A magnificent group of temple bronzes brought together from public and private collections in Europe and the United States forms the core of The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India, which seeks to broaden our understanding and appreciation of Chola bronzes by productively contrasting these areas of perception. This exhibition expands upon traditional museum practice by addressing the ritual adornment and sacred resonance of bronzes and by incorporating historical and contemporary Hindu voices into its curatorial framing.

Most of the bronzes date from the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries CE, the apex of Chola dynastic strength and the height of their aesthetic tradition. The Chola aesthetic of fluid movement, supple flesh contrasted with delicately carved ornament, elegant proportion, and serene expression is evident in an astonishing array of divine forms ranging from a seated Nataraja with ferocious but contained power (Cleveland Museum of Art) to an elegantly composed wedding group of Krishna, his wives and attendant Garuda (Los Angeles County Museum of Art). The bronzes are spotlit, displayed upon pedestals, and accompanied by curatorial labels.

While the exhibition situates many of the bronzes in this aestheticizing fashion, it also seeks to address the meanings that these bronzes have had for historical and contemporary Hindu audiences. In choosing bronzes for the exhibition, curator Dr Vidya Dehejia was guided not only by exogenously inspired aestheticizing fashion, it also seeks to address the meanings that these bronzes have had for historical and contemporary Hindu audiences. In choosing bronzes for the exhibition, curator Dr Vidya Dehejia was guided not only by exogenously inspired aestheticizing fashion, it also seeks to address the meanings that these bronzes have had for historical and contemporary Hindu audiences. In choosing bronzes for the exhibition, curator Dr Vidya Dehejia was guided not only by exogenously inspired aestheticizing fashion, it also seeks to address the meanings that these bronzes have had for historical and contemporary Hindu audiences. 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