

## Javanese art



This album was probably produced at the palace (*kraton*) of the sultanate of Yogyakarta in central Java. It tells the story of Werkudara, otherwise known as Bima who, in the Javanese version of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, is one of the five brothers of the Pandawa clan. In the original Indian epic Bima is a great warrior and a rather coarse fellow, but in the Javanese version he undertakes a quest to the bottom of the sea to find the elixir of life and instead discovers his true nature in the form of Dewi Ruci, who paradoxically appears at first to be small and weak.

The illustrations in this album combine the traditional *wayang* style figures, derived from Javanese shadow puppet theatre, with naturalistic elements borrowed from European prints and book illustrations, the latter seen in the painterly style of the landscapes and sea creatures.

This story, illustrating Bima's realisation of the knowledge of true self, is known as *Serat Dewi Ruci*. It dates from the sixteenth century during a period of transition in Java from Hinduism to Islam and reveals the influence of Islamic mysticism on Javanese Hinduism, as Islamic teachers incorporated Sufic concepts into familiar Hindu narratives.

### JAVANESE

*Illustrated manuscript of Serat Dewi Ruci*

1886, Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia  
book: watercolour, gouache, ink and gold paint on paper, 160 pages, cardboard and leather cover, stitch binding

33.6 x 21.0 cm (page) 34.4 x 21.0 x 2.6 cm (closed) 34.4 x 42.0 x 1.3 cm (open)  
Presented by the Friends of the Gallery Library in memory of Tina Wentcher, 1982 (AS29-1982)