

#SOTHEYB'S NEW YORK

Rembrandt's Young Lion Resting

Young Lion Resting stands apart even among Rembrandt's rare animal studies. The lion is not roaring, hunting, or asserting dominance. Instead, it reclines



One of only six surviving drawings of lions by Rembrandt van Rijn, *Young Lion Resting* has traveled across continents to arrive at Sotheby's New York, where it will be on view from 31 January as part of the prestigious Masters Week exhibition. Though small in scale, the drawing carries an emotional and artistic gravity that far exceeds its size, an intimate encounter with the mind of one of history's greatest artists.

Set to be offered in the Old Masters auction on 4 February in New York, the work holds significance beyond the art world. Proceeds from the sale will benefit Panthera, the world's leading conservation organization dedicated to the protection of wild cats, an echo of the subject's enduring symbolic power.

Why Lions? Rembrandt's Fascination with Strength and Humanity

Rembrandt's choice of lions was neither decorative nor accidental. In 17th-century Europe, lions symbolized power, nobility, divine authority, and inner strength. They appeared in biblical narratives, royal emblems, and moral allegories, subjects that deeply interested Rembrandt throughout his career.

Unlike artists who depicted lions as fearsome emblems of dominance, Rembrandt approached them as living beings. He was fascinated by the tension between strength and vulnerability, grandeur and introspection. Lions, with their commanding presence and expressive faces, offered him the perfect subject through which to explore these contrasts.

Rembrandt is believed to have drawn lions from life, likely studying them in menageries that were emerging across Europe at the time. These encounters allowed him to observe not just anatomy, but temperament, how power rests when it is not performing.

'Young Lion Resting': A Study in Stillness and Soul

Young Lion Resting stands apart even among Rembrandt's rare animal studies. The lion is not roaring, hunting, or asserting dominance. Instead, it reclines, alert yet calm, powerful yet unguarded. This

quiet moment transforms the animal from a symbol into a presence. What distinguishes the drawing is Rembrandt's extraordinary linework. With minimal strokes, he captures weight, musculature, and breath. The lines are confident but sensitive, creating form without rigidity. The lion's face, in particular, reveals a soulful introspection—eyes heavy with awareness, as though the animal exists in contemplation rather than display.

Jeremy Irons, the voice of Scar in *The Lion King* films, explores this lineage of the lion in art history, highlighting how Rembrandt's depiction diverges from theatrical villainy or heroic exaggeration. Here, the lion is neither tyrant nor myth; it is real, grounded, and deeply felt.

A Masterpiece of Observation and Empathy

Rembrandt's genius lay in his ability to reveal inner life, whether in portraits, biblical figures, or animals. *Young Lion Resting* exemplifies this gift. The drawing feels less like a study and more like a conversation between artist and subject. The lion is observed with empathy, not dominance, a quality that gives the work its timeless resonance.

The drawing's small scale enhances its intimacy. It invites the viewer to lean in, to notice the pauses between lines, the economy of gesture, and the emotional restraint that defines Rembrandt's maturity as an artist.

Legacy, Conservation, and Continuing Relevance

That this drawing now supports wild cat conservation adds a poignant contemporary layer to its story. Centuries after Rembrandt captured the quiet dignity of a resting lion, real lions face unprecedented threats in the wild. The artwork thus bridges past and present, art history and ecological responsibility.

In *Young Lion Resting*, Rembrandt reminds us that true power does not always roar. Sometimes, it rests, watches, and endures. This tiny masterpiece stands not only as a testament to Rembrandt's unparalleled observational skill, but also as a meditation on strength, vulnerability, and the soulful presence shared by humans and animals alike.



● Rajesh Chettiar

Jeevaka Chintamani, considered to be one of the five greatest ever Tamil epics, is a 10th-century classic composed by the Jain monk Thiruthakka Thevar. It was a forgotten treasure till Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer (also called UVeSa) rediscovered and assembled the complete manuscript after a statewide hunt that lasted many years. He then breathed life into many other literary classics, reviving the lost glory of ancient Tamil literature. Here is how it happened.

The challenge

Swaminatha Iyer was a Tamil professor at the Kumbakonam Government College, who had studied at a Hindu monastery (Thiruvaduthurai) which also nurtured Tamil literature. Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar was a munsif (junior judge) in the British Raj, and

a great connoisseur of Tamil literature. It was a conversation between these two that sparked UVeSa's quest.

One day Judge Ramaswami tanned UVeSa saying, 'What do you know of the ancient classics? Can you even annotate the Jeevaka Chinatamani?'

This was in the 1880s, when Tamil scholarship had fallen to a new low. Macaulay-inspired English institutions had begun dominating India, and vernacular studies languished. Tamil pundits taught literature that was, at the most, 250 years old. Classical Tamil literature, with a 2000-year-old legacy, shaped by highly sophisticated grammar and subtle poetry, was almost unknown. Printing technology had come to India by the 16th century, but very few Tamil classics were in print.

Stung by Ramaswami's challenge, UVeSa was determined to produce a complete research paper on the subject. In order to help him kick-start the project, Ramaswami gave him a transcript with a com-



Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer.

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Palm leaf manuscripts.

mentary on the epic by a 14th-century scholar named Nachinarkiniyar.

The 'fake' manuscript

Intuitively, Uvesa rushed to his alma mater, the Thiruvaduthurai monastery, to find references to Jeevaka Chintamani. He scoured its vast library and found another manuscript of the commentary by Nachinarkiniyar. Oddly, the two versions did not match. How could two commentaries by the same author on the same subject be different? Before we go further into the story, we need to go back in time to understand ancient manuscripts. How did 2000-year-old literature get passed down from generation to generation before printing technology evolved?

Through olai chuvadis or treated palm-leaf strips that were inscribed with a metal stylus called ezhuthani. The writer had to 'scratch' the words with great care and precision, too much pressure would destroy the leaf, too little would make it unreadable! Depending on the environment and the preservation process, it could last even 500 years, but the typical shelf life was about 100 years. How could a 100-year-old medium store 2000-year-old information?

This co-operative chain was disrupted when the Europeans colonised India. Society changed, and fewer people were interested in 'reprinting' these manuscripts. Old manuscripts lay hidden in the attics of families who had forgotten their value. With fewer manuscripts in the public domain, even professors taught only 'recent' writings, not the classics. This was the crux of the Ramaswami-Uvesa conversa-

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Palm leaf manuscripts.

tion. Searching for a copy of a 1000-year-old epic was pretty much an impossible task. Obviously, the 'original' had vanished centuries ago. Different parts of the epic lay in different households, and not in any particular sequence. The merit of even those was dependent on the copyist. One different stroke on the palm leaf could convey a meaning very different from the intention of the original author. And then, there was the problem of fakes.

The Jain Culture

Today, there are less than 1,00,000 Tamil Jains. But a millennium ago, they were a prosperous community who made outstanding contributions to art and literature. Even in UVeSa's era, there were many people who practised Jain traditions. He decided to meet some of them to learn about Jain customs. How could he write a commentary on a Jain text if he did not understand the social, cultural and religious context?

UVeSa trained under Chandranatha Chettiar, a pious Tamil Jain, for several months. After exhausting everything he knew, Chandranatha introduced him to Gunabala Chettiar, another expert in Jain tradition. Mrs. Gunabala was a greater expert in Jain tradition and eager to help.

That's when UVeSa discovered a startling fact. Nachinarkiniyar, the 14th-century commentator, had indeed written two commentaries. The second commentary was written after he had enrolled in a Jain monastery and studied Jain tradition closely. This proved that the two versions UVeSa had were both genuine. It also validated Uvesa's approach: you cannot annotate any literary piece without knowing the context!

The Hunt

UVeSa was now confident that his preparation was good. He had two versions of the commentary. Now, he had to assemble all the 'authentic' palm-leaf manuscripts of the entire Jeevaka Chintamani, all 13 volumes comprising 3,147 verses. The only way was to round up all the known versions and compare every

Celebrating National Croissant Day: A Delightful Pastry Tribute

National Croissant Day, celebrated on January 30, honours the iconic flaky, buttery pastry that has captured hearts worldwide. Originating in France, croissants are now a beloved breakfast and snack item, enjoyed with coffee, chocolate, or jam. Bakeries often mark the day with special offers, limited-edition flavours, and fresh batches straight from the oven. Beyond indulgence, the croissant represents craftsmanship and culinary tradition, with each layer a testament to patience and skill. Whether savoured at a cozy café or homemade, National Croissant Day invites everyone to celebrate simple pleasures and the joy of freshly baked delights.



The resurrection of Jeevaka Chintamani

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Thamotharam Pillai (the man who had earlier pressured him to sell his copyright) intervened and got him supplies on credit; he turned out to be the Good Samaritan!

Recognition at Last

In 1887, Uvesa released the first edition of a few hundred copies. It was a near-perfect translation of the forgotten masterpiece; his annotation wonderfully established its social-cultural-historical-religious context. UVeSa had beaten the odds, and he was just 22!

His troubles were far from being over, though. At his alma mater, one priest protested: 'How could the student of a Hindu monastery publish a patently religious Jain text?' The head monk silenced him by saying that UVeSa had brought great honour to the monastery by publishing an ancient work of art. Some ultra-conservatives condemned the erotic passages in the work. UVeSa calmly replied that the epic covered a range of human emotions; a true connoisseur would notice the artistic merit of the lines instead of carping on their sexuality! Those were puritanical times, yet, UVeSa had won the overwhelming support of the liberals.

Thus encouraged, he published his research on two other epics, Silappadikaram and Manimekalai, and the Sangam-era Puranaanuru, which reflected the culture of ancient Tamils. Ultimately, he published nearly 100 books, a remarkable achievement for any researcher. The ultimate appreciation was the epithet he earned, 'Thamizh Thatha' or the 'grand old man of Tamil'.

The 5 great Tamil ancient epics are Silappadikaram, Manimekalai, Jeevaka Chintamani, Kundalakesi and Valayapathi. Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam (monastery) was established around the 16th century to spread Saiva philosophy. It manages many Siva temples and has a large library of ancient religious literature.



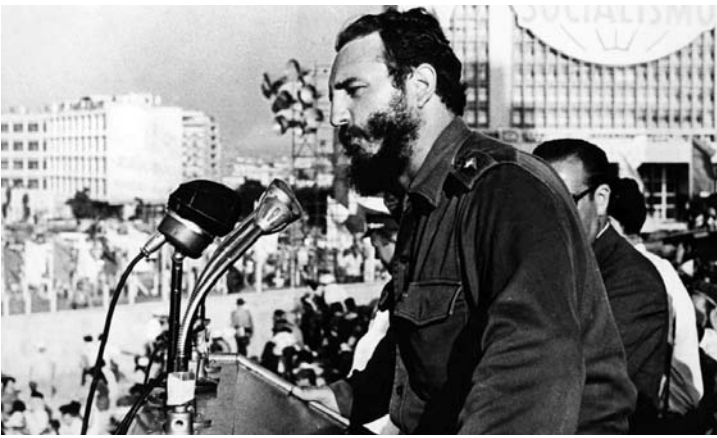
Statue of UVeSa at Presidency College, Chennai.

#FIDEL CASTRO

Desperate U.S. Couldn't Do Away With Him

The Man Who Outlasted 11 U.S. Presidents and Survived Over 600 Assassination Attempts

Fidel Castro, the revolutionary leader of Cuba, remains one of the most controversial and enduring figures of the 20th century. Known for his defiance of U.S. imperialism, his communist revolution, and his survival against countless assassination attempts, Castro's life was shaped by a relentless struggle against external forces, particularly the United States.



For nearly five decades, he led Cuba with an iron fist, surviving numerous covert U.S. operations aimed at his removal and facing pressure from 11 U.S. presidents. He would die in 2016 at the age of 90, not by assassination, but from natural causes.

Early Life and Rise to Power

Born in 1926 in Birán, Cuba, to a wealthy family, Fidel Castro initially pursued a law degree at the University of Havana. It was during his time at university that he became politically active, joining movements aimed at fighting against the corrupt and oppressive Batista dictatorship that ruled Cuba in the 1950s. After an unsuccessful attack on the Moncada Barracks in 1953, Castro was imprisoned, only to be released in 1955. He went into exile in Mexico, where he organized the 26th of July Movement to overthrow Batista.

The CIA's Assassination Plots

The CIA, under both Eisenhower and Kennedy, orchestrated a range of assassination attempts, from poisoned cigars to exploding seashells. Other plans involved contaminating Castro's food and drink with toxins or deploying poisonous chemicals through his diving equipment while he was snorkeling. One of the most curious attempts was a poisoned milkshake, designed to kill him during a meeting. These bizarre plots were not just failures, they also highlighted the desperation with which the U.S. sought to remove Castro.

The U.S.-Cuba Conflict

Castro's alignment with the Soviet Union and his embrace of Marxist-Leninist ideology alienated him from the U.S., which viewed the spread of communism in its hemisphere as a direct threat. The United States responded by imposing a trade embargo on Cuba in 1960

operations was Operation Mongoose, launched by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. Its objective was to destabilize Cuba through a variety of means, including assassination, economic sabotage, and psychological warfare. Over 600 attempts on Castro's life were made, including some of the most bizarre and audacious plots.

Despite these efforts, Castro's survival became a symbol of defiance. For years, he outwitted and outlasted the U.S.'s covert operations, continuing to lead his country through periods of economic hardship and political isolation. His ability to survive these repeated assassination attempts and continue as Cuba's leader only further cemented his place as a symbol of anti-imperialism in the eyes of many around the world.

Surviving 11 U.S. Presidents

Throughout his time in power, Fidel Castro would outlast 11 U.S. Presidents, from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Barack Obama. Every U.S. administration, from Eisenhower's early efforts to support anti-Castro insurgents to Obama's eventual attempt at détente, grappled with the Cuban leader's resilience.

- Dwight D. Eisenhower initiated the trade embargo and the first CIA-backed operations against Castro.
- John F. Kennedy, who famously ordered the Bay of Pigs invasion, was also the leader during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which became a critical moment in Cold War history.
- Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford all continued U.S. efforts to destabilize Castro's regime, often relying on covert operations and economic pressure.
- Ronald Reagan intensified U.S. hostility with stronger sanctions, and George H.W. Bush maintained the tough stance.
- Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama all adjusted U.S. policy with Obama making the most notable shift by restoring diplomatic relations in 2015, though the broader embargo remained in place.

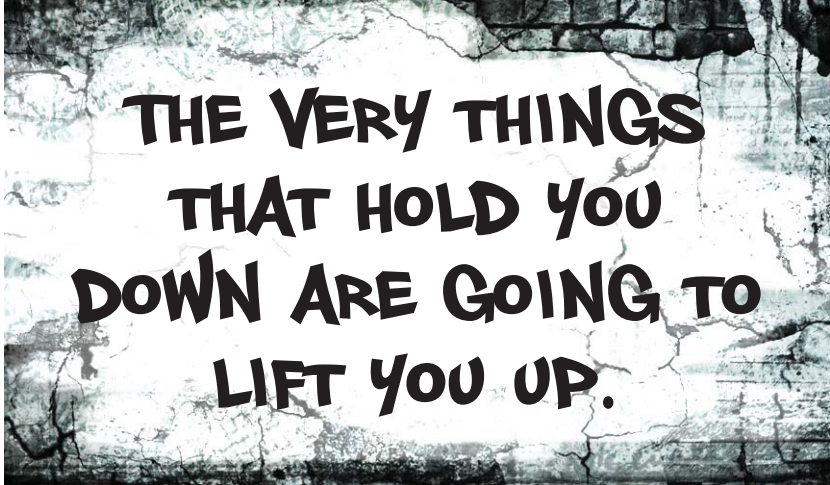
Despite the changing faces in the White House, Castro remained a thorn in the side of U.S. foreign policy, leading Cuba for almost five decades.

Legacy and Death

In 2006, due to health problems, Fidel Castro handed over power to his younger brother, Raul Castro. He officially stepped down from the presidency in 2008 but remained a figure of immense influence in Cuba. Even as his health declined, his image as a revolutionary leader who stood up to U.S. imperialism remained iconic.

Fidel Castro died on November 25, 2016, at the age of 90, not by assassination, but due to natural causes. His passing marked the end of an era in Cuban history.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

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