



# Montien Boonma and Buddhist imagery

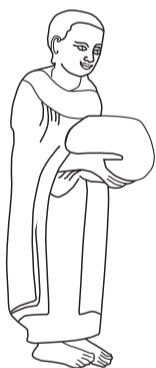
Montien Boonma was a leading contemporary artist who studied in Thailand, France and Italy. He is best known for his work in sculpture and installation, in which he combined modern industrial and found materials with organic substances used in Thai traditional art. He often produced detailed and evocative preliminary sketches for major constructions and series of works.

Montien Boonma's strong Buddhist faith was tested by a series of personal misfortunes throughout the last decade of his life, when most of the works in this exhibition were produced. The artist drew on Buddhist philosophical concepts to explore ideas of healing, prayer and meditation. Many of the works in Montien Boonma: Temple of the mind incorporate archetypal Buddhist shapes and symbols, interpreted in an innovative and personal manner. Some of these symbols are explained below.

## Buddha

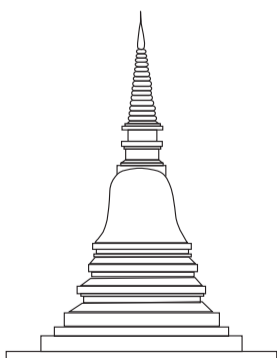


Buddha, meaning 'one who is awakened', is the most commonly recognised symbol of Buddhism. Images of the Buddha incorporate a diversity of teachings and meanings. In Thailand today, the serene sculptures of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni displayed in temples are often cast from bronze using the ancient lost-wax [cire perdue] process. Buddha images can be identified by auspicious markings which include a cranial bump, sometimes forming a flame, elongated earlobes and neck rings. As well as reflecting Montien Boonma's interest in sculptures of the Buddha, certain works show his fascination with the tools and molds used in casting.



## Alms bowl

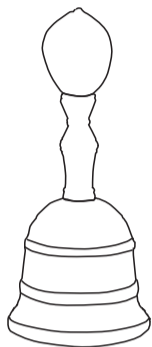
The alms bowl is one of the few possessions of a Buddhist monk or nun and is used to collect food from the lay population. The ritual supports the sacred community and provides religious merit in the next life to those who give. The alms bowl is also a symbol of the simplicity of the Buddha's life.



## Stupa or pagoda

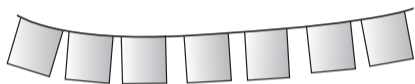
A stupa, also known as a pagoda, is an architectural structure built to house Buddhist relics. While the shape of the stupa or pagoda varies across Asia, in Thailand it takes a mountain or dome-like form. A popular symbol of the Buddha, often built to attain spiritual merit and better standing in the next life, the stupa is visited by pilgrims who encircle the base in a clockwise direction as an act of devotion.





### **Bell**

Bells are symbolic objects used in Buddhist rituals. The hollow form of the bell represents the concept of emptiness, while sound is related to wisdom. Sounds and vibrations created by ringing bells are similar to chants or mantras recited during meditation. Buddhist bells range from handbells to the huge bronze bells placed in the grounds of temples.



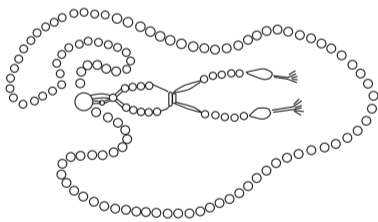
### **Prayer flags**

Prayer flags are coloured pieces of cloth decorated with sacred images, prayers or Buddhist texts [sutra]. Rows of prayer flags are strung up outside, so that the prayers and offerings of worship can be sent on the wind. They also inform the community when religious ceremonies take place.



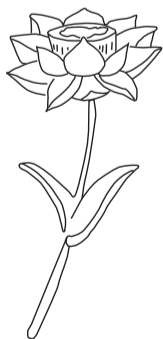
### **Herbs**

Medicinal herbs and aromatic spices are the basis of traditional healing practices which have a long association with Buddhism in Thailand. The fragrant herbs soothe and heal both body and mind.



### **Prayer beads**

Prayer beads, or rosaries, are used in certain Buddhist rites and can be worn and carried by lay devotees as well as priests. Made from fragrant wood or herbal substances and strung onto special thread, prayer beads assist in reciting and remembering chants and prayers.



### **Lotus**

The lotus is a recurring symbol in Buddhist art. The throne on which the Buddha sits is often lotus-shaped. The long-stemmed flower symbolises mental purity and the potential of all beings to achieve enlightenment, since 'a lotus will grow even in rubbish thrown away. It will delight the heart with its sweet smell and beauty.' (Dhammapada).

