and objects. Such attachments are a chief obstacle in the journey toward enlightenment—the understanding of one's place in a cycle of life, death, and rebirth (*samsara*) and, eventually, release from this cycle. And yet it is impossible to escape sensory experience, especially in learning about or practicing Buddhism. Monks often use the senses to teach laypeople about complex Buddhist concepts, even though, paradoxically, sensory experiences are part of what binds them to *samsara*.

Focusing on types of objects used in Japan, the works displayed here illustrate how the senses are incorporated into Buddhist practice. We invite you to engage your senses—perhaps most of all your mind—as you move through the gallery.

Susan Dine
Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, 2017-2018

with

Natsu Oyobe
Curator of Asian Art

#sixsenses

Lead support for *The Six Senses of Buddhism* is provided by the Japan Business Society of Detroit Foundation and the University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies.



20"

82"

106"

All objects drawn to 1/10th scale • Eyeline = 60" from floor

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