



# The Two-Headed Deer: Illustrations of the Ramayana in Orissa (California Studies in the History of Art)

By Joanna Williams

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## **The Two-Headed Deer: Illustrations of the Ramayana in Orissa (California Studies in the History of Art)** By Joanna Williams

India's epic poem, the Ramayana, is a dramatic, ever-evolving tale of a prince and his bride, their adventures and dilemmas, and demons. Joanna Williams studies the art of the Ramayana in Orissa, a region known for its elegantly carved temples. There she researched both literary and visual art works, interviewed artists, and observed them at work.

With depth and originality, Williams considers how Indian art tells a story in distinctive ways. Her narratological study takes into account many familiar genres of visual art: illustrated manuscripts, drawings on palm leaf paper, wall paintings, shadow plays, temple sculpture, and painted cloth *pata*. Included are discussions of pan-Indian versions of the epic, which include film, video, and the comic strip; and those local to Orissa, including rural theater and festivals.

Noting that we often treat images designed to be seen in sequence as separate pictures, Williams argues that considering several Ramayana images in sequence reveals their qualities of variety, surprise, and emotional development, promoting an understanding of how the story is told. She discusses the artists' narrative strategies and offers interpretations of *how* and *why* artists made their choices.

Williams persuasively argues against critics who believe that Indian art, indeed any traditional art, is conventional and lacks individual technique or vision. Her analysis across a variety of genres offers a new model for art historians; at the same time anthropologists, folklorists, and scholars of literature and narratology will find her work of great value.

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## **The Two-Headed Deer: Illustrations of the Ramayana in Orissa (California Studies in the History of Art) By Joanna Williams Bibliography**

- Rank: #4651134 in Books
- Published on: 1996-06-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 1.16" h x 7.31" w x 10.32" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 330 pages



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#### About the Author

**Joanna Williams** is Professor of Art History at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *The Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province* (1982) and co-author of *Palm-Leaf Miniatures: The Art of Raghunath Prusti of Orissa* (1991).

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