

Stacey Ravel Abarbanel, staceyra@arts.ucla.edu
310/825-4288

For Immediate Use
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**“Fowler in Focus: Masks of Sri Lanka”
Opens March 1 at the Fowler Museum at UCLA**



Brightly painted wooden masks transform Sri Lankan dancers into specific characters that appear in curing rituals or popular entertainment. The Fowler Museum collections include the most important assemblage of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Sri Lankan masks in North America, and *Fowler in Focus: Masks of Sri Lanka*—opening at the Fowler on March 1, 2009—presents twenty-five of these rare masks. Two recently produced masks with full costume, in the forms of a shaggy yellow lion and a malevolent bear-like graveyard spirit, complete the selection. Accompanying photographs and video offer visitors an opportunity to see these powerful masks in use.

Ranging from comical to fierce, striking masks have long played an important role in Sri Lankan performance genres that were created through the mixing of local indigenous religious traditions with strains of Buddhism and Hinduism imported from the Indian mainland in the first millennium BCE. Masks representing different diseases or spirits are used for curing ceremonies (*tovil*) during which elaborate rituals are performed for patients in front of their homes.

One spectacular curing mask consists of a demon’s face topped with cobra heads, surmounted by a towering display of the heads of the eighteen spirits of gruesome afflictions. Another set of masks in the exhibition was used purely for entertainment in various forms of satirical drama (*kolam*). These include crowned members of the Sinhala royalty, a Vedda hunter-king, a wounded soldier, and the wives of various legendary figures.

Fowler in Focus: Masks of Sri Lanka is co-curated by David Blundell, associate professor, National Chengchi University, Taiwan and Roy W. Hamilton, the Fowler’s curator of Asian and Pacific collections, and will be on view in the Fowler in Focus gallery, the central space within “Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives.” Fowler in Focus is dedicated to rotating installations of new acquisitions, sub-collections, and particular artistic genres in the Fowler’s permanent holdings. The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA’s School of the Arts and Architecture, is located in the north part of the

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UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$9 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.

Related Event:

Sunday April 5, 2009

3 and 3:30 pm

Exhibition Tour: *Fowler in Focus: Masks of Sri Lanka*

Anthropologist David Blundell, Associate Professor in Languages and Cultures at National Chengchi University, Taiwan, and research affiliate at UCLA leads a tour of the *Fowler in Focus* exhibition, examining the masking traditions of the Sinhala communities of the southern coastal region of Sri Lanka.

4 pm

Performance: Dances of Sinhala

Sri Lankan drummers, dancers, singers and actors from the performance group **Sapthabhumi** (meaning "resplendent seven lands") present ecstatic healing ritual dances and satirical mask dramas of the Sinhala folk traditions of the Southern Province.

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