



JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI
QUARTERLY

APRIL - JUNE 2024

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Director's Note

Spring has adorned the earth, in a trice
With the groves of *palasha* trees aflower
Swinging in the breeze
Bowed with the load of blossoms
Resembling flaming fire
The earth looks like a newlywed bride
In lovely red attire....

Like Kalidasa in his *Ritu Samhara*, countless artists since millennia have extolled the form of this king of seasons through words, melody, painting and movement. Harvests are threshed with benediction, and colours celebrated through rites of festivals in every corner of this subcontinent. Climate change, pollution and all accompanying worries of this Anthropocene era are forgotten, however briefly.

After a quarter of deeply satisfying and memorable seminars and lectures ranging from Islamic thought and objects to British Indian construction, varied book launches to curatorial walk-throughs, discovering the new lexicon for applications of technology to culture, and more, we too are filled with overwhelming gratitude. The writeups of our offerings in the inner pages testify to the immense knowledge that our scholars have enriched us with as we humbly prepare for our closing months of this academic year.

April will see us taking a deep dive into the magical world of the Arts of the Book through two multiple-session seminars. The polyvalence of figural artworks made for Hindustan's Muslim audiences from 1500-1800 CE will be analysed art-historically and through readings on Indo-Persian literature. The other seminar will look at Udaipur as a place of many moods through the depiction of its palaces, reservoirs, temples, *bazaars* and *darbars* in the 18th century.

The finale before we bring this year to a close will be a lecture by well-recognised artist Varunika Saraf who will speak about her creative process, and the famed numismatist Shailendra Bhandare who will decolonise the art and designs of British commemorative and campaign medals.

We look forward to you being with us either personally or virtually at all these talks.

Till then, with my warmest,



Rashmi Poddar Ph.D.
Director

AESTHETICS

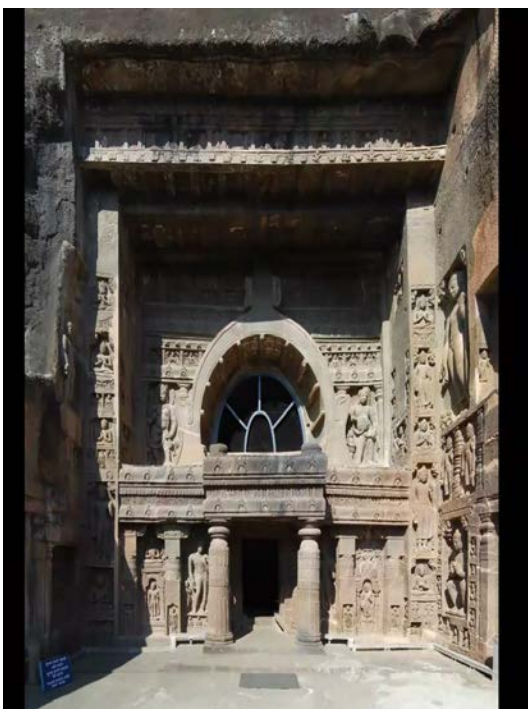


A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacharya Katha: Jaina Tirthankara Enshrined (upper panel), Celestial Dancers (lower panel). c.1475

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:

- (1) an academic yearlong Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field;
- (2) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Yoga & Tantra, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field;
- (3) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Southeast Asian Art and Architecture, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field;
- (4) a fortnight of public seminars and lectures in Islamic Aesthetics;
- (5) an ongoing series of public seminars in Buddhist Aesthetics;
- (6) an ongoing series of public seminars in Southasian Painting; and
- (7) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Indian Aesthetics

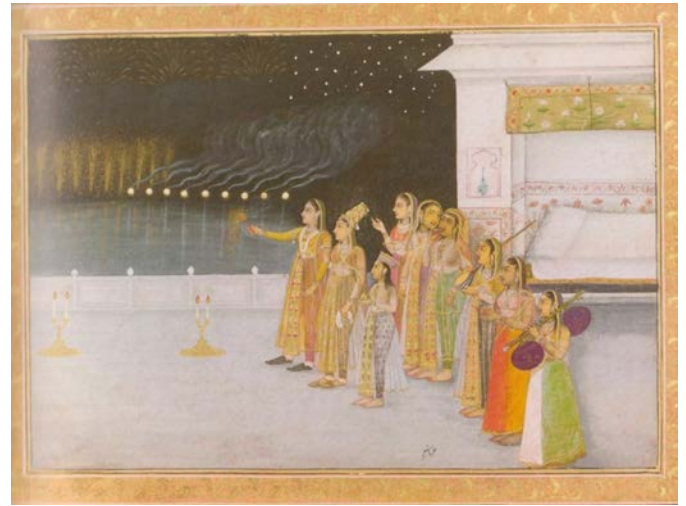


In the world of Indian Aesthetics at Jnanpravaha, January is the harbinger of the season of painting. Fittingly, this season begins with the exquisite paintings of Ajanta, which were brought to poignant life for the class by Dr. Leela Wood through her rare photographs and her charming ability to tell stories; for our students, she 'read' the narratives of the Buddhist *Jataka* tales that are depicted in Cave 17, where the mural art of Ajanta is perhaps best preserved. Dr. Wood spoke of these mural paintings with the deep and analytical knowledge that comes from primary research. She showed how it is difficult to establish a link between a canonical text such as the *Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharmottara Purana*, which codifies the rules of painting, and the mature art of the caves at Ajanta. The fluidity, intuitive rendering and innovative composition at this site makes attempts at stylistic and practical codification superfluous. The complexity of the task is compounded by the freedom with which artists have used space. It is most likely that theory as presented in

works such as the *Chitrasutra* came after practice had already reached a high level of expertise.

In discussing 14th to 16th century portable paintings from the subcontinent, Dr. Shaikka Mishra explored the trajectory of Jain manuscript painting. This type of religious painting can be found in manuscripts that were commissioned to gain religious merit because they were used for ritualistic purposes in Jain temples. Multiple manuscripts of texts such as the *Kalakacharya Katha* and the *Kalpasutra* can be found in Jain *bhandaras* or libraries housed in Jain temple precincts. The scholar pointed out the characteristic angular style of the figures in Western Indian Jain paintings, in which three-quarter faces are represented with an extended eye. She also examined the subject matter, material and design of these manuscripts, pointing out the commonalities and differences between earlier palm leaf examples and the later paper ones. Since many manuscripts were destroyed in the 12th and 13th centuries due to the establishment of Islamic sultanates and the Ghurid attacks in the north of the subcontinent, scholars can only assess incomplete extant material and derive a concomitantly incomplete picture of the art of this region. The scholar explored the style of *Chaurapanchashika* painting, a study that must be based on a single extant manuscript of a poem by the same name by Bilhana. Elements of this style are evident in many North Indian manuscripts in subsequent centuries, making the temporal restriction of the use of this style highly problematic. There was a large variety of manuscripts in the commissions of this period; for instance, the *Nimatnama*, an illustrated book of recipes, was produced in the late 15th century for the ruler of Mandu, Ghiyath Shah, and completed in the reign of his son, Nasir Shah. Finally, the scholar presented several manuscripts of the *Chandayana*, a Sufi romance drawn from an already popular indigenous tale, to show the many styles used in illustrating such works.

Roda Ahluwalia pointed out that Mughal, Rajput, Pahari and Deccani painting includes an enormous quantity of such work produced in Mughal India. As manuscripts and *muraqqas* (bound albums which brought together diverse examples of paintings and Islamic calligraphy) became a vital component of courtly culture, the elite, including



monarchs, commissioned them in large numbers. Akbar's substantial atelier, which boasted nearly a hundred and thirty painters, produced refined painting for numerous such manuscripts. In the view of Yael Rice, the relationship between artists engaged in the creation of manuscripts within this atelier resembled a network; artists from varied backgrounds collaborated to create a new 'Mughal' style with a combination of Indic, Persian, and European elements. Akbar's son Jahangir (during whose reign painting became even finer and included new subject matter such as plant and animal studies, folios depicting religious men, as well as allegorical paintings) retained only thirty master artists in his employ, causing others from the original atelier to migrate to distant courts such as the Rajput courts of the Punjab hills. This engendered or enhanced new 'schools' such as Pahari painting; the paintings produced elsewhere were more Indic in nature than work produced at the Mughal court, though no less political. *Durbar* scenes painted during both Jahangir's and Shah Jahan's regnal periods, conveying the power of these emperors, were schematic and symmetrical, while those produced at smaller *thikanas* were less formal. Painting in the court of Ibrahim Adil Shah II, the Deccani ruler of Bijapur who was also a poet and musician, was syncretic, esoteric, and mystic in nature. The *Nujum-ul-ulum*, a manuscript from his court, has the occult, divination and astrology as its subject matter.

Mrinalini Sil and Dr. Parul Singh examined 18th- and early 19th-century Murshidabad and Awadh painting respectively. As the Mughal centre declined, artists fled to these far richer courts to paint for diverse patrons such as the *nawabs*, Jain merchants and Europeans who

came to the fore as changing power equations were mirrored in society. Such patrons tapped into inter-regional and transregional artistic networks; these encounters produced hybrid but still refined painting styles that developed special characteristics in each location.

Dr. Harsha Dehejia's exposition of Krishna *shringara* explained the importance of poetic truth rather than factual truth in understanding this aesthetic position where Krishna is the male principle beloved of devotees (*bhaktas*) who think of themselves as female in relation to him, regardless of whether they are men or women. In Krishna *shringara*, the *bhakta*, who submits wholly to the deity, also becomes a *rasika* or aesthete, whose primary means of enjoyment are the senses. *Shringara bhakti* espouses dualistic philosophy or *dvaita*, where deity and devotee are lovers, as seen in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. However, the *Bhagavata Purana*, which combined several Indic devotional strands, begins with *dvaita* but ends in *advaita* or monism, as longing born of *viraha* or physical separation makes Krishna omnipresent in the minds of the *gopis* or cowherdesses of Braj who worship Krishna through *shringara bhakti*. Krishna *shringara* is manifest in courtly poetry such as *ritikavya*, and the popular *baramasa* poetry, but with weaker metaphorical underpinnings. Krishna *shringara* is apparent in Pahari paintings and in mural paintings in the *havelis* of Rajasthan, as seen in the Badal Mahal at Bundi. At important centres of worship such as Jagannath Puri, song, dance, and *bhoga* or food offerings become the focus of *bhakti*, giving it an aesthetic dimension. At other centres such as Pandharpur, *bhakti* does not have the dimension of *shringara* despite the presence of music and dance in the movement of the *varkaris* as they journey towards the temple town.

Dr. Himanshu Prabha Ray explored the autonomous and potent space of the sea on both sides of the long coastline of the subcontinent. Trade with lands to the east and west led to a meeting and mingling of cultures even 5,000 years in the past, evident from material cultural remains. Professor Ray spoke of boats and ships that set sail from this coastline to visit China, Burma, Java, Malaya and other places in the archipelago of Southeast Asia, as well as the Middle East and Africa: ships are depicted eleven times in the narrative wall murals of the Buddhist

temple of Borobudur in Central Java. The speaker examined coastal shrines and their audiences through two case studies, one each from Tamil Nadu and from Gujarat. In both places, temples were built facing seawards; their archaeological context is clearly related to maritime journeys. In Tamil Nadu, the edifice remained a marker for ships until the British built a lighthouse there. The temple of Harshal Mata or Sikotar Mata in Saurashtra, Gujarat, seems to have been used by the fishing community and the nearby town but equally by seafarers: the temple was probably linked to travellers who went to the island of Socotra located off the Horn of Africa.

The colonial period in the subcontinent and an understanding of the period's art almost demands an application of Edward Said's critical theory as presented in *Orientalism*. Dr. Jaya Kanoria referred to Orientalism as seen in European painting, and extended Said's argument to include paintings of the colonial period in India: European painters such as Zoffany, and the British pair, Thomas and William Daniell. These works display the European categories of the Romantic, Picturesque and Sublime, but adapt them to Indian subject matter and the colonial situation. The speaker also referred to Raja Ravi Varma and the Company school of painting in which European patrons commissioned paintings from Indian artists. The land of the subcontinent, its flora and fauna, its culture and its people have been recorded in these paintings, which often enlarged the colonising Self and diminished the colonised Other, and depended on 'difference' for their success. Dr. Suryanandini Narain presented a thoughtful analysis of photography which came to India almost at the same time as the West due to the close contact brought by colonisation. Used differently by coloniser and colonised, photography was mobilised for surveillance, political control and racialised voyeurism on one hand and for self-documentation on the other. Despite these disjunctures, local usage nevertheless mirrored and continued the methods and functions of photography as practiced by the coloniser. In addition to painting and photography, the colonial period engendered new types of architecture. Dr. Pushkar Sohoni presented a sweeping overview of such constructed spaces before focussing on an architectural type that was born of and for the colonial situation: the colonial market hall.

This has been a rich quarter with a wide trajectory that has still allowed deep engagement. The course is poised to enter the aesthetics of the

20th century – the nationalist and contemporary period of the subcontinent’s history – in April. – **J.K.**

The Indian Temple

PAST PROGRAMMES

Mud, Stone, and Brick: Western Himalayan and Tibetan Buddhist Architecture

November 16th, 2023, 6:30 PM IST | Dr. Melissa R. Kerin (Associate Professor of Art History at Washington and Lee University in Virginia)

Finished parapet with layers of arga, slate, tamarisk branches, and rammed earth.



In analysing sacred architecture found in the unstable, seismically active western Himalayan and Tibetan zones, Professor Melissa Kerin noted the effect of climate, elevation and topography on the materials and techniques that were used to build free-standing temples there. Humble materials such as mud, stone and brick displayed flexibility in the hands of artisans who created several massive structures in this region

between the 7th and 17th centuries. Vernacular or local architecture has many resonances with religious architecture in the Ladakh region. Both use sun-baked mudbricks with a local mortar, traditionally prepared materials that continue to be created for renovation of old structures, even though an increase in the amount of destructive rainfall has necessitated efforts to adapt to the use of concrete. In the traditional architecture of the region, a water-repellent material called *arga* continues to be oiled and tamped down at strategic points on floors, roofs and parapets. The latter also have water holes. The use of tamarisk, a plant material, facilitates drainage and makes the roofs and parapets lighter and spongier. This allows for circulation of air, a requirement for Ladakh’s unique environment. These materials are layered over each other; for instance, mudbricks on a roof might be covered with rammed earth overlaid serially with tamarisk, slate and *arga*.

Since these local materials are easily accessible,

of the Dukhang within 70 years of the temple's inception. Apart from these two phases, work by the ASI in the 1980s altered the entrance to the temple greatly; however, the multi-pillared assembly hall was stabilised in a manner faithful to the 11th-century original.

13th century onwards: the Sumtsek (sum: three, tsek: pile), a three-storeyed structure, which is seen twice at Alchi. The most important, nodal 13th-century Sumtsek of Alchi has a square plan with protruding *bhadras* and recessed corners, while the lesser-known 15th-century Sumstek

Clay sculptures and painting, Tabo's Dukhang Temple, 11th century (part of Vairocana mandala).



The entrance to the Tabo Dukhang, on an east-west axis, is aligned with a sculpture of four addorsed figures of the Buddhist deity Vairocana at the threshold of the *garbhagriha* at the far end of a rectangular *mandapa* space. Sculpted icons, almost as large as life, dressed in cloth robes, are appended roughly midway up the elaborately painted *mandapa* wall (additionally painted with iconic and narrative representations) giving the impression of floating deities in a horizontally oriented *mandala* with Vairocana as the central deity. The *garbhagriha* also houses a statue of Vairocana and is surrounded by a *pradakshina patha* lined by painted iconic images with narrative paintings on the wall below them. All of the sculpture, created from clay, is painted. Scholars such as Christian Luczanits have identified texts to which the iconographic programme at Tabo relates. The narrative programme has parallels with the one at Indonesia's Borobudur where it was probably enabled by peripatetic teachers who carried Buddhist texts with them.

An innovative temple form is found in the western Himalayas and West Tibet from the

located in Tsatsapuri, the residential area of the large hamlet of Alchi, has a simple square plan with four interior pillars. The 13th-century Alchi Sumtsek, originally patronised by a wealthy clan, is a small, mysterious space that hems in the visitor. A large central *stupa* screens the deity from the entrance. The *stupa* is surrounded by walls painted in sophisticated detail with Buddha-like figures and niches which contain immensely tall figures of *bodhisattvas*, with the visitor's head reaching just the level of their kneecaps. These figures are exquisitely painted, with intricately rendered *dhotis* (lower garments). The second level is physically accessible by a small ladder outside the structure but not to those who are not initiates or invitees; as there is no central flooring on the second and third levels, they are accessible through sightlines. The levels resonate with the vertical organisation of Borobudur. Unlike the Alchi Sumstek, Borobudur lacks an interior and allows physical ascent through carved levels to reach the metaphorical *arupadhatu* performatively. The vertical levels at both sites adhere to the concept of a mountain temple. Linrothe's iconographic reading of the

Alchi Sumstek has interpreted these levels in terms of the *nirmanakaya*, or the physical body, with patronage and sponsor figures at the lowest, the *sambhogakaya* or the celestial body at the second with representations of *bodhisattvas* and some *mandalas* and the *dharma kaya* or the absolute body at the highest which is purely a *mandalic* space, indicating a *dharmic* ascent.

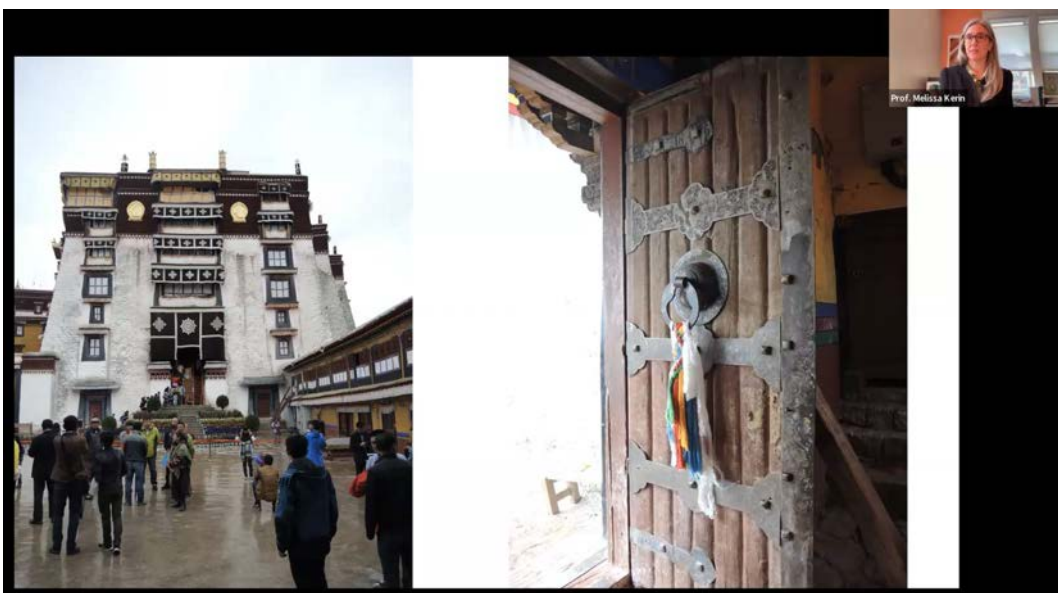
The inscription at the 15th-century Sumtsek situated at the top of a royal vernacular compound at Wanla references the 13th-century Alchi structure, even though three vertical levels are only suggested here, and not clearly defined. The central deity, Avalokiteshwara, can be seen axially upon entering since the space lacks Alchi's *stupa*. It is also a little larger. An important photograph taken by Gherzi during Tucci's 1930s expedition documents a Sumstek at Tholing in West Tibet, of which only the lowest level remains at the present time. Illustrations created by scholars at the university at Graz, Austria, reconstruct the lost superstructure, powerfully engaging with the other examples of this architecture and the relationships between them. It is likely that the 13th-century Sumtsek at Alchi responded to the temple at Tholing. There is textual documentation of a fourth Sumtsek, no longer extant, in Leh, the capital of Ladakh. While Central Tibet has some three-storey temples including the example at Samye, they do not show affiliations with the inner iconographic programme of extant Sumtsek architecture.

The 17th-century Potala palace at Lhasa, a massive complex that contains multiple temples, is thirteen storeys high with a building area of

more than thirty-two acres and several gorgeous doorways. The Potala palace intentionally and majestically looms over the Kyi Chu valley. It is also a monastery built on a mountain top. Resembling the 15th-century monastery at Thikse, which like the Potala is affiliated to the Gelug tradition that expanded from this time until the 16th century, the Potala palace consists of an upper red palace and a lower white palace but is built at a much larger scale with greater refinement. While it radiates power when seen from a distance, the landscape dominates the view of a visitor from close range. The structure justifies the term 'mountain temple' and was the mighty political and religious centre of the region. It is situated high above the valley floor, protection that was necessary at the time as it was the winter palace of its patron the fifth Dalai Lama who established the imperious Ganden Phodrang theocracy, becoming the head of Central Tibet. The interior is a maze of pathways that weave within and around buildings, another factor that is protective against attack by outsiders lacking knowledge of the complex. The Gelug structure draws on greater Central Asian palatial citadel-like architecture, which focussed on fortification and protection, but uses local materials such as mud, stone, brick and wood with metal and gilding on the roofs. Heavy eaves supported by systems of brackets protect the windows from sun, rain and snow.

Despite its considerable temporal and architectural span, Dr. Kerin emphasised that her compressed presentation left out much of the sheer variety and complexity related to temple architecture found in the western Himalayas and

Tibet. - J.K.



Islamic Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Sacrality and Surrogacy in the Devotional Arts of Islam

January 8th, 9th & 10th, 2024, 6:15 - 8:45 PM IST | Dr. Finbarr Barry Flood (Director of Silsila: Center for Material Histories, and William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of the Humanities at the Institute of Fine Arts and Department of Art History, New York University)



In this insightful seminar, Prof. Finbarr Barry Flood presents his extensive research on the various kinds of sacred objects found in different religions, with a particular focus on Islamic relics. The lecture series delves into the craftspeople involved in their production, reproduction, and distribution, and the power of these objects on the people who buy and consume them. The seminar challenges the emotional attachment that people develop when they revere the imagery of mass-produced objects. It raises questions about the uniqueness of these copied objects, which become unique because of the aura attached to them by the same people.

The lecture series began with the topic of **Materialising**, which explores the material and the immaterial, and introduces the idea of surrogacy, i.e., the creation of copies of objects. Professor Finbarr Barry Flood presented complex ideas of portability, multiplicity, and their ripple effects through a chronological discussion of analogies within different religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, and Judaism. He smoothly navigated the topic towards his primary concentration, Islamic devotional art,

through 'networked practices' such as the tangible Islamic prayer rug and ceremonial robe, even the intangible recitation and consumption of religious text. These objects and practices can be activated through haptic and semantic rituals, and only then are they considered to demonstrate incredible talismanic properties. Interestingly, the Islamic prayer rug triggers paradoxical notions when one considers the actions of kissing, touching, and stepping on earth, dust, textiles, or a relic. Contemporary art practices such as *Seven Times* (Idris Khan, 2010) also provided unique perspectives on repetition, ritual, and religion. Towards the end of the lecture, after observing several objects within global museum collections (from Istanbul, Ethiopia, Doha, Dublin, and Toronto, to name a few), the power of these objects on people was deemed magical at one level but credulous at another. As an architect, I was deeply moved by Professor Barry Flood's account of the mechanical gesture of individuals who touch and, in doing so, deface the inscription of I. M. Pei, the architect, on the wall of the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Professor Barry Flood likened this act to that of pilgrims who touch holy sites and objects, yet he also informed that museums generally discourage visitors from touching artwork.

The next part of the lecture dealt with **Measuring**, which involves understanding the numerical, statistical, and spatial units of religious places and objects, and abstractly replicating them to activate religious qualities. Replication methods of the Christian Holy Sepulchre and making copies of the Islamic holy Kaaba were explained

with ingenious measurement practices such as cords and strings. These themes reminded me of Leonardo da Vinci's *Divine Proportions*, the principles of ancient Indian Vaastu Shastra, and my architectural education, which involved generating units of measure using body parts. Another architectural reference Professor Finbarr touched upon was Le Corbusier's reflection on the bond between the modern geometric form of the holy Kaaba and the religion of Islam in his 1933 Villa Radieuse. This session was also an opportunity for me to revisit the Kaaba, which I had previously studied in a Sikh miniature painting during the Jnanapravaha Indian Aesthetics course in 2019.

As a preservation architect, I am professionally involved in documenting historic buildings and cultural objects. Hence, it was fascinating for me to learn about the creation of modern souvenirs through digitisation, miniaturisation, and incorporating sacred measurements into commodities. The subject is meaningful at a profound level, as it involves communicating an essential part of the object or place experience. It is noteworthy when Professor Barry Flood elucidates that "without inscriptions, measurements are just lines on a wall".

The first part of Day 2 of the seminar (**Dusting**) included a fascinating discussion about the value of dust in art and dust as a precious religious relic. Professor Barry Flood showed a picture of *Ethics of Dust* (2016) by Jorge Otero-Pailos which was a project made from the dust of historical monuments such as Doge's palace in Venice. He also displayed an image of *Tony Smith, Die (Pictures of Dust)*, 2000, an artwork by Brazilian artist Vik Muniz, and hinted at the interplay of measure and medium, solidarity and fragility through dust. He shared the early histories of mass production and continuity practices through the examples of making fans, combs and amulets touching the holy Zam Zam water and dust from near the holy Kaaba in Mecca. The presentation also illustrated other examples from Greek, Christian Palestine, and Islamic Ottoman civilisations. The transformation and activation of the most mundane objects are routinely carried out in almost every religion. As a Hindu, I see dust in the form of sacred ashes or 'Vibhuti' in temples, and have thoughtlessly consumed it as potent matter on several occasions, even when

I am situated many miles away from where the custom was initiated in the first place. The lecture made me aware of the reach and impact of 'dust' in my daily life.

The second part of the session (titled **Imbibing**) featured Professor Finbarr Barry Flood emphasising the significance of inscriptions and imagery in Islam, which convey different meanings and sometimes cosmological associations. The effectiveness of sacrality is also contingent on the devotion of the person responsible for crafting the object. The professor cited magic medicinal bowls and pilgrimage scrolls as key examples to demonstrate how the process of production and adaptation can impart authenticity and efficacy to sacred objects.

The final session of the seminar first delved into the concept of **Tracing**, which involves recreating a form, design, or practice in such a way that the ritual becomes tactile piety over time. The contact with relics produced through tracing acquires powers that may surpass the original. Professor Barry Flood cited the depiction of the sandal of the holy Prophet in manuscripts or prayer caps, as an example that elevates the ability of the object to protect. The professor was generous with the images he displayed; the chance to experience vast examples of religious objects (such as relics of sandals of the Prophet) from the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul was both delightful and alluring. The last part of the seminar (on **Printing**) explored the techniques of replication and reproduction in Islamic art and religion. Professor Barry Flood referred to Walter Benjamin's writings to deliberate on the meaning of commodity culture in the present. Engraving, stamping and printing, lithography, and photography are visual forms used to build relationships in Islamic art and religion. The professor analysed works such as the templates of the holy Prophet's sandals through the lenses of authenticity, status, and scale.

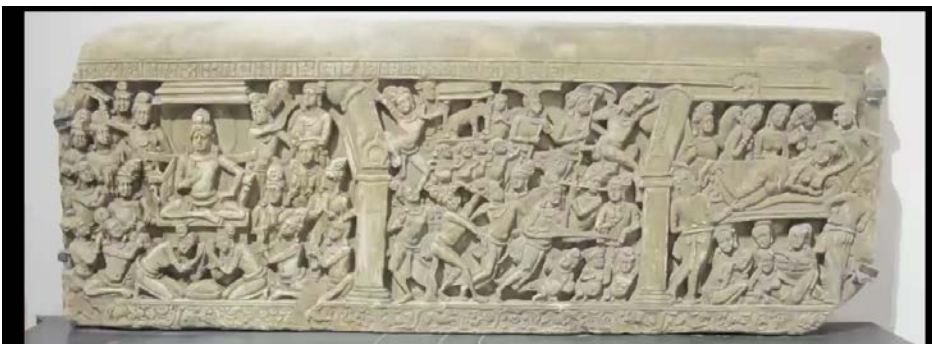
As someone keenly interested in art and curious about religion, I enthusiastically pursued this seminar despite the time difference. The assigned readings familiarised me with the subject before the seminar commenced. The lectures were informative and exciting, and the speaker's passion for the subject and engaging delivery kept me captivated throughout. Professor Barry Flood's expertise in art history and his thoughtful responses to the audience's questions added significant value to the seminar. - **P.P.**

Buddhist Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Excavations, Conservation, and Active Reconstruction: Lives of Buddhist Materials Remains in Andhra

January 20th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Akira Shimada (Professor of History Department at the State University of New York at New Paltz)



Rail Coping, Amaravati, The Indian Museum, Kolkata



Rail Coping, Amaravati (Mackenzie Amaravati Album)

Akira Shimada is an Associate Professor at State University of New York at New Paltz. His research interests lie in Early Buddhist Art and Architecture of the Deccan. His focus on the history of Buddhism in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, or Andhradesa, informs the current climate of academic interest in the region's Buddhist past. Recent notable publications on this subject, wherein his writings have been featured, include *Tree and Serpent* and *Phanigiri*.

Buddhist images and sites, and their evolving relationships with changing political milieus formed the bulk of Professor Shimada's lecture. What made this lecture particularly interesting is that he traced the lives of these images from their

ancient past to the colonial era, all the way up to the present.

This lecture was segmented into two sections that dealt with the two distinct periods in the histories of these images/sites. In the preliminary section of his lecture, Professor Shimada delved into the history of colonial intervention at the site of Amaravati and other surrounding Buddhist sites in the region. In the course of doing so, he also provided an overview of the history of Buddhist archaeology in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. He discussed artefacts that were acquired here against their current provenance,

while also critiquing excavation and acquisition techniques followed by European excavators at the site, which he observed are characterised by "unsystematic excavations, inconsistent methods of documentation, little understanding of Buddhism and Buddhist architecture, and administrative failure to protect the sites and sculptures."

The lecture was segmented by certain questions posed by Dr. Poddar, which contextualised the subject for viewers such as myself who are not very familiar with the Buddhist history of the region. A particularly pertinent one among these was, "Why was this area between the (rivers) Krishna and Godavari so important for Buddhist

activity?" Professor Shimada explained by first highlighting the importance of pre-Mauryan activity in the Krishna river-valley, the eventual spread of agriculture into the region, and then went on to elucidate how these factors led to the rise of Dhanyakataka as a result of the advent of an agrarian economy that coincided with early Buddhist migration.

This instance provides a clear example of how incentive motivates the modification of ancient structures and furthermore, how drastic a difference this sort of intervention can have on the original context of a site.

He concluded by asking if such modifications to archaeological sites should be allowed, which leads to the larger question of whether beautification trumps concern over contextual integrity of a site and possibilities for further research. One must remember that archaeology, fundamentally, is a destructive process. Whether it be at the hands of colonial-era excavators or by Indian state governments, sites and artefacts, once damaged, cannot be viewed in their original state. To end on a more constructive note, the lecture, albeit unwittingly, might serve as an excellent resource for those willing to look at many of the neglected and renovated Buddhist sites along the eastern coast of the Deccan. - A.M.

Major Archaeological Excavations by the Department of Archaeology

- Phanigiri (1950, 2007-)
- Yelleswaren (1954-60)
- Kesanapalli (1966)
- Gajurabanda (1970-71)
- Dhulikatta (1974-77)
- Chandavaran (1972-77)
- Nellakondapalli (1976-78, 1986-87, 1993-94).
- Thotlakonda (1988-92)



Dhulikatta Excavation in 1974-77 (Photo: Dept of Archaeology and Museums)

The second half of the lecture focussed on these sites and images in a newly independent India. The early years after independence saw archaeological activity at numerous sites in Andhra Pradesh, such as Chandavaram, Dhulikatta, Thotlakonda, and Phanigiri, among others. He mentioned that for many of these sites, excavation reports have not yet been published, and that they have suffered from theft and further damage after excavation.

He then proceeded to discuss how, since the late 20th/early 21st century, state governments of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have intervened in the lives of these sites and images, incentivised by archaeological and religious tourism. He demonstrated, through pictorial evidence, how sites such as Chandavaram and Dhulikatta have been renovated for beautification. It is evident that these modifications have altered the original context of the site, thereby making further archaeological research nearly impossible.

To further demonstrate his point, Professor Shimada referenced the visit of the Dalai Lama to Amaravati in 2006 for the Kalachakra ritual. To celebrate the event, the ASI modified the *stupa* at Amaravati by elevating the structure.

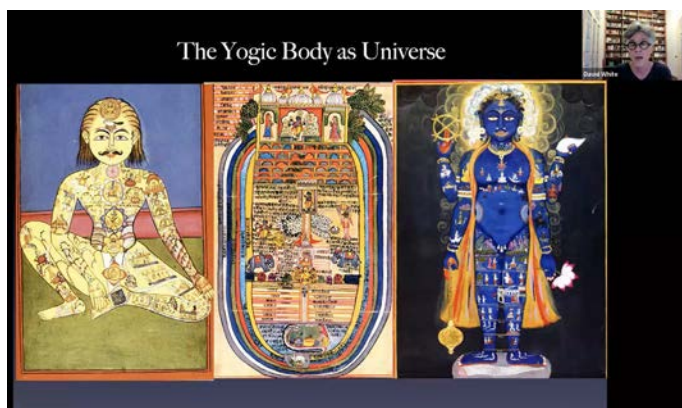


Yoga & Tantra

PAST PROGRAMMES

Sinister Yogis

December 4th & 6th, 2023 , 6:30 - 8:45 PM IST | Dr. David Gordon White (Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara and Associate Research Fellow at the Centre d'Études Sud-Asiatiques et Himalayennes in Paris)



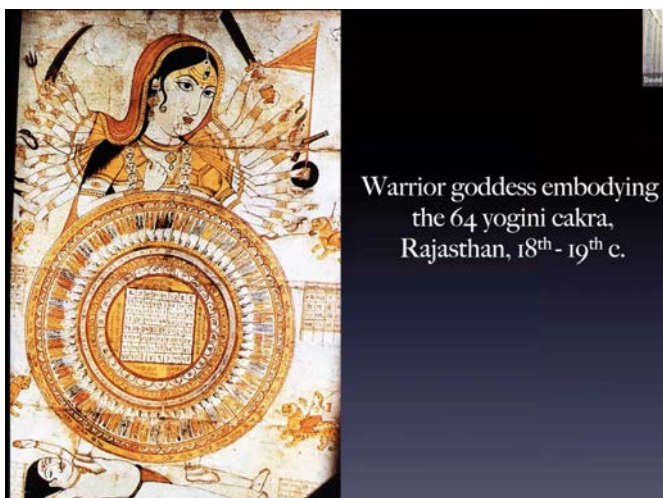
At the outset, Professor David White referred to modern Southasian tales of sinister and even dastardly yogis who trick victims, supernaturally taking over their bodies, and hence their lives. Viewed through the disciplines of grammar and etymology, the 'yogi' is one who possesses the ability to practice yoga. However, an enquiry into the nature of yoga reveals that the discipline has shifted over time: for instance, ancient or mediaeval figures presented in a cross-legged seated position are not necessarily yogis. In its earliest usage, the term 'yoga', from the root *yuja* (Sanskrit: yoking or harnessing) was related to chariot warfare. In the *Vedas*, the meaning of the terms 'yoga' and 'ksema' were opposed: yoga or the yoking of horses to war chariots was necessary during periods of war, and *ksema* or the unyoking of war horses occurred in times of peace.

The term 'yoga' appears over nine hundred times in the *Mahabharata*, a marked increase from earlier texts, and more than a hundred times in the *Bhagavad Gita*, in which Krishna links yoga to the apotheosis of the warrior. The term also refers to the team of horses yoked to a chariot. Texts such

as the *Mahabharata* and the *Vayu Purana* describe how dead hermits and dead warriors, who faced enemies, pierced the sun behind which the world of the gods lay, on chariots called yogas. Passages from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, the *Yajnavalkya Smriti* and the *Parasara Smriti* support this claim. A 12th-century hero stone, coeval with the *Prithviraj Raso* and the *Khechari Vidya* which mention the piercing of the sun, includes the carving of a warrior on a chariot. This concept of heavenly ascent and divinisation was adapted from the *Atharva Veda* into the meditational methods presented in the *Upanishads*, *Puranas* and *Tantras*. The *Netra Tantra* saw the body as a fortress (*pura*) in which the *purusha* lies. The 3rd-century BCE *Kathaka Upanishad* mentions that eleven gates of this *pura* enclose the soul, and precedes the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali in linking yoga and meditation techniques, used by the 'man of understanding' to reach the world of Vishnu to never be born again. The text presents the metaphor – also employed by Plato – of the chariot-warrior (the self), chariot (the body) and charioteer (the intellect), using reins (the mind) to control horses (the senses). In a merging of the microcosm and the macrocosm, a tantric practitioner or yogi would travel out of his body to the top of the universe on rays of light or *rashmi* to merge with the supreme godhead. Simultaneously, this practice would bring the universe into the yogi's body, locating the supreme godhead in his own heart. This iconography is described in tantric literature and mapped in paintings of yogic bodies. In the *hatha* yogic understanding, the subtle body was composed of a network of three channels (*nadis*) and wheels (a variable number of *chakras* in different systems, pictured as lotuses) which

could be energised by the yogi through postures, breathing and meditation. In the late 19th century, Sabhapati Swami interpreted the rising through the *chakras* (which he also called kingdoms) as a spiritual conquest of the subjugated *chakras*. In time, non-Indic practitioners would adapt these *chakras* to their own ideas, such as the glandular system of the human body.

Yogis could obtain the sense objects through an expansion of the body so that it coincided with the entire universe and draw the sense objects back into themselves. In this sense, the scholar argued, images of the 'subtle body' of yoga refer to the macrocosm, *brahmanda* or *hiranyagarbha* (the cosmic egg of Indian philosophy) rather than to the yogi as microcosm or tiny replica of the universe. Gods are also referred to as yogis when they embody the universe. Images present the concept of the yogic body as the entire universe (for instance, resting on the tortoise) or extended vertically with the help of flames, the *ushnisha*, or *chakras* placed above the head. The *Kubjikamata Tantra*, an important 12th-century text which elaborates on the history of the five *chakras*, identifies each with one of the *panchamahabhutas* (five elements) and calculates their diameters; it also assigns a yogini, referred to as the regent of this 'fortress', to each of the six *chakras*. The coeval *Svacchanda Tantra* argues that the elements of the *hiranyagarbha* are the same as those of the yogic body and occupy identical dimensions as the *chakras* described in the *Kubjikamata Tantra*, confirming that the yogic body was the macrocosm.



Warrior goddess embodying the 64 yogini cakras, Rajasthan, 18th - 19th c.

In his book, *The Kiss of the Yogini*, the scholar argues that the *chakras* are the internalised form of circular yogini stone temples of North and Central India and bear a formal resemblance to

them. Yogini sculptures (usually sixty-four) placed in niches in the circular wall of these temples were replaced by phonemes placed in the lotus petals surrounding the *chakras*. The temples, built on strategic hilltops to protect the perimeters of kingdoms from human and superhuman invaders, were abandoned due to the 11th- and 13th-century Islamic invasions. At this point, the sentries (yoginis) were internalised onto the *chakras* (also used as weapons in warfare) of the yogic body or *pura* (military fortress). Such internalisation occurred in the identification of *chakras* with cremation grounds as stated in the 15th-century *Hatha Pradipika*; battlefields are often referred to as charnel grounds (*shmashan*) on which supernatural yoginis dance as they feed on the blood of dead warriors. A chapter titled 'Yogini Chakra' in the 11th-century *Manasollasa* discusses military strategies and contains astrological diagrams which help to determine the best place to attack enemies. In its last diagram, named *yogini-chakra*, eight goddesses occupy the eight directions. The speaker showed 18th- and 19th-century paintings from Rajasthan in which variations of such *chakra* systems are depicted. Textual references are vital in decoding the rich iconography of yogis represented in Indian art, religious or secular, examples of which are found, for instance, in medieval sculpture and Mughal paintings.

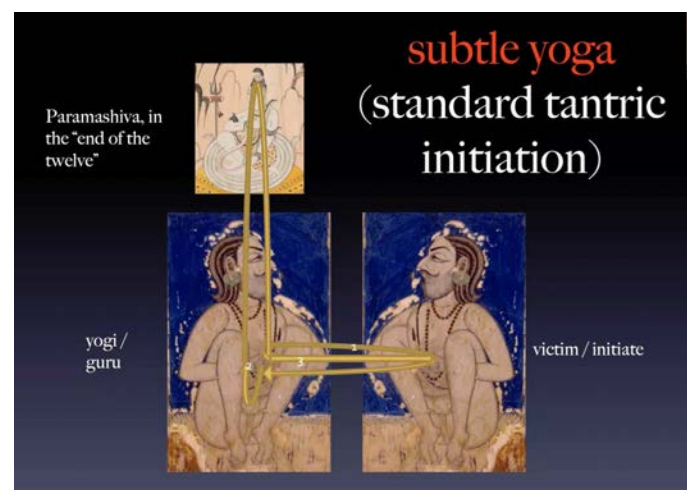
The term 'yogini' first appeared in tantric scripture around 700 CE and referred to supernatural shapeshifters (*kamarupini*) capable of flight. They could be women, animals or birds, usually imaged as predators such as the kite or *chila* bird, carrion-feeders and female jackals, with whom initiated tantric practitioners consorted in charnel grounds, as attested by the 14th-century *Kulachudamani Tantra*. Jackals were also called Shiva, as was the god's Shakti. Yoginis as jackals find mention in the *Jayadratha Yamala* and the *Brahma Yamala*, two 8th-century Hindu tantric texts. The yogi (considered a *vira*: hero) or a king initiated into tantric practices offered himself to be eaten by the yoginis (referred to as the filthy birds of the night in the 12th-century *Dvyasraya Kavya*) in a practice called *virachara*, *hatha melaka* (violent consorting) or *para yoga* (supreme yoga). Through this, he could be reinvented as the yoginis' chosen one and perform the elite tantra practices which led to liberation as well as supernatural powers in the world called *siddhis*. In this sense, yoga

was an initiation into the clans of yoginis. The 9th-century *Netra Tantra* describes three types of tantric yoga, among which the violent practice was foremost, since it helped *pashus* (victims) of the yoginis achieve the supreme goal of tantric practice: identification with the supreme god Shiva (*pati*) through death at the hands of yoginis, who were seen as Shivarupa or feminine forms of Shiva himself. Yoginis ate away sin, crunching the *pashas* or fetters of *pashus* and yoked them with Shiva without sullyng themselves. This was the yoga or yoking of the individual soul to Shiva. The scholar acknowledged that the violence of tantric practice has been overlooked by scholars, perhaps due to his own earlier emphasis on its sexual aspects. In present-day Nepal, a simulated human sacrifice to jackals at the Vatsala temple in Kathmandu echoes the legacy of medieval tantric beliefs and practices.

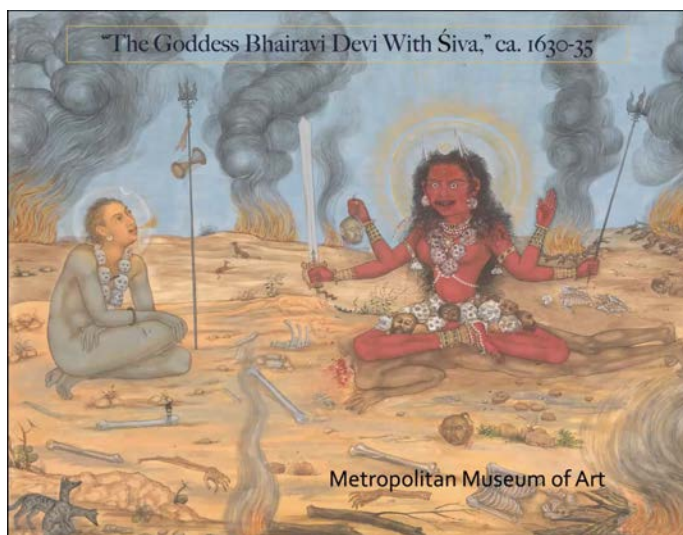
Professor White noted the close parallels between the language used by *hatha* yoga, tantric yoga and alchemy, and the importance of sexual fluids in the transformations – human, divine and metallic – seen in these three fields. Mercury was equated with the semen of Shiva, while sulphur was associated with the menstrual blood and sexual emissions of the Goddess. Alexis Sanderson used the term ‘the Kaula reformation’ to indicate the shift to an understanding of yoginis as women who participated in initiations of yogis, and sexual practices called *priya-melaka* (affectionate consorting) that led to the attainment of *siddhis*, a ‘fluid gnosis’ through the ingestion of sexual fluids and menstrual blood. What was once a gruesome and violent encounter with a yogini sublimated into an erotic one, but the shift was not ubiquitous according to Hindu and Buddhist sources, as yoginis (*dakinis* in the Buddhist context) were only satisfied with offerings of flesh and blood. Most yogis became food for the yoginis, while the virile hero or tantric virtuoso became their ‘darling’ only after being eaten by them. An 11th-century Sanskrit poem by the Kashmiri poet Kshemendra which can be read either as a description of a yogi being made love to by his lover or a corpse being eaten by a jackal indicates two ways in which a male could relate to a yogini.

Next, the *Netra Tantra* describes the taking over of the bodies of victims and tantric practitioners by both yogis and yoginis through the techniques of *sukshma* or subtle yoga. A passage in the

Mahabharata refers to yogis as masters of visual perception (*yogi pratyaksha*): a ray of light projected from the yogi’s eye onto the surface of the object of perception. This technique of subtle yoga, in which the practitioner could also reduce himself to the size of a pellet or *gutika* using *mantras*, enabled the yogi to transcend his own body by entering and taking over the bodies and selves of others, such as “the Prajapatis, the sages, the gods, and the great beings”. Yogis could harness and retain the powers of thousands of selves simultaneously, in some cases divinising themselves or creating armies of themselves that could walk the earth. The *Netra Tantra* exhorts the yogi to assault and enter the body from all sides; possession of this type was termed *avesha*, whereas *samavesha* referred to altruistic possession by a yogi, yogini, spirit being or *matrika*. *Sukshma* yoga is described in popular retellings and in some incidents in the *Mahabharata* as seen in the story of Vipula. In the absence of his guru, Vipula protected Ruchi, his preceptor’s wife, from Indra’s amorous advances, entering her body to paralyse her response by binding her through yogic means. Yogis also had the power to release others from these bonds and lead them to liberation. Gopinath Kaviraj, a famed 20th-century scholar from Varanasi, explained tantric possession through the disembodied concentration of the practitioner, which utilises yogic mind-bearing channels fanning through the entire cosmos that form a network of a luminous thread-like substance, through which everything is connected with everything else. Kaviraj also explained how the tantric guru merged his disciples’ minds with his own (by leaving a piece of his mind in the disciple’s mind at the time of initiation, and a piece of the disciple’s in his own). Through this the guru led his disciples to liberation after their deaths.



Finally, the *Netra Tantra* describes gross or *sthula* yoga which involved sorcery and counter-sorcery. This black and white magic could be both protective for others (which was salutary for the practitioner, his family and the kingdom) and selfish and destructive (ultimately resulting in practitioners being destroyed by their own evil). The three types of yoga allowed practitioners to control their victims using invisible means. Kshemaraja, disciple of Abhinavagupta and a famous scholar in his own right, describes the dust practice, used in *sthula* yoga in combination with *mantra-vada* or the doctrine of spells, in his commentary on Chapter 20, Verse 39 of the *Netra Tantra*: the yogini took the dust off the right foot of a male corpse and the left foot of a female corpse with her left and right hands, using it to kill her victims. These three types of yoga, *hatha-melaka* and *priya-melaka* are illustrated in manuscripts and in monuments such as the temples of Khajuraho.



The *Shiva Samhita*, a *hatha* yoga text, and corresponding paintings, present the yogic body with Mount Meru (representing the spine) at the centre of the universe. Attributed to Gorakhnath, the founder of the Nath yoga sect, though probably a later text, the *Siddha Siddhanta Paddhati* presents the principles of perfected beings or *siddhas* (a yogi who has perfected his practice). Most likely brought to power by the intervention of Nathas who were very powerful in this region in the 18th and 19th centuries, Maharaja Mansingh, the Rathore ruler of Jodhpur, was a patron of the sect and commissioned a stunningly illustrated manuscript of this text. Many such detailed paintings which precisely illustrate textual descriptions of the yogic body with its resident deities and beings, worlds, continents,

rivers, and seas are found in manuscripts held by the Mehrangarh Palace Library, Jodhpur. Nath yogis were associated with mountains (*naths* or lords of the landscape) and sometimes seen as mountains themselves: Mallinath, a Rathore king and a *siddha purusha*, was named for the Malay Mountain. A Nath yogi named Chidiyanath (lord of the birds) occupied the hill on which a Rathore king eventually built Mehrangarh fort at Jodhpur; *chila* birds, referred to as yoginis in several sources, are still found in large numbers around this cliff. The two highest peaks at Girnar in Gujarat are called Dattatreya and Gorakhnath (the founder of the Nath sect) after two great yogis, and house temples and *mathas* dedicated to them. Jalandharnath, another great Nath yogi, was also associated with a mountain.

Travellers such as Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta noted the yogis' use of alchemy, diet and practice, evidenced in mediaeval sculpture across the Hindu world, to prolong their lives by hundreds of years. Many of India's monastic orders were also military orders of armed yogis who fought each other over patronage or land. They, and others in the guise of yogis, served as mercenaries in the subcontinent's wars from late mediaeval times through to the colonial early modern period. The *Akbarnama* presents an incident in which Akbar sided with a band of *sanyasis* against a group of yogis, tilting the battle in favour of the former. Other fascinating accounts relate that Akbar was respectful of the yogis' power, both military and supernatural, curious about their alchemical knowledge and built a structure at his capital at Fatehpur Sikri called the City of Yogis. One story relates that a yogi switched his soul with the emperor's, altering the ruler's character in the last decade of his life. Mughal paintings and mediaeval sculpture depict a yogi's curious ring-like iron weapon, a small deer horn (*simhanada*) worn around the neck of a yogi on a string and his distinctive earrings. In accounts written by yogis, dominated by those of the Nath yogis in the Mughal, colonial and modern periods, they present themselves as powerful, war-like and often sinister figures who performed beneficial miracles for those who respected them but brought about the downfall of those who did not.

Travel accounts, hagiographies and James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* recount that in the absence of a powerful centralised kingdom,

yogis (referred to as *jogis* or *faqirs* at this time) in North India became powerbrokers, using their *siddhis*, their saintly status which precluded punishment, their fighting prowess, and perhaps less miraculous means such as poison, to provide protection and bring victory to petty kings and warlords. Tod's disenchantment with the unscrupulous and power-hungry comportment of the yogi Deonath or Ayasdeonath who enabled Maharaja Mansingh's rule in Jodhpur is abundantly clear: the Nath yogis were successful in preventing the British from becoming kingmakers and exercising de facto control over the region. Tod remarks that Deonath's position was that of the god of the kingdom to whom the king was beholden and subservient: Deonath condescended to share power with Mansingh, hence exalting the throne; one-tenth of the revenue of the entire kingdom accrued to the yogi; Deonath was given lands in every district to build eighty-four temples and monasteries 'for his well-fed, lazy disciples' and exercised control over the treasury. Maharaja Mansingh wrote his guru's hagiography and built the Mahamandir in 1804 to mark his accession to the throne at the cost of over fifty lakh rupees. It was dedicated to Jalandharnath, who was at that time represented by Deonath himself. Nath yogis occupied similar, enviable positions in many Rajput kingdoms of North India in mediaeval and modern times. The hagiography of a yogi named Mastnath, written by an insider of the order and published in Jodhpur, seems to amalgamate the exploits of many yogis (including one who claimed to be responsible for the fall of the Mughal empire) into a dramatic narrative, and offers the insight that yogis had no qualms about proclaiming their maleficence towards those who did not respect and venerate them.

By the 1990s, the Naths were greatly reduced in number throughout India; the trend began in the early 19th century when the British, faced with the bloodthirsty tactics and belligerent opposition of these warrior-ascetics to their colonial projects, put in place a series of laws called the Vagrant Acts that made many of the yogis' activities punishable by imprisonment. The British codification of the caste system classified many orders of yogis as criminal castes and staged photographs of degenerate yogis were added to the colonial ethnographic archive. British scorn was not entirely unfounded as mobs of yogis commonly

indulged in criminal behaviour and extortion at this time. Understandably, contemporary European accounts rue the fact that no 'true' yogis remained in India except those that lived in the inaccessible high Himalayas. Legislation, and changes in the economic and religious landscape of India where *bhakti* became prominent, resulted in a loss of power and prestige for the yogis especially between 1857 and the 1990s. By the millennium, however, many yogis had succeeded in gaining private patronage and, in a sense, rebranding themselves, from being former miracle workers to offering an alternative to the Brahmin priesthood, successfully organising *havans* and *bhajans* for their clientele. Yet, to this day, the *kumbh mela* sees several renunciate orders, including armed yogis, vie for primacy in taking a holy dip in the river.

Observers of India in the last three decades have marked the political power wielded by yogis since the 1990s, with member of parliament Yogi Avedyanath being known for his involvement with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Avedyanath was also *mahant* of the Gorakhpur monastery as was Yogi Digvijaynath, who in 1949 placed images of Rama and his family in the Babri mosque at Ayodhya; in addition, Avedyanath was the guru of Adityanath, chief minister of Uttar Pradesh who has also been designated *mahant* of the Gorakhpur monastery. Professor White closed his arguments by pointing out that Adityanath's political role is, in fact, aligned perfectly with the historical legacy of the Nath sect and with the history of yoga, which began as warfare. The present political turn is hardly surprising considering that for over a millennium, yogis were not just ascetics and magicians, but also spies, powerbrokers and de facto rulers. - J.K.



CRITICISM & THEORY



Apnavi Makanji | Untitled - Significant Other | 2018 | Courtesy: Vadehra Art Gallery

JPM's Criticism & Theory offerings include: (1) a Certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (3) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

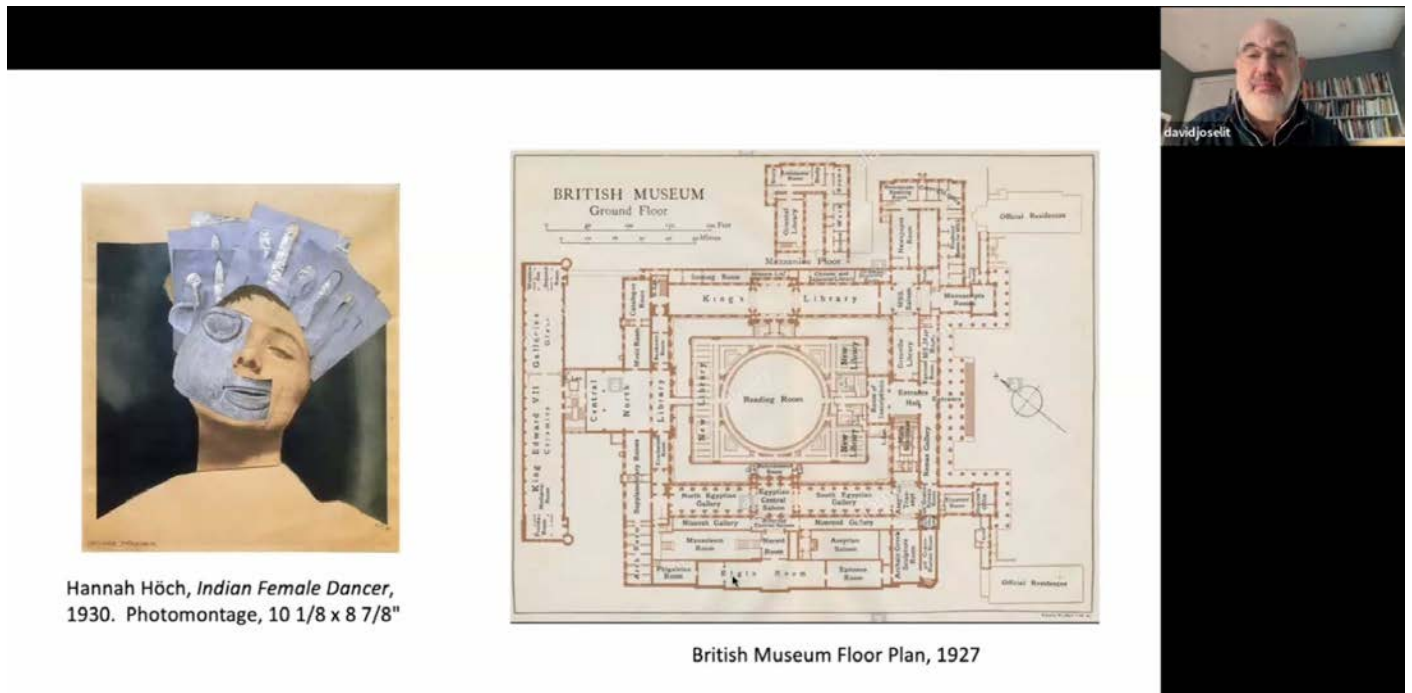
Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

An Uncomfortable Tour Through The Museum

PAST PROGRAMMES

Museum Montage: Inclusion as Dispossession

November 7th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. David Joselit (Arthur Kingsley Porter Professor and Chair of Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard)



Hannah Höch, *Indian Female Dancer*, 1930. Photomontage, 10 1/8 x 8 7/8"

British Museum Floor Plan, 1927

Dr. David Joselit's session, the fourth talk in the series, looked at the museum through the metaphor of a montage, by navigating intricate themes of inclusion juxtaposed with dispossession, urging an examination of the museum's role in contemporary times. He opened the talk by referencing the work of the German Dada artist, Hannah Hoch, to define what characterises a montage according to Western Modernism, and how it is epitomised by the jarring conjunction of disparate elements to form a new composition. Citing another example of a blueprint of the British Museum from 1927, he confronted the museum's power to shape narratives and perspectives, often at the expense of marginalised voices. His discourse surrounding the museum as montage prompts critical reflection on its role in perpetuating both inclusionary and exclusionary practices. The speaker scrutinised the museum as an institution by confronting questions of representation as a technique of dispossession, and how inclusion

by representation can be exclusionary in its very nature.

Dr. Joselit fundamentally analysed representation by highlighting intersections between inclusion and dispossession, and by pointing out the dual nature of representation, likening it to the complexities of political aesthetics. The speaker emphasised how the encyclopaedic model of museums, epitomised by The Louvre, commodifies art, stripping it of its original context and significance. While diverse representation in museums is often lauded, Joselit drew parallels from political theory to reveal its inherent exclusivity and how people are portrayed as subsets while never being fully represented. He built upon insights from the political theorist, Robert Nichols's book *Theft is Property!*, where the concept of inclusion as a form of dispossession is seen in the context of Native American and African American experiences, particularly in selective recognition of Native land ownership

and enslaved individuals' rights. Drawing parallels to art, he further stated how art when treated as property, serves as both an asset and a liability. By comparing the works of two artists – Jasper Johns and Robert Colescott – he pointed out how one can presume neutrality while the other is expected to represent their identity and even challenge stereotypes, purely by virtue of their ethnicities, which goes on to show how the burden of representation often falls on minorities.

The museum, akin to democracy, serves as a site for inclusion, aiming to represent diverse cultures, genders, sexualities, and historical narratives. However, its very inception involved the alienation of objects, often extracted from their source cultures and are subjected to unjust interpretations adhering to geopolitical hierarchies. Dr. Joselit argued that this process of inclusion can paradoxically lead to dispossession. He cited the examples of historical instances such as Napoleon's appropriation of artworks during military campaigns to stress that the museum's very foundation is built on acts of looting and dispossession. Efforts for repatriation by rightful owners further highlight the complexities inherent in the museum's history. The speaker goes on to assert that the museum is a place where works of art were destroyed, and used a passionate quote by the French archaeologist Quatremere de Quincy to support it further:

“Moving all the monuments, so as to gather up their dispersed fragments, methodically classify their debris and make of this grouping a lesson in modern chronology is for a living nation to become a dead nation; it is for the living to attend their own funeral; it is to murder art to write its history; it is not to write the history of art, but its epitaph.”

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Joselit urged us to challenge the encyclopaedic model of modern museums by considering alternative models which can address historical trauma and foster inclusivity in better ways. By illustrating contemporary examples like Depot Boijmans Van Beuningen and Documenta Fifteen organised by Ruangrupa, which prioritise viewer agency and collaboration, he highlighted the potential for shifting curatorial roles. He posed the question of whether an open-archives model could serve as a remedy to singular representations within museums, and left us contemplating whether it will enable the writing of history in reverse. The speaker acknowledged that the future of museums is uncertain, as ongoing debates surround their evolution, and concluded the talk with a final thought-provoking idea of whether the museum can be reimagined as a search engine. Whether this open archive format will significantly reshape its trajectory or simply spark further discourse remains to be seen. – *P.I.*

The Rise and (Fall?) of the Post-Colonial Documenta

November 14th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Mr. Sunil Shah (Artist and Writer)



Introduction

Artist, writer and editor of *American Suburb X*, a photography and visual culture platform, Sunil Shah is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London, and is researching art and exhibition histories with a focus on Okwui Enwezor's Documenta XI, 2002. He is interested in the visual document, photography and the archive, their function and meaning, and their relation to postcolonial

theory, political science and Black Studies. Shah is interested in non-standard, non-genealogical ways of thinking about exhibition histories, albeit within the frame of the academic – its formats, contexts, and languages. This desire to resist rather than fold into the colonially entrenched framework of contemporary art exhibitions becomes the impulse for his Ph.D. thesis which examines Okwui Enwezor's Documenta XI, 2002 as a case study of the status of the postcolonial within contemporary art. Shah's lecture introduced us to the history of the biennial, its place within the history of art exhibitions, the notion of the postcolonial in contemporary art, and the pioneering figure of Okwui Enwezor. His presentation was structured around a series of photographs that document the staging of this personal, political and postcolonial encounter of the self with the sites and psycho-scapes of exhibition spaces. Shah presents the shape of the biennial entwined with the story of colonialism, and framed discussions around contemporary museums/museumisation, the exhibitionist and the spectacular, and the 'productive' discomfort of inhabiting such spaces.

Articulating 'difference' through exhibition and curatorial spaces

Ugandan-born Shah immigrated to the UK in 1972, and his interest in the colonial photographic archive and the ways exhibitions articulate 'difference' emerges from his postcolonial, migrant status and personal experiences of racism in Oxford. Aware of the dominant narrative of wealth and social mobility of East African British immigrants most often articulated in colonial photography exhibitions spurred in him a desire to complicate and problematise these narratives. His photography and research practice draws on the potential of curatorial spaces as sites of challenge, interrogation and resistance.

His association with David A. Bailey of the International Curators Forum and his meeting with Okwui Enwezor, in Haus der Kunst in 2017, when he attended an exhibition workshop on *Post-war Art Between the Atlantic and the Pacific*, led to his travel with them to Sharjah, Kassel, Prospect New Orleans, Berlin and Liverpool for the Biennials, to understand contemporary art on the global stage, various aspects of representation, and challenges to Western notions of art nourished his interest

in Documenta XI. Shah subsequently interviewed Enwezor (who passed away in 2019) on his approach to Documenta XI in London in 2017.

The Biennial as Postcolonial Turn in Contemporary Art



Drawing attention to the colonial underpinnings of contemporary exhibition-making, Shah traces the biennial's emergence from the 19th-century World Fair, and their similarities in their utilisation of the spectacular, celebration of industry, culture and commerce, and the nation-building/nationalistic impulse. He discusses the 'internationalism' of the contemporary biennial, its peculiar relationship to 'locality and its reception, both local and global, through the example of the Liverpool Biennial. Alluding to Terry Smith's *What is Contemporary Art?* (2009), which identifies three currents within contemporary art exhibitions: "the retro-modern spectacular" of museums, institutions and the art market; "the postcolonial turn" of biennials and their internationalism; and "relational survivalism" of new media and spaces like the internet adapted by artists (such as Instagram, social media, online formats, and sharing of art in virtual spaces). Shah speculates on the place of the biennial within the postcolonial turn within contemporary art, and on why the postcolonial has become a current within contemporary art.

Otherness and Contemporary Art Exhibitions

Gesturing towards ideas of the artist as genius and the work of art as separate from social and political realities that emerge within the Western Aesthetic tradition of Kant and Hegel, Shah speaks of the challenge presented by the idea of 'the other' in the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois in the 1980s, where the non-white subject, firmly outside Western mainstream consciousness, underpins conversations around modernism and the postcolonial.

The failure of exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1989 and *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and Modern*, MOMA, 1984, at presenting art in a non-Western global sense, coupled with artists' struggles to get noticed by galleries and art circuits in the post-war period, becomes significant for Shah. Social justice movements from the 1960s onwards started gaining traction within art circles. In the 1980s, shifts started to occur in critiques of modernism, from structuralism and scholarship of postcolonial theory. Black artists begin to cohere as a community, coinciding with the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the emergence of Sonia Boyce, Keith Piper and Eddie Chambers, the scholarship of Stuart Hall, Rasheed Araeen and organisations like the Institute of International Visual Arts (INIVA) in the early 1990s. Rasheed Araeen's exhibition at Hayward Gallery, London, *The Other Story*, 1989, featured "Asian, African and Caribbean artists in post-war Britain" and fostered a sense of political Blackness and solidarity.

The Figure of Okwui Enwezor



Emerging as a pioneering figure in African art writing and contemporary art, Okwui Enwezor started his magazine for African art writing, *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* along with Chika Okeke-Agulu and Salah Hassan. His career in curation began with *In/sight*, an exhibition of 30 African photographers at the Guggenheim, in 1996. The Johannesburg Biennial, 1997, became the testing ground for ideas that were a precursor to Documenta XI. Invited to participate in *Hundred Days, Hundred Guests* by Catherine David, curator of Documenta X, Enwezor presented a proposal for the shape of contemporary global art which garnered international attention, leading to his appointment as the artistic director of Documenta

XI in 1997.

Documenta XI: History, Contribution and Legacy

Curated by a committee from its initial conception in 1955 by Arnold Bode, Documenta was a large-scale contemporary exhibition till 1968. In 1972, Harold Zeeman introduced the idea of a star curator whose encompassing vision would pull the exhibition which is itself a consumed entity, together. Further, Documenta, as a conversation between East and West in the post-Cold War era, where art was a site at which ideological apparatuses could be presented and laid out, transformed under Catherine David's Documenta X and Okwui Enwezor's Documenta XI, into a conversation between the countries of the North and global South. Documenta XI comes into being at the turn of the millennium when the internet becomes an entity and globalisation a reality. These global technological shifts shape contemporary art, shifting its radar towards postcolonialism. The 9/11 attack and its aftermath forged a new relationship between capitalism and terrorism, and Western ideological shifts with their capitalist configurations draw attention to the 'centre' and 'margins' of Western cultural consciousness.

Documenta XI and the Postcolonial

Enwezor's Documenta XI has been seen as "a culmination of two decades of activity to realise the postcolonial space of artistic production and dissemination. He shows how the visual representational field has been rewritten from the margins and largely activated through circuits of biennials. Most notably, initially emerging from the biennial in Havana, 1984 onwards, Smith sees the postcolonial turn as locally specific yet worldly in implication, inclusive, yet oppositional and anti-institutional, concrete but variant, but also various, mobile and open-ended, as antithesis to what current modern art meant. What is interesting in what Smith lays out is his belief that postcolonialism is in opposition to modernism, able to overturn art's narrow Eurocentric focus and provide a worldly picture of what art was." – Stuart Hall on Terry Smith.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, biennials emerged within contemporary art, presenting the world in a new language around the global

and the postcolonial. Okwui links the global with the postcolonial, seeing them as two sides of the same coin where the postcolonial condition is the movement of people around the world, characterised by ‘nearness’ and not something that is happening elsewhere anymore. The postcolonial subject appears in the West, and is there, present at all times. The ‘good immigrant’s role is to assimilate and hide rather than highlight and make visible his cultural difference. Enwezor attempts to present a critique of Westernism within Documenta XI, where although the Western avant-garde’s challenges to the status quo are rendered problematic, they ultimately fold into high culture.

Linking postcoloniality to ideas of empire, multitude and the postcolonial subject, Enwezor according to Shah, presents a regime of subjectivity that is oppositional to Western thought modes. In *The Black Box*, Enwezor states that postcoloniality is bound up against two forces: “Firstly, through its relationship to decolonisation and its liberatory struggle for freedom from colonisation. And secondly, how it represents a global presence and not something that exists only in the margins.”

Innovations of Documenta XI



The culmination of five years of collaborative work and shared curatorial authority, Documenta XI, 2002, brings to the fore new materials – film, photography and archival materials – for viewership and critical attention, and attempts to relay postcolonial subject positions. It effects several deterritorialisations whereby multiple platforms for discussion precede rather than follow the exhibition. These discursive platforms, staged at Vienna and Berlin, New Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos, address regional concerns and subject matter, where speakers discuss socio-political realities, which were part of the postcolonial

experience such as overpopulation and the environment. These emphasised the socio-political, not merely a backdrop to art, but as an essential part of the postcolonial experience.

Shah explains that seeing an exhibition was also about hearing the contexts in which the artworks were being made, the delving into and discussing the complexities of the works shown. The art exhibition was conceived less as a visual spectacle and more as a reflective, educational experience. Documenta XI, which involved 170 artists and a 40 million Euro budget, also introduced the idea of collaborative specialisms and shared conceptual strategies, bringing in different perspectives and complicating conversations, both curatorial and other. In continuity with Documenta X, 65 artists at Documenta XI were using either photography, film or archive-based media which Seth reads as a “deterritorialisation of media forms” that visitors found outrageous. Even within Kassel, offsite projects such as Thomas Hirschhorn’s Bataille monument (graffitied walls) made with residents of Kassel (library, TV, studio, cafe) played with ideas of social practice. The inclusion of collectives like Raqs Media Collective and Le Groupe Amos in Documenta Halle effected conceptual shifts in notions of what art could be. Postcolonial subject positions were delivered through the socio-political realities that we see in the photographs and the films in the artworks shown.

Its Limitations and Critiques

Reflecting on its legacy, Seth charts briefly how the Documenta that followed reacted to Documenta XI, most immediately reacting against it, which for him marks the end of the postcolonial turn wherein the postcolonial enters the frame but the issue that is raised overturns the postcolonial.



Seth concedes that Documenta XI did not often transcend its exhibitory strategies and the

layouts it attempted to critique: it allowed for assimilation into the very strategies of 'white cube' and 'black box' it sets out to critique; its attempt to present a challenge to Westernism was seen as 'highbrow', elitist and was divorced from postcolonial realities; it was not art and in the words of Anthony Downey, was "an institutional diagnosis and an ethical imperative to address social and political injustice through counter-hegemonic voices, but then that was not really art"; not exempt from issues of representation of non-Western artists and women.

Conclusion

Discussions centred around questions of representation, "whether the postcolonial subject can ever be legitimate in the West, whether assimilation can only be in terms set by the West"; the paradoxical nature of biennials which sometimes displace communities while featuring art about displacement (such as Zarina Bhimji's work about displacement at the Sharjah biennial); on funding, big budgets and 'artwashing'; on art

politics and the elaboration of the postcolonial subject; on whether mainstream representation at mainstream centres follows a logic of the inclusion of the other or adapts it to Eurocentric modalities; on critiques of Documenta and the ways of seeing disagreements around funding within collectives (as in the case of Ruangrupa), and discrepancies around peoples' labour, time and money through the lens of decolonisation; and how organisations and artists are adjusting to contemporary restrictions of freedom.

Sunil Shah concluded his lecture by revisiting the postcolonial status of contemporary art today by treating the exhibition itself as an artefact and the possible ways of navigating this terrain: through a 'remixing' or 'storying' articulations of postcolonial subjectivity to create radical, anti-colonial work and reconstitute 'knowledge'; through extracting archival material from the Documenta's history to re-examine issues like curatorial inputs and deterritorialisation; through an interdisciplinary approach to art history, exhibition history and research practice to make visible the "experience of the postcolonial subject". - S.S.

After Institutions - The Inner Workings of Institutional Critique

November 21st, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Ms. Karen Archey (Curator of Contemporary Art at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam)



Karen Archey is an art curator for the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the largest museum of modern and contemporary art in the Netherlands. She is, therefore, ideally placed to provide us with an additional set of tools to navigate our way through our uncomfortable tour of the museum.

Her talk consisted of an insider's view of the inner workings of art institutions and an overview of the history of the institutional critique movement.

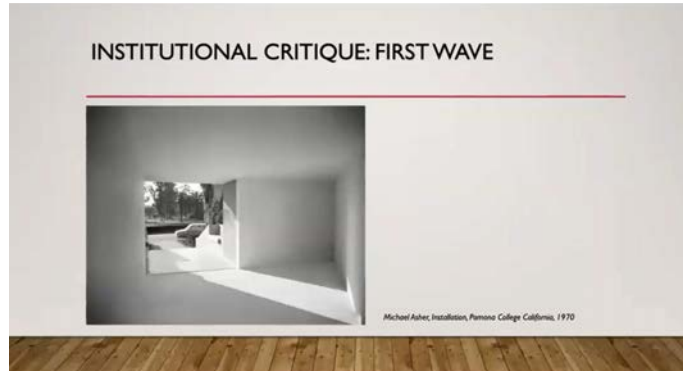
Archey began by introducing the concept of institutional critique, which she describes eloquently as "art reflecting on art, within art".

Archey summarised the movement in three waves.

First Wave

This began in the 1960s as an offshoot of conceptual art. It can be seen through the works of artists such as Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Hans Hacker and others. Andrea Fraser

provided some key texts on the subject, including a definition.



Key works include The Museum of Modern Art's 1999 exhibition entitled 'The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect' and Michael Asher's work at the Pomona College Museum of Art in 1970.

We looked at the 'anti-aesthetic' strategy prevalent in the first wave, including measures to prevent the work from being commoditised, since it may be contradictory to be critical of capitalism while simultaneously embracing it.

Second Wave

This ran in the late 1980s and coincided with the AIDS crisis. Artists in the second wave included Zoe Leonard, Mark Dion, Byron Kim, Derek Jarmin, Renée Green and James Meyer. It included educators as well, such as Gregg Bordowitz, Mark Dion and Joseph Grigely.



The second wave of artists acted against the formalism of the first wave artists and their lack of urgency.

"I have no more questions about gallery walls." (Gregg Bordowitz, 1989)

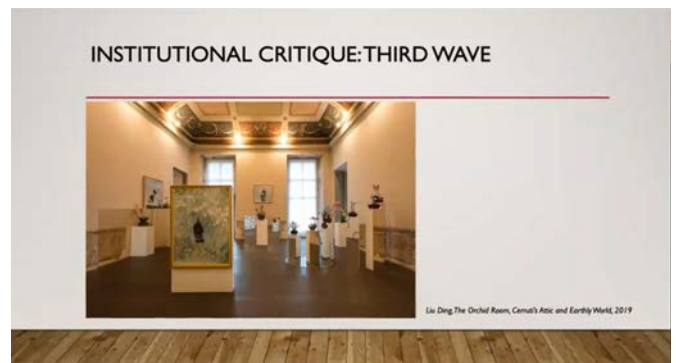
Particular works that exemplify the second wave include:

- Mark Dion and his series of taxidermic animals.

- Zoe Leonard and two of her works – her series of photographs of trees growing into fences, which speaks of the feeling of confinement and survival, and her series called 'Strange Fruit' which speaks of the body ravaged by AIDS and left behind by society, but also the museum's preservation and collecting function, and challenging the American medical institution.

Third Wave

Archey considered whether the definition of institutional critique needs to be revisited given the economic, social and political changes that have taken place since Fraser first defined the term almost twenty years ago. For example, does the anti-aesthetic requirement still apply?



We considered questions on whether anti-aesthetic work makes it less legible for non-professional audiences and therefore less accessible. Additionally, is the resistance to commodification so relevant, given that all work can ultimately be commodified by institutions over time?

We also looked at how institutional critique has now become a worldwide movement. We looked at the works of artists such as Clara Ianni's *Soft Water Hard Stone*, Liu Ding's *The Orchid Room*, and Joseph Grigely and Park McArthur's criticism of minimalism and access to museums for persons with disabilities.

Connecting the discussion with a previous talk by David Joselit in the series, Archey also discussed how the inclusion of a piece of work within an institution would make it a commodity and property. Therefore, could its inclusion lead to its dispossession, especially with work dealing with colonialism?

Going Forward

Archey concluded by setting out that it is not enough to just show art by or of unrepresented people; deeper changes are required to have a meaningful impact. In considering how to bring about such change, Archey proposed a number of potential options as food for thought:

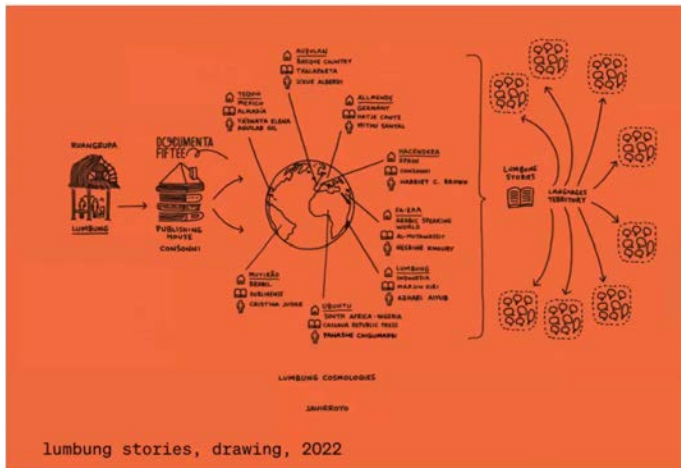
1. The removal of all curators.

2. Rethinking the concept of 'mirroring constituencies'.
3. Reconsidering property as content and methodology.
4. Whether private institutions work better than public spaces.
5. The abolition of museums in general.

- P.D.

Lumbung-ing: A Spatial Practice

November 23rd, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Mr. Farid Rakun (Architect & Curator)



the story of Ruangrupa, their mode of operation as a collective, and ultimately addressing their curation of the controversial Documenta Fifteen.

What is a collective and how can it function within the context of the art world? In taking us through the beginnings of Ruangrupa in Jakarta in the year 2000, Farid demonstrated how at its core, a collective is really a space that artists can gather within – a space that can evolve, expand and accommodate practices both from within and outside of the art world, but critically, a space where art could be made, thought through, seen and conversed with by local communities as well as broader contexts. Given that the art world has globally remained severely gate-kept, the collective as a form of artist solidarity but also a practical space has been deeply important. Ruangrupa’s beginnings in engaging with video art, murals and other mediums that went outside of the expensive and solitary artist studio mould quickly allowed them to grow within the urban and university contexts of Jakarta where they are based.

For the eighth session of our immensely well-received public lecture series on the museum, ‘An Uncomfortable Tour Through the Museum’, we welcomed Farid Rakun, a member of the renowned Indonesian collective Ruangrupa. In 2022, Ruangrupa were catapulted to global attention far beyond the confines of the art world through their curation of Documenta Fifteen – the most recent edition of the world’s largest contemporary art festival, taking place once every five years in the German city of Kassel. In fact, Ruangrupa’s curatorship of Documenta had been a central subject in several of the talks in this series preceding Farid’s, therefore our participants were already prepared with numerous questions at the start of his talk. Given the particular interest that Documenta held for the audience, Farid began his talk with a ‘question session’, allowing participants to ask a few questions to set the tone of discussion before he delved into

How can the mythical space of the art gallery or the museum be opened up for artists to enter and intervene, not just through their work as ‘dead’ objects placed in vacuums, but as living, breathing communities of people and of experiences both tangible and intangible? To have the museum leak onto the street, and out towards the world outside its gates has been of central interest for

Ruangrupa, seen particularly in their intervention *Ruru (2011-ongoing)* for the Sao Paulo Biennial in 2014. In tracing through Ruangrupa's journey, Farid emphasised the role that being a cosmopolitan, internationally oriented collective played in opening up access to global spaces of discourse. It was particularly interesting to hear Farid speak on how the writing of funding proposals also played a critical role in providing the collective with the funding that they needed. However, the funding provided by institutions are often a double-edged sword, as institutional agendas can heavily influence what is possible with the funding one receives, and Farid stressed on how this too led Ruangrupa to more carefully approach funding while at the same time attempt to create more accessible spaces.

Perhaps the most prominent section of Farid's talk was his articulation of Ruangrupa's experience of curating Documenta Fifteen, a mega art event that has historically been known for the spectacle of their artists as well as for its 'star curators'. Ruangrupa's proposal was to envision Documenta as a *lumbung* – a 'communal rice barn' in Indonesian. The idea of a *lumbung* meant that their role as curators was to open up the role of 'curator' to as many artists and collectives as possible – a collective of collectives in essence, and over the course of the 100-day festival in 2022, the small German city of Kassel witnessed an influx of more artists than ever before – all working, living, cooking and conversing together as well as with the world. For a largely global-north-focussed art world accustomed to

witnessing spectacular works of art in the rarefied spaces of the gallery or the museum, Ruangrupa's highly participatory, community-led approach – a *lumbung* – seemingly came across as controversial. Interestingly, for an audience largely from South Asia, Ruangrupa's experience came across as more relatable than remote. The demand of the art world from artists, collectives and curators of the global south to 'represent' the entirety of their regions, to wear the skins of their identities and provide easily consumable works of 'art' that can be palatable but will not cause discomfort or reveal structural injustice or ongoing exploitation, these are everyday experiences for artists trying to survive, make meaningful work and connect to wider communities. In that way, Ruangrupa's idea of a *lumbung* is not simply a radical move to decentre the 'star curator' and the spectacular singular artists who can be easily traded as commodities, but to claim that the spaces created to think, make, converse, and live creatively are the most significant artistic contributions.

Farid's session had some of the most deeply felt questions from our audience through the entire series. As is often the case, a two-hour session with such an engaged speaker felt limited. However, while the talk itself felt short, Farid's session provided us with not simply hope that another way is possible, but a radical optimism in bringing it into practice in our own ways as practitioners. Open the doors, allow the museum, the classroom, the gallery, the festival, creative practice itself, to leak out into the street, and welcome people to join in. – **A.T.**

Against Museology

November 28th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Mr. Sabih Ahmed (Writer & Curator)

The museum is under attack, but the old guard stands strong. Forms of resistance are met with a mutation. The museum evolves but barely budes from its extractive necropolitical techniques of subjugation, domination, and quantification. Museology still remains predicated on the death of the art object – it fixes the object in place, time, and history in the name of preservation. It subjects us to the fantasy that within the museum,

time stands still and entropy slows down. But what exactly does museology seek to preserve?

Sabih Ahmed has a clear answer. In the museum, time is made to appear to stand still not to preserve the object of art, but to preserve the power that has accumulated through the conjoined history of the museological and the mercantile. I nod my head in agreement.



The story that the rich and powerful tell us is that without a collection, there's no museum, without museums, there's no history, and without funding, there's no collection. Indeed, they try to convince us that art *needs* a market. The museological reinforces and reproduces the commodity aesthetic, perceiving and producing the world of objects through its violent gaze. It simulates a fantasy in which objects are killed so that they can be exhumed, collected, and exhibited in the space within the museum.

Ahmed focusses on how, in the neoliberal era, the museum bureaucratizes itself and employs figures such as the *manager* and the *consultant* towards this common end. Ahmed describes the manager as the primary deadening force at play. The work of the manager is that of the police. The art industry mimics the military-industrial complex, even importing its vocabulary of the *headquarters*, *plan of action*, *impact*, *strategy*, etc. The manager's procedural work turns an art object into an asset. Care for an object is turned into asset management, care for knowledge into preservation of power, and the custodianship of history into a fight to control the future.

This tendency of *mangerialisation* is hardly unique to the museum – it can even be seen in universities, and other institutions in the knowledge complex. The institution fears transformation. Implicit in this fear of transformation is the fear of loss of power or the loss of value of the possessed object. Thus, it creates edifices to halt transformation – the privatisation of the institution is such an attempt to hold on to this power that resides within institutions. Ahmed quotes the late David Graeber, “Never underestimate the power of

institutions to preserve themselves.”

In light of this, Ahmed urges us to ask what it means to *decapitalise* a museum. This is the central question of the lecture. Ahmed argues that the history of museology must be rewritten abandoning the etymology of care – we must tear down the facade on which institutionalised power stands. He differentiates between the *art field* and the *art world* or *art industry*, two realms that, though intermingled, stand in stark contrast. Where the art field emerges from organic processes, the art world, through the market, imposes on them its mechanistic demands. Where the art field is marked by plenitude, the art world is marked by a regulation of scarcity. Frequently, the assumption is that the latter is ‘elite’; however, when one engages with the art field in itself, assumptions that hold the industry afloat start to break down, much like the logic of capital itself breaks down periodically. Who is an artist/curator? What conditions is art produced in? What conditions is it encountered in? These are all questions that have been put under a microscope, here and now.

As evidence, Ahmed examines Ruangrupa's Documenta Fifteen, which the *art world* largely met with confusion and backhanded compliments, asserting that this Documenta was about *ethics* and not *aesthetics* – perhaps still harbouring the belief that aesthetics must only mean commodity aesthetics. He discusses the practices of Raqs Media Collective, among others, as alternatives that have started to emerge. In a time where the words *interdisciplinary* and *multidisciplinary* have become market symbols, he insists these practices produce a *non-disciplinarity* and bypass classifications dominant in the industry. Exhibitions become symposia, and sites for sharing practices are no longer restricted to the white-walled gallery. The *art field* thrives, even in conditions of precarity, where funding is limited and often even absent.

Ahmed argues that decapitalisation requires such a paradigm outside the economic – one that rids the museum of the extractive, patriarchal, and hegemonic forms of power that divide the world and fix objects within it – for people “sitting on the economic steam roller” operate largely under the same ethos. Ahmed suggests that

we need alternative *ethics*, or, as I think of it, an alternative framework of *desire*, such as feminist ethics, from which an alternative economic model may eventually emerge. His reinterpretation of *scale*, expanding the narrow definition based on *monumentality* to a broader conception based on *transmission* is a concrete example of such a decentring of the power preserved in the institution. Ahmed indicates that the work of the artist or curator who strives towards decapitalisation is like that of a jazz pianist – one that turns the *staccato* of the fixed world into a *legato* of flows. – **I.S.**



Institution as Practice

November 30th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Mr. Aaron Cezar (Founding Director of Delfina Foundation)

What does it mean to run an organisation whose mission is to invest in contemporary artists rather than their art? This was the question that stood at the heart of the 10th lecture of our series on the museum, titled 'An Uncomfortable Tour through the Museum'. Aaron Cezar, the indomitable director of the Delfina Foundation, led us through an expansive talk that laid out how an institution works to facilitate a more supportive space for contemporary artists.

Located in the heart of London, the Delfina Foundation is a renowned institution that hosts artist residencies for artists, curators and collectors around the globe to come and make work as well as network and grow their practice in one of the major centres of the contemporary art world. Delfina Entrecanales, the founder of the institution, famously said that she preferred to collect artists rather than art. In keeping with the focus on the artists that Delfina has supported over the decades, Aaron's talk also led us through videos and images of the artist residencies that had taken place at Delfina, giving us a wonderful insight into the breadth of artistic practices that Delfina has supported. While it would be impossible to detail all the artists' practises that Aaron showed us, I will be using some of the key themes that residency open-calls follow at Delfina to structure this essay.

The Politics of Food

Beginning from 2014, Delfina Foundation restructured the format of their residency programmes to have thematic directions rather than the region-based residencies they had previously been doing. A thematic focus allowed the institution to open itself to artists from around the world to respond to their themes, leading to each cycle of residencies bringing fascinating new interpretations. Aaron first took us through the work of a number of artists who had worked on the theme *The Politics of Food*, whose work addressed urgent issues related to food production, consumption and distribution. Since food is also an expression of social and national identity, their programme also explored wide-ranging subjects

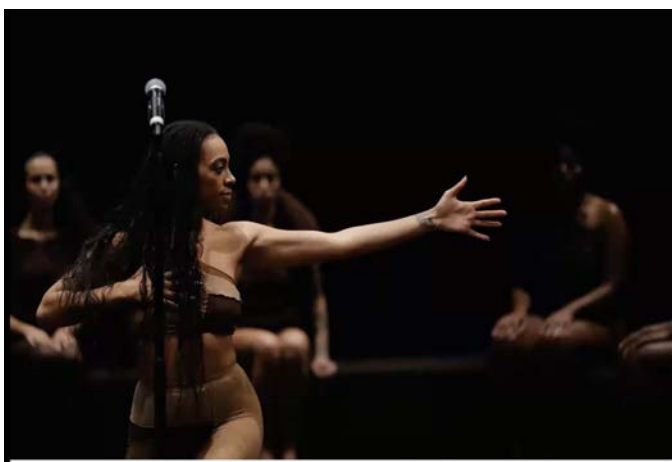


from gender to postcolonial politics, alongside considering recipes and culinary practices as a form of cultural memory. The politics of food is a particularly accessible topic, as whether one has a relationship with art or not, one has some kind of relationship with food because we need it simply to survive. Two artists whose work was particularly striking here were Michael Rakowitz's *Enemy Kitchen*, which opened up conversations about the war and US occupation of Iraq using Iraqi cuisine and community kitchens, and Amar Kanwar's *Sovereign Forest*, which investigated the relationship between food and the farmers in India who produce it, particularly highlighting the precarious relationship between survival, capital and the ecological crisis – a work that remains even more meaningful today than ever before.

Science, Technology, Society

A more recent theme that Delfina has been developing has been *Science, Technology and Society*. Here, we saw an interesting intersection between this current theme and Delfina's other ongoing theme, *The Politics of Food*, through the work of the artist Nick Laessing. An artist and inventor, Nick developed a hydroponic growing system for food, drawing from earlier experiments by NASA in growing food in non-conductive environments. Presented alongside a soundtrack emulating the sounds of nature, the work raised numerous questions about survival, sustainability as well as the directions that the ecological crisis are pushing us towards.

Performance as Process



Solange Knowles, *In Past Pupils and Smiles* (2019), performance documentation at 58th Venice Biennale

Another notable theme within the Delfina residency programmes was their *Performance as Process* programme. For the 2019 Venice Biennale curated by Ralph Rugoff, Aaron was invited to



co-curate a series of performances that would take over the 'in-between' spaces of the biennale pavilions, activating and disrupting the structured logic of exhibitions. Artists at the forefront of contemporary performance art, including Alex Baczynski-Jenkins, Boychild, Paul Maheke, Nastio Mosquito, Florence Peake and Eve Stainton, Sin Wai Kin (formerly Victoria Sin), and Zadie Xa, did a varied series of performances, culminating in a specially commissioned performance by the Grammy-winning musician and artist Solange Knowles in the final performance for the biennale.

Collecting as Practice

Perhaps one of the most interesting thematic programmes Aaron took us through was *Collecting as Practice*, a programme where both artists as well as curators were invited to be in residence and engage with the idea of collecting/collections in their practice. Here, we were taken through Indian artist Avani Tanya's 2017 residency project jointly undertaken with the Delfina Foundation and the Victoria & Albert Museum, which critically explored the V&A's South Asia collection, resulting in a publication that has since been included in the museum's bookshop.

While Aaron's talk provided a lot of insight into how an artist residency could be a truly fulfilling space for supporting artists from around the world, over an extended period of time, many of the questions raised during our ensuing discussion session highlighted the difficulties of creating such spaces within India, or South Asia, given the lack of funding opportunities and overall support. In thinking with Aaron, however, and through the example of Delfina, it does open the door for us to imagine a pathway to create more such spaces within our own geographies. – **A.T.**

Museum as Ethos: Give the Body Back

December 05th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Ms. Zoe Butt (Writer & Curator)



One of the most nuanced and deeply resonating talks in the ACT series on the museum was given by Thailand-based curator and writer, Zoe Butt. Titled 'Museum as Ethos: Give the Body Back', Zoe's talk focussed on the series beyond the built landscapes that we generally understand as museums or even art spaces – colonial museums, national museums, or even private museums and contemporary galleries. Zoe began her talk by highlighting how in Vietnam, the country where Zoe spent numerous years as a curator, the museum is still seen as a space for dusty relics of colonial pasts, and is more popular as a site for wedding photo shoots than as a cultural centre or the home of contemporary art. Zoe asks, "If a museum is without expertise or audience, what then is the role and purpose of its collection?"

As a curator, Zoe has been interested in how contemporary artists and their work can provide alternate means of access to larger historical consciousness beyond the typical museological concepts of geography, nation, race, or social movement. In the opening section of her talk, Zoe began with an account of her own experience as a young child in Newcastle, Australia, being taken to the regional museum by her mother, where the descriptions of artworks by the security guards were even more compelling to her than the official narratives on the walls. Zoe was struck by the nuances of this act of sharing the stories of others through their art, and she grew to ask herself how much it matters that these stories are often not told by the cultures who produce the artworks, and what significance does it hold to see your own people represented

in the museums, particularly as a child of diaspora growing up in a predominantly white society. Her training as an art historian and subsequent early career as a curator with the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane led her to further question the lack of meaningful representation of art outside the mainstream centres of the art world in Europe and North America, and through her work with the gallery, focussed on bringing much needed attention to contemporary art from Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, particularly on histories and narratives that have undergone persecution and suppression. Yet although Zoe was engaged in bringing about significant shifts within the representation of artists and artworks from the global majority within the museum, her time within the system also left many nagging questions on how the structure of the museum itself remained dictated by systems of naming, cataloguing, displaying and collection that were determined by continuing colonial practices. This prompted her to accept the invitation extended to her by artists in Beijing and Saigon to assist them in realising their own artistic dreams.

In 2022, The International Council of Museums, or ICOM, an international non-profit organisation with consultative status to the UN Economic and Social Council, released a controversial new definition of the term 'museum'. According to ICOM, "A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing." Zoe read this definition out twice, highlighting in her second reading some critical questions, beginning with *who* gets to research, collect, conserve, interpret and exhibit tangible and intangible heritage. Furthermore, who has experiential knowledge of the diverse contexts of a collection, to know how to write the meaning of it, which fills their terms in their

language, of who has spent time in their place with their memories? And then, to think even further, is everything inherently purchasable, or collectible? And who are museums speaking to? If a museum is to be inclusive in their collections, their displays and their language, then how does audience consideration determine what is visible and what is not? Given that Zoe delivered her talk in the early months of the genocide in Gaza, the blatant labelling of voices speaking up for Palestine as being antisemitic was beginning to be increasingly evident, and brought home her point about visibility and inclusion within the space of the museum.

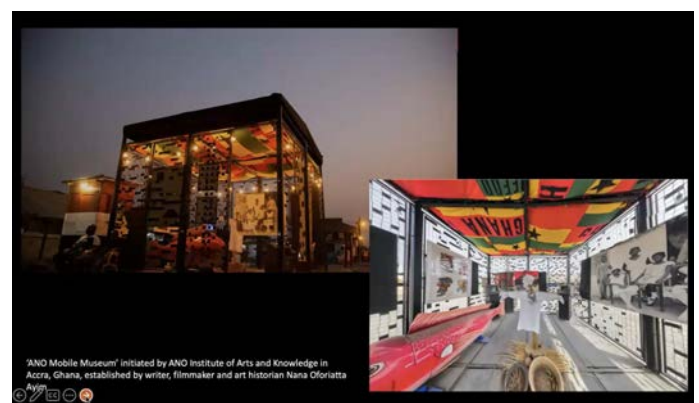


900mdpl in progress / installation shots of Museum of Kaliurang Community (MURKA) : Kaliurang

In illustrating the difficulty of arriving at a clear understanding of what a museum is and what it is meant to achieve, Zoe took us through two examples. In the first, we learnt of the national museum in the premises of the Elmina fort, a site infamous for being the epicentre of the Atlantic slave trade. Accompanied by the French postcolonial historian Françoise Vergès, their visit to the museum itself was disconcerting, as how can such a painful and traumatic history as that of slavery be adequately depicted in a museum for viewers to process and understand? The efforts made by the state seemed paltry, while outside the museum complex, the streets were full of signs, memorials and pieces of history that were far more compelling in reckoning with this history. In fact, their visit to a small family-run 'museum' that showed a small slice of history connecting Java to the Ashanti region in Ghana in the late colonial period seemed to do far more in making evident the sheer scale and impact of colonialism than a state-run museum that attempted to tell a vast story in too easy a way. In her second example, Zoe took us to Cambodia, another country whose material and tangible history has greatly been erased, taken away or destroyed, to ask what role a museum plays in addressing its history. Here, she cited the work of the Filipino

scholar Patrick Flores, who speaks of the various localised characteristics of entering institutions, of so-called culture in Southeast Asia, where guests of the National Museum of Cambodia come not to see the art but to give offering to the Buddhist statuary. Just because a work of cultural history is housed in a museum, does it erase its sacredness for the communities from which it has been taken?

To quote Zoe, "There is, therefore, a great need to study what does not fit into the disciplinary categories of attending to the form of aesthetics, and rather to canvas the contextualised multiplicities of how varying social values and habitations serve and assist such thoughtful production." Through a series of further examples, Zoe then took us through some incredible projects conceived and articulated by artists and curators who were embedded within their communities, thinking of what the museum was and what it could do. 900mdpl, a biennale site-specific project in Kaliurang, Yogyakarta, within 7km of the active volcano of Mount Merapi in Indonesia, was one such example of a space that conceived of an archive of the village that would grow and evolve with the community, through the gathering of collective memories, art-making, and in the setting-up of a community museum. 900mdpl also held three editions of a biennale that invited artists across Indonesia to create work within the framework of the village and its particular place within the Indonesian as well as the global context. A second example that we were taken through was that of the Ano Institute in Accra, Ghana, founded by the writer and art historian Nana Oforiatta Ayim. Ano is a mobile museum project, inspired by the ubiquitous kiosks of Ghana. Designed by young architects and designers who were envisioning what a museum of the future could possibly look like, Ano is a modular space whose exterior can readily be changed as it



'ANO Mobile Museum' initiated by ANO Institute of Arts and Knowledge in Accra, Ghana, established by writer, filmmaker and art historian Nana Oforiatta Ayim

moves across different locations across Ghana. Engaging the youth of each site particularly in questions of cultural memory prompted by contemporary art, this structure becomes a social gathering point whereby exhibitions, discussion, music screenings, and performances take place in addition to critical research in collecting differing terms and understandings of cultural signs, symbols and objects. This then feeds into Ano's cultural encyclopaedia, which as Zoe describes, is a reordering of knowledge, narratives and representations from and about the African continent through the celebration of its indigenous knowledge systems. The categories of the cultural encyclopaedia are inspired by classical knowledge foundations of the African continent. Nana states the aim is to deconstruct the idea of a museum as static and monolithic, to bring it into communities and also to re-evaluate or think about what has value, who gives value to what object and why, and to create a kind of kaleidoscopic encyclopaedia of the country, not

an authoritative one or a definitive one, but a starting point.

While Zoe did take us through more such projects that radically reimagined the foundational logic of the museum, while actively thinking with questions on representation, community knowledge and memory, intangible, lost, stolen and even destroyed heritage, as well as the difficult question of who tells these stories, and how, the above examples give a glimpse into what is possible beyond the traditional binaries of the museum as an institution and everything that is outside it responding to it. While I have not been able to go into greater detail within this report on more of the wonderful examples of artists, scholars and communities coming together to reimagine the museum, I hope this account has given a sense as to what was one of the most compelling talks of the entire series on the museum. – **A.T.**

Museums and Wealth: Value and the Institutionalization of Contemporaneous Art

December 09th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Ms. Nizan Shaked (Writer & Curator)



Nizan Shaked, through the topic 'Museums and Wealth: Value and the Institutionalisation of Contemporaneous Art', addresses the core issue of whether museums meet the criteria of and serve as a public space. Traversing from the 15th century, she examines methodologies and changing facets of acquiring art and its effect of diluting public spaces and purpose.

By arguments stretching over different periods

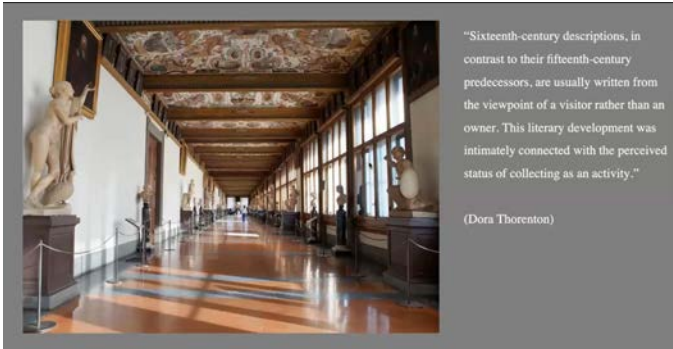
of time, locations and disciplines such as display, role of trustees and collectors, tax sops, changing legislation, etc., Shaked demonstrates how art is used as a tool of power and an assertion of status.

Florence, Italy and Medici emerge as perfect case models to examine the relation of power and money to art.

An art collection commences reflecting a collector's identity as a means to store wealth. A major shift in display occurs around 1584, when Francesco Medici makes his collection accessible for public viewing, using art as a soft power, legitimising the right to an aristocratic title.

The 16th century generally represents externalisation of the collections, marking a paradigm shift in museum history. In this transition, paintings became the foremost collectible worthy of national patrimony, enabling public display of

art as a unit and to hold value.



"Sixteenth-century descriptions, in contrast to their fifteenth-century predecessors, are usually written from the viewpoint of a visitor rather than an owner. This literary development was intimately connected with the perceived status of collecting as an activity."

(Dora Thornton)

As the narrative shifts from collector to visitor, curator Dora Thornton observes that literary development was intimately connected with the status of collecting as an activity.

Shaked corroborates this by coining the word 'public alibi': when art becomes public, its market develops – a belief that is difficult to refute.

In Florence, though art was ostensibly made public, it served the private interests of Medici, altering a republic into despotism. Medici thus subordinated the state for private benefit, a model which is echoed even today.

High finance in its modern capitalist form is a Florentine invention. Leveraging art to high finance echoes a Florentine cycle of accumulation, as collections built from surplus capital invent mythical collective identities.

Shaked questions the core museum activity of extracting from the public instead of catering to public use.

Museums land up serving the upper echelon of trustees, donors, patrons, investors, and shareholders of galleries/auction houses, who govern museums and enrich themselves by collecting/lending the same art as the institution does.

Art's intrinsic characteristic to be appreciated captivates investors, which facilitates financialisation progression. An exponentially growing art market in the 20th century is characterised by a transformation of art from a creative expression into a commodity, giving it unprecedented liquidity.

Declining profits in the 1970s sees an emergence of art investment groups, mutual funds, and

pension plans. By the 21st century, art becomes a loan collateral, a new asset class in portfolios, alongside real estate and private equity. As valuation changes in accordance with the lenders' perception of 'verified art', a new form of exploitation of the public emerges.

The formalisation of art as a secured method of lending is generally referred to as 'art financialisation'.

Museums, expected to address the information opacity in the market, subserve the wealth management sector while establishing creditability of art as collateral. Though popularity polls and holding biennials appear democratic, the museum's infrastructure represents interests of a select elite.

The synchronic criticism of the system, Shaked states, is two-fold: museums fall short of the promise to serve the public, and artwash the reputation of donors instead, giving them ideological control over this important aspect of civil society.

One case study is San Francisco's MOMA, which displays the trustee Fisher's collection, whose wealth comes from offshore enterprises, where profits in one territory end in subsidising luxury in another territory.

Collections driven by businessmen's methodologically and demographically narrow logic to blue-chip art narrows the scope of the museum's diversity, adversely consuming exhibition space and curatorial attention. A ubiquitous set of branded artists whose recognition gives 'goal certainty' in investment drives the market. Goal certainty turns into a vicious cycle as banks use it to encourage the public, who hitherto were not collectors, to invest, boosting artwork prices, reducing purchasing power of museums and in turn making them dependant on donations and loans of private collections for display. Rising operating costs and declining public funding strengthens collectors and patrons, leading them to gaining control over museum operations.

This vicious circle is worsened as policy makers instead of questioning museum leadership get convinced that allocating space to blue-chip art

is service to the public. Thus, museums play the role of a bank facilitating art to function as a promissory note/potential money.

This system needs both contemporary analysis and Marxist critique.

Allocation of real estate influences the art selected for exhibition in what Shaked refers to as 'the singular-multiple' phenomena. Works shift to abstraction based on device-produced multiples, and rarity takes a back seat.

Art criticism comes to a full circle as something has changed in the logic of art itself.

Publicly subsidised art historians drum up an aura of artists to support this system, which is yet another way the public is subsidised. Like Benjamin Buchloh's writing on Gerhard Richter. But unlike Richter, post-modernist Andy Warhol's print productions didn't sell in his lifetime.

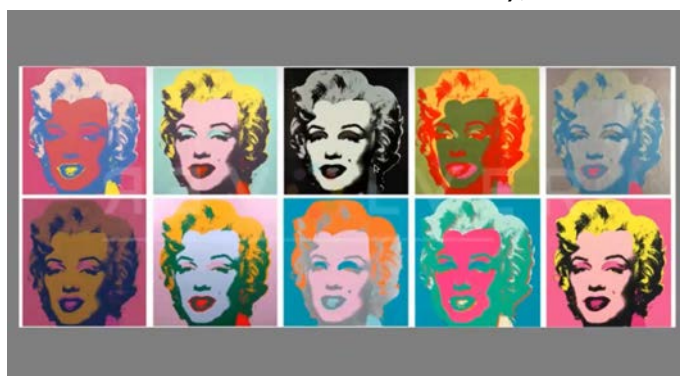
Popular media too supports this private agenda to keep prices soaring for works produced at cottage-industry rates and techniques.

Succumbing to the general public ethos that art doesn't matter, museums mirror this.

Shaked suggests museums should refrain from buying reproductions where normally only first and last works are important.

In exploring tax history, Shaked demonstrates the museum's role in promotion of the art market, a logic that runs contrary to experimentation and diversity.

The display of collections through tax breaks enhances their value. Thus, a seemingly appearing win-win situation is in fact the museum's subordination to limited inventory, and taste



of contemporary art, narrowing horizons and reinforcing international monoculture.

Patrons' exploitation of the museum in the liberal state is akin to appropriation of lands under the common-law framework during the Enclosure Period in England.

Law historian Morton Horwitz writes that the concept of the private emerged in the 16th century through a series of transformations in law. The idea of a distinctively private realm is grounded in the 17th-century liberalism of John Locke and his successors.

With 19th-century conservative liberalism and 20th-century progressive liberalism, the law responds to an emergence of 'market'-supporting ideologies driven by consideration and goal-oriented approaches. Contracts become private arrangements, legislative functions are redefined, and redistributive tendencies of democracies are adjusted.

20th-century events that mark the new face of progressivism, failing to curb greed are: conservatism of the 1920/30s, legal sophistication of the 1940s, totalitarianism on the heels of WWII, and a winner-rules market.

The wave of law privatisation during the Margaret Thatcher-Ronald Reagan regime dramatically exacerbates inequality, giving more power to the elite. The undoing of the Welfare State, and deregulating the economy by privatisation, globalisation, etc., generally referred to as neo-liberalism, ultimately results in the great recession of 2008 and recent great stagnation.

Amidst this public-private dichotomy, the state in its current form bears an alarming resemblance to the absolutist model of the Italian state.

Scholars Robert Kuttner and Katherine Stone describe a new form of feudalism wherein public law reverts to unaccountable control by private businesses.

Private law starts governing the corporate sector, forcing arbitration and preventing class-action suits.

Arbitration over public jurisprudence is a return

of the feudal form of social control that blends political and economic power rather than separating them as a means of democratic checks and balances.

As public domain is handed to private entities to exercise quasi-state functions and create their own proprietary systems of law, Shaked correctly observes that *dramatic privatisation of the law and legally sanctioned private jurisprudence is neo-feudalism*.

The 1980s Wall Street invention of 'financial derivatives' governed by trade association rules is one fitting example.

Shaked alerts that it is unprecedented that the economic crisis of 2008, COVID and the last stagnation has not led to equi-distribution of wealth but a contrary situation where wealth has accumulated more wealth, requiring the immediate attention of society.

She cautions artists not to become part of the trajectory where similar works are expected of them.

Stressing the dire need for independence of museums as a public space, Shaked suggests setting up international think tanks and non-fellow institutions with professionals from different jurisdictions to study different time periods, distribution of universal basic income to support artists, taxing the big resale market and using the money for field work.

Her view is that the solution does not lie with individuals; change will come from collective organising/activism, artists supporting one another like a union, and reformist work in legislation. She ends on the positive note that though these seem like impossible mountains, once the climb begins, change can actually be achieved. – **R.P.**

Between Possession and Dispossession: The Museum as Immersive Space (In Memory of Kavita Singh)

December 15th, 2023, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Kajri Jain (Professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University of Toronto)



The closing talk of our ACT series on the museum was given by Professor Kajri Jain. Titled 'Between Possession and Dispossession: The Museum as Immersive Space', it held a poignant dedication – *In memory of Kavita Singh*. To hold such a series

on the museum without the presence of Kavita Singh was a deeply felt loss for all of us, and Professor Jain's tribute in her opening remarks emphasised the seminal contributions of Kavita Singh's work within art history, visual culture, museum studies, Southasian studies and much more. In fact, Kavita Singh's 2015 book co-authored with Saloni Mathur, *No Touching, No Spitting, No Praying: The Museum in South Asia*, had been a foundational resource throughout the series, particularly as we engaged with debates on the legacy of museums and their emerging futures in our region.

What does it mean to think about a museum as an immersive space? By asking this question, Professor Jain took us into some of India's

latest large-scale 'cultural' spaces, to examine how the meanings and intents of such spaces have been redefined by the state apparatus in contemporary India. We began to think about the idea of immersive spaces through the example of the recent mega project that had come up on the banks of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat, called the Statue of Unity. While the statue itself already has the remarkable badge of being the tallest in the world, Professor Jain's focus on this site was on the sprawling two hectares beneath and around the statue, comprising museums, exhibition spaces, cultural centres and gardens that are accessible to the public, and which form a critical part of the infrastructure of the monument. On the surface, the idea of creating cultural spaces that are outside the established metropolitan areas of New Delhi or Mumbai that are accessible to large populations sounds commendable, however, as Professor Jain took us through its landscape, it became clear that the Statue of Unity project was not merely meant as a non-political space of cultural engagement or entertainment.



What does it mean for a space to be 'immersive'? If we are to think of the experience of going to a museum, an art gallery or a performance space, we are often expected to be mute spectators imbibing information. This is the traditional understanding of viewership – a largely passive act. However, the emergence of the new mega-spaces like the Statue of Unity has shifted the norms of what is expected of visitors and also from exhibition and cultural spaces in themselves. As we were taken through the sheer scale of experiences that the Statue of Unity complex offered, Professor Jain pointed out how each of these spaces encouraged visitors to interact and engage actively with what it offered. The presence of selfie points in strategic locations

encouraged visitors to take selfies and make videos to post on social media and share with the wider networks of family and friends who are not present with them, interactive multimedia and video-intensive displays urged viewers to spend time interacting with them, and most remarkably, the entire estate itself has been carefully designed to correspond to the theme, including the use of light installations and special gardens that can be viewed even from moving vehicles while inside the sprawling estate, creating an experience that completely cuts a visitor off from the outside world, and instead, immerses them within this created world.

Given that the Statue of Unity project has been conceived, executed and run to extol the virtues of a political figure – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who has recently been revived in the national consciousness as the 'Ironman of India' by current state leadership, it is important to pay very close attention to how a totalising and immersive experience has been employed to further a particular narrative of history and an individual's place within in. But as Professor Jain pointed out, this is not the only aspect of interest – the fact that this statue has been built on the site of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, erected across the Narmada river, in a project that has destroyed the homes, livelihoods and even lives of hundreds of thousands of mostly Adivasi people across the region, while also irreparably damaging the local ecology, is important to consider given that exhibits within the museums highlight the plants and animals of the region, while also displaying exhibits on the indigenous people who are this land's original inhabitants in the same vein as its plant and animal displays – a harkening back to the old colonial model of racist imaginings of indigenous people.

While the Statue of Unity was not the only example of recent immersive spaces that Professor Jain discussed through her talk, this has been one of the most ambitious complexes that have come up in India's recent history. And with the popularity of such experiences growing rapidly in this region, much of our ensuing discussion session focussed on whether the idea of the immersive experience was here to stay – and that even to challenge the established narratives of the state it would be necessary to create alternate immersive experiences ourselves. – **A.T.**

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

A Spiralling Revolution – Technology, Culture and Crisis

PAST PROGRAMMES

Humans and Other Machines: Towards A Theory of Technology, Tools and Teleology

February 13th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Arjun Appadurai (Emeritus Professor in Media, Culture and Communication at New York University, and Max Weber Global Professor at The Bard Graduate Center in New York)



In February of 2024, a ten-session series critically examining 'Technology', titled 'A Spiralling Revolution - Technology, Culture and Crisis', began with a keynote lecture given by the inimitable Arjun Appadurai. As a cultural anthropologist whose work examining the impacts of globalisation on societies has been seminal to scholarship on fields spanning cultural studies to economics, to have Arjun Appadurai give a keynote address on technology was particularly interesting. He began his session with a close examination of its title: 'Humans and Other Machines: Towards a Theory of Technology, Tools and Teleology', pointing out that the term *teleology* traces back to the ancient Greek *telos*, a term used by Aristotle to describe the purposiveness or the end goal of an entity or object. Now if we were to use this concept to ask what is the *telos* of technology, we come to a pretty straightforward understanding – the *telos* of technology is generally seen to be progress. As Professor Appadurai pointed out, through the mainstream historical relaying of technology, the idea has been that 'we began there, and now we are here', or a straight line pretty much from the invention of the wheel to ChatGPT. But is it really as straightforward as that? Have things always gotten better through the progression of

technology through time?

For Professor Appadurai, the idea that technological progression always results in progress for society is an old and fundamental bias that has shaped our relationship with technology, particularly in modernity where technology is seen as the twin of teleology. In order to understand this bias and its function more critically, Professor Appadurai led us through three examples where this relationship is more unsettled.

We began with a story of agriculture, drawn from Professor Appadurai's field work in a village near Mumbai, where open surface wells were a critical aspect of the agricultural life of the region. An ancient technology that the region had employed for over a thousand years, these wells have changed little in their fundamental science, although small interventions like electrification and pumps have emerged in recent years. Here, Professor Appadurai introduced a term used by the French philosopher Bernard Steigler: *technological milieu*. Basically, each technological intervention creates its own milieu around it, essentially a network of effects that determine in particular the social but also the economic and political relations within the society employing a certain technology. What is interesting about the example of the surface wells is that this is a technology that has progressed little through its existence, and in the regions of Maharashtra and Rajasthan in particular where they are most used, there is little scope to replace this technology with other interventions like dams. Given that 70% of India's economy still relies on agriculture, and much of that agriculture is still unorganised and reliant on irrigation technologies like surface wells,

it prompts the question of whether technology and progress can really be tied together for a vast majority of India's population.

In his second example, Professor Appadurai took us on a vastly different journey from the resolutely physical world of agriculture into the domain of the digital economy fuelled by apps. In an interesting argument, he put forward the case that 'technological innovation' today has moved away from advancements in classical engineering or science into ideas that are seen as 'investable'. For neoliberal capitalism, an investable idea is one that can make the investor money quickly without significant hard costs; here, apps that provide a service – like Uber or Swiggy, which employ gig workers – are more attractive for capital, but the question of whether this is technological 'progress' is much harder to answer in the affirmative. Furthermore, as Professor Appadurai pointed out, technology companies that have built empires from apps are largely benefitting from social insights – recognising a human need for convenience that can be easily fulfilled with a service – rather than scientific innovations. This also brings us to another question that draws from a word in the lecture's title – are these apps actually 'tools'? And if they are, does this require

a redefinition of the idea of a tool?

The final example that was discussed was perhaps the most intriguing in the way it considered technology's relationship with human society. Here, Professor Appadurai brought up one of the most foundational constructs of Indian society – the phenomenon of caste, and the inability of society to stamp it out over the more than two millennia of its existence, with every effort to do so being inevitably absorbed back into the hierarchical logic of caste. To connect it to the current direction of mainstream technology – largely screen-based interfaces on which a majority of our time is spent in touching and receiving haptic feedback in recognition of our action – we considered how caste too is fundamentally centred around the idea of touch – who is touchable and how much, and who is not, to what degree. Leaving us to think of the way that caste too has evolved with the evolution of both society as well as technology, imbuing itself even within the teleological idea that technology is a progression, Professor Appadurai ended his talk laying these three very different and yet related questions on the table, urging us to think on the foundational promise of technology as we proceed through this series. – **A.T.**

Studies in Superlative Discorrelation

February 20th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Alexander R. Galloway (Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University)



How does one record silence? Does a vacuum have contours? What do empty photographs look like? Perhaps the question of representation faces

its ultimate precarity when it comes to expressing the inexpressible. The limits of representation are often extended as we approach new horizons of capturing reality in the digital realm. However, Professor Galloway focusses on representations that do not necessarily 'capture' reality but 'correlate' reality through data-driven models of machine learning. Whereas images may appear to correlate with reality, they may also seem to discorrelate with reality. This contradiction wears an aesthetic similar to the category of empty noise and orients us toward the gaps that are hidden inside the construction of images. The grain of this aesthetic is embodied in the superlatively

discorrelated image: a category of images that lack apparent continuity or appear disjointed from reality. Perhaps it is safe to say that such images do not correlate with reality, but rather overload the senses to create the impression of reality within themselves.



To study the category of superlatively discorrelated images, Galloway presents various levels of images. The first level is occupied by images that discorrelate syntactically but not semantically. Galloway explains this in the following manner. Digital images are expressed as alphanumeric codes which represent values on a two-dimensional spatial grid. He shows that a plain monochromatic image will express fewer gaps in the minimum and maximum pixel values at each spatial location and thus appear less discorrelated than a richly texture image. He also shows that higher discorrelated images exhibit a smoothing effect or a monotony which brings them semantically closer to correlated images. Such is the underlying structure of first-level images. At the second level are images that discorrelate syntactically and semantically from each other yet appear to be semantically correlated when they appear in a quick succession of montages or frame cuts in filmmaking. While changing dimensions of space is necessary for the study of first-level discorrelated images, the dimension of time is necessary to study its second level. The third level of discorrelated images considers changes in all dimensions of image-making such as projection planes, pixel sizes, convolution matrices, colour channels, frame sizes, and frame rates. Galloway terms this as a non-Euclidian discorrelation where unexamined axioms of image-making get flushed out. He analyses three-dimensional stereoscopy in filmmaking where two cameras

superimpose the same image which is partially offset. He illustrates how moving bodies that are virtually superimposed in the same space may coincide from time to time to produce a tension between seamlessness and seam-fullness that is characteristic of non-synchronised image capturing. Thus, the concept of edge detection in traditional image processing gets problematised in non-Euclidian discorrelations.

At the final level, Galloway speculates that the most discorrelated image is the one that cannot be viewed. He hints towards forms of image-making that are beyond phenomenological experience or computational methods. He encourages us to suspend non-contradictory thinking and seek a reconciliation of contraries. Perhaps the silent noise, the empty photography, and the contoured vacuum are forms of representation that lie at this final level of discorrelated images. The impossibility of an image is not because it cannot be captured, but because the conditions for viewing it are inaccessible or lost, thereby maximally discorrelating them from phenomenological experience and computational methods. Thus, the study of superlative discorrelation presents



Goodbye to Language (d. Jean-Luc Godard, 2014)

conditions under which an image may be impossible to view. At this level, it is worth noting that Galloway's impossible image is finally subject to the ontology of the image itself. After all, is it an image if it cannot be viewed at all? Perhaps this unlocks a hidden level beyond Galloway's final level of discorrelated images. The research question for this level could be framed as follows: When does an image cease to be itself? - **M.D.**

Community Engagement

PAST PROGRAMMES

The Colonial Constitution

January 05th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Arghya Sengupta (Author & Panelist), Justice Gautam Patel & Prof. Faisal Devji (Panelists), Mr. Rajdeep Sardesai (Moderator)



Arghya Sengupta began his talk by referring to the Constitution of India as a framework for governance, and as a document that concerns itself with practical considerations more than with lofty ideals.

Sengupta was sceptical of the Constitution being called a 'holy book' as holy books are meant to be revered instead of being questioned or engaged with.

To demonstrate his first point about the Constitution being concerned with practical issues, he referred to two items of commerce from the Constitution that dealt with two of the largest manufactured items of the time – jute and salt. Jute, which was an important export product at the time, had a special provision under Article 273 that provided for special proceeds from taxes of jute export to three of the largest jute-producing states, that is, West Bengal, Bihar and

Orissa.

The Constituent Assembly also spent a long time discussing whether or not salt tax ought to be permanently exempt from taxation. Sengupta argued that these examples of time spent and special attention given to practical issues like taxation prove that the Constitution framers saw it as a document for governance and not a set of idealistic principles.

Sengupta then offered three reasons for calling it a colonial Constitution.

1. The Constitution is unduly long – the belief during the time of the Raj was that law should be used as an instrument to control the natives, and so the 1935 Constitution had laws covering every aspect of local life. Sengupta feels that this has continued

with the new Constitution of 1950.

2. It enables perpetuation of colonial institutions – he gives the example of the police force which was brutal under the Raj and was allowed to continue with no reforms post-independence.
3. It has resulted in a state that towers over the citizen – he uses the example of the preventive detention laws included in the Constitution that stand contrary to the fundamental rights also enshrined in it.

Justice Gautam Patel, sitting judge of the Bombay High Court, responded to these arguments by saying that the Constituent Assembly consisted of people from all walks of life who debated in great detail the intricacies of what we wanted India to be, and this was something that was being attempted for the first time.

The Constitution framers had to first agree upon the idea of India and then had to fashion some method of making it happen. This resulted in the framing of the Preamble, which, according to Justice Patel, is “one of the most electrifying and dramatic leaps of faith” that gave to the people a document for the idea of India to which all practical considerations were tacked on.

Justice Patel added that since it was adopted, the Constitution has been under threat and *that* is the greatest argument in its favour. He granted that provisions like preventive detention were bizarre, inexplicable and colonial, but added that those don't define the entire Constitution. He also agreed that there needs to be some reconsideration to doing away with provisions like preventive detention – but without entertaining the idea that we need an entirely new Constitution.

The journalist Rajdeep Sardesai, who moderated the conversation, then asked Faisal Devji for his opinion on whether security concerns in light of the Partition and the integration of princely states as well as the accommodation of multiple viewpoints led to it becoming a Constitution of compromise.

Devji pointed out that by the time India became a republic in 1950, it was no longer undergoing the throes of Partition and had stabilised as a state and there was no need, at the time, to inscribe these degradations of liberties into the Constitution. There were many aspects that were made provisional like reservations, etc. The restrictions to liberty were not made provisional.

He then listed provisions like reservations, personal laws, Article 370, etc. to show that the Constitution is strikingly original and had been formulated keeping in mind unique requirements of the nation at the time. In Devji's view, the fact that India has a long constitutional past meant that it was natural that existing provisions be adapted and adopted into the new Constitution.

He then argued that the draconian provisions could, of course, have been eliminated from the Constitution, but their inclusion points to the desire of the founders to build something entirely different from a colonial state and so, in order to bring about such change in society, the state had to be powerful enough to change India – and in that sense, the Constitution is not colonial at all. The problem was that this put an inordinate amount of trust in the founders and the legislature.

Sardesai then asked Sengupta about the aspect of the state towering over the citizen to the extent that the Centre can now demote a state to the status of a union territory - and whether there is now a fear of the state breaking up – which was also the fear at the time of framing the Constitution.

Sengupta said that the central premise of the idea of Delhi towering over everyone was that a strong Centre was essential to the integrity of the nation at the time of framing the Constitution.

He, however, added that Article 356, which gives powers to governors to impose the president's rule, eventually became a tool for even greater centralisation. And so, he argues that the Constitution which grants these powers has a centralising bent which continues from colonial times. According to Sengupta, the biggest threat to the unity and integrity of the country today comes from an overly strong Centre.

Justice Patel argued that this did not happen by constitutional design but that it is the conflation of Delhi with the Union of India that is causing the problem.

Sardesai then asked if there is a possibility that we will end up conflating ideas of unity and integrity with ideas of uniformity. Justice Patel responded that this was a very real fear, which is why more discussion and debate on the subject at all levels was crucial.

Justice Patel added that there is so much worth preserving in the Constitution, that just because there are some parts that need to go should not mean that we get rid of the entire Constitution.

The parts that have outlived their usefulness or relevance can be identified and amended.

He stated, however, that those parts are not the target or the “objects of amendment affection” at all. The object of the entire exercise today is to find some method to systematically curtail liberty and equality.

Justice Patel believes that the freedoms enshrined in Articles 14-21 of the Constitution cannot be given up, as therein lies the future of the country. He added that we must get rid of the restrictions to the freedoms but the freedoms themselves must not only be preserved but must also be expanded. - **M.G.**

In God's Mirror: The *Theyyams* of Malabar

January 16th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Ms. Pepita Seth (Author)



Ms. Pepita Seth's journey of discovery of Kerala's 2,000-year-old ritual of worship called '*theyyam*' was the basis of her talk and also her book titled '*In God's Mirror: The Theyyams of Malabar*'. It is an exclusive, privileged photographic record of a relationship over two decades. The author's entry into this world was a permission 'given', not 'taken' by her. The permission to write the book was given by the senior practitioners, and was studied and approved by them. While visiting the most revered shrine of the deity Muchilottu Bhagavathi, the author met two famous and revered practitioners of *theyyam* - Lakshmanan

Peruvannan who had the right to carry this deity every season, and Murali Panikkar. Their generosity over 20 years of interactions allowed the author a glimpse into the multiple aspects and depths of *theyyam*.

The word '*theyyam*' is a corruption of '*daivam*', which simply means 'God'. The deity uses the body of the *theyyakkaran* (nominated, experienced practitioner) who performs the *kaliyattam* (the public act) in *theyyam* season (October-end to mid-June) at various compounds of small rural shrines in North Kerala (Malabar region and especially Kannur). *Theyyam* is a form of worship where a particular deity is carried by a practitioner who becomes the incarnation of the chosen deity, and enacts a period of its life on earth through a series of preparations over a number of months, thereby bringing the divine into the presence of the devotees to be worshipped, blessed and seen by them. At the end of *theyyam*, the practitioner becomes a mortal again. The presence of the divine is a powerful element in Malabar's culture, traditions and everyday life. Each community has their own shrines and honours their chosen deities with *theyyam*.

The need for *theyyam* arose when the lower castes were refused entry into the main temples. When that happened, some of the oppressed communities began building shrines for their own worship. Since the Brahmins will not consecrate the deity, they began placing *avatar moortis* (incarnations of the God) as deities. Food and prayers were followed by a shrine festival, the *kaliyattam*. A *roopam* or form of the *avatar* deity was visualised and *theyyam* was born, where the chosen mortal became the deity. He had *deva prasna* – the ability to read the mind of the deity and act accordingly. He assumed the form, temper, moods, aspects particular to the chosen deity and displayed them through dress, make-up, masks, costumes and dance movements to arouse devotion and worship, and be finally blessed by the *theyyam*.

Theyyam honours the various aspects of Annapoorneshwari, a Goddess from Varanasi, who came to Malabar by ship to save and protect this region. This myth became a canvas on which many more myths of her various forms and associates arose. Interestingly, this original deity is never carried as *theyyam*. But myths of her and her associates became the acts of *theyyam*.

Theyyam's initial impact is created by its costumes. It is an assembly of over 40 pieces tied tightly to the body and the head to enable vigorous movements with ease. Making the dress involves long months of meticulous work. Even dressing the practitioner demands intense effort and concentration by a team of experienced helpers. Tender coconut leaves called *ola* are used in the costumes since it is believed to offer protection when fire is incorporated in the *kaliyattam*.

The elaborate headdress called the *mudi* is a towering structure fashioned by hand from wood, bamboo, flowers and jewellery. *Theyyam's* most sacred element, the tall *mudis*, can go up to 15 metres in height. The make-up includes intricate face-writing and body-writing, which is created from natural colours such as soot, turmeric and slaked lime. After prayers, the practitioner lies down to be elaborately painted, a process which takes many hours and a lot of skill.

Although everything used in *theyyam* is visually beautiful, it is crucial to realise that nothing is purely ornamental. There is a rationale and

symbolism regarding everything. Numerous details in each process are strictly adhered to, since what is done, or not done, or wrongly done, adversely affects the deity, the *kaliyattam* and the locality.

Despite the belief that everything is technically worn by a *daivam*, it is a mere mortal who must endure the discomfort of long hours of make-up, of carrying the weight of the costumes, of using the fire element, and of being closely watched by the community. Physical preparation is essential since the practitioner often has to carry considerable weight and stand for long hours. He undergoes months of preparation and purification before *theyyam* season. He also needs to be an expert in many areas such as martial art forms, fire acts, balancing skills, singing the *thottam* (divine invocations), playing the drums and make-up skills. Besides this, he also holds an important place in the small rural community. They ask his advice on personal issues and seek his blessings as he is the incarnation of their God on earth.



Ms. Seth noted that it is a sad fact today that despite their extraordinary skills and knowledge, there is no basic respect for what the practitioners do and who they are. Often, they have to hold other jobs to make ends meet. Their names are rarely advertised in the media.

Theyyam's magic is in the transformation. The moment of transition from a mere mortal to a deity is made in structured stages, beginning with purification rites, prayers, make-up and costumes. The culmination of this process is the entering of a state where the human being is possessed by

the deity. That is the moment of transformation. It is an ecstasy, for both the practitioner and the audience, a state that creates a kind of rapture.

A mirror is held up to the *theyyam* and he enters another state of consciousness and sees the God in it. He has become God! - **M.M.**

For Now, It Is Night

February 15th, 2024, 6:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Kalpana Raina (Author & Translator), Tanveer Ajsi (Art Historian & Cultural Theorist), Gowhar Fazili (Professor & Translator) & Freny Manecksha (Journalist & Writer)



Perhaps as interesting as a book is the story of how it came to be. The discussion of Hari Krishna Kaul's *For Now, It Is Night* began with one such story, as his niece Kalpana Raina recounted how four people from varied backgrounds came together, and despite the pandemic, used Zoom to continue translating the writer's short fiction from Kashmiri into English.

Oftentimes, a translator works individually on a story, but in the case of this collection, the notes on the stories by each translator were so immersive, and revisions so numerous, it became nearly impossible to distinguish any particular

story as the effort of a single translator. The collection also had two editors, making the process an intensely collaborative one, and making the collection a pioneer in its field.

The book discussion was a collaboration between Jnanapravaha and Literature Live, and was gently guided by moderator Freny Manecksha, a veteran journalist whose own book *Flaming Forest, Wounded Valley* is set in Kashmir and Bastar, the former region being a common setting between Kaul's and Mackensha's works.

The panel consisted of three of the four translators

who worked on Kaul's collection of short stories, one of whom was his aforementioned niece, who pursued this translation project to learn more about her maternal uncle, and do his legacy justice. Born in Kashmir and now living in New York, Raina could understand Kashmiri, but could not read its Nastaliq script. Despite this impediment, she immersed herself in her uncle's writing, leaning on her Ph.D. in Literature and her experience as a corporate and non-profit sector professional of over three decades. She also began reaching out to writers who had a deep connection with Kashmir.

She met with Gowhar Fazili, who used his background in political science and sociology, his experience of being published in various journals and edited volumes, and his forthcoming monograph based on his doctoral thesis, to delve into Kaul's stories. Tanveer Ajsi brought to the collection his perspective as an art historian and cultural theorist, and his extensive experience as a writer, translator, director and curator. The fourth member of the translation team (who was, unfortunately, not present at the discussion) is Gowhar Yaqoob, a Srinagar-based scholar whose work focusses on the medieval and modern history of literature in Kashmir.

The session moved from a brief history of Kaul's writing and influences to the themes reflected in his work, readings of passages, and of course, the role of the translator in faithfully transmitting the work of a writer. Although Kaul did write in Hindi, he began to focus on Kashmiri in the late 1960s, possibly as a form of resistance against the political upheavals of the time. However, he did also translate his work from Kashmiri to Hindi, suggesting the need for the writer to reach an audience beyond Kashmir's borders.

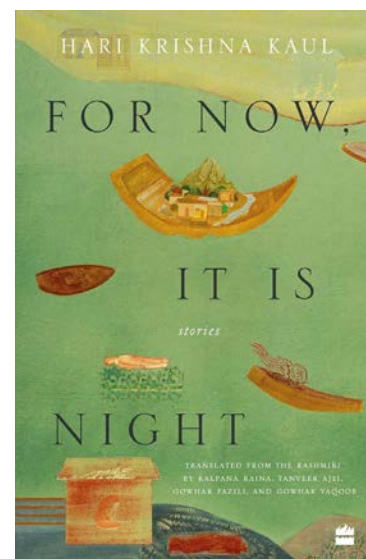
The translators discussed their mindful efforts to preserve Kaul's voice and essence, keeping interventions to a minimum, and navigating issues such as missing sections of original stories. Previous translations of Kaul's work have involved rather sanitised versions, which has set apart *For Now, It Is Night* as an attempt at true preservation and dissemination. This can be noted in details such as keeping the original Kashmiri names of characters rather than replacing them with Hindi or Hindu alternatives.

Following is a brief exploration of the collection's themes, excerpted from a *New York Times* article:

The Kashmiri writer Hari Krishna Kaul's stories...are firmly rooted in his contested homeland in the late 20th century. Kaul, who died in exile in 2009 at the age of 75, left an intricate body of work that amounts to sly, detailed portraits of domestic life set against the backdrop of religious and political tensions.

But even when Kaul's tales focus on the mundane, fault lines open up. Several stories in his collection *For Now, It Is Night* (Archipelago, 205 pp., paperback, \$22) involve crushing bouts of loneliness and despair, often prompted by the isolation of curfews and avalanches. "For now, it is night. For now, it is dark. For now, it is cold. In this darkness and this cold, I am alone," reflects a housebound character in the title story. In *Tomorrow – A Never-Ending Story*, things take a surreal turn as two boys repeat their grade-school class for decades, failing to age as the town around them transforms.

For Now, It Is Night is an enthralling – and welcome – reclamation of Kaul's fiction.... Kaul's work shimmers with questions of reality and illusion, home and exile. "Just like the stalled traffic which had begun to move," thinks a Kashmiri adrift in Delhi in *A Moment of Madness*, "his stagnant life would be revitalised if he allowed himself to think about Kashmir again." But, as Kaul reminds us, it's never that easy. "A person may walk or take a flight," the character later muses, "but can a destination ever be reached?" – **S.P.M.**



Announcements

EMBODYING DEVOTION IN INDO-MUSLIM PAINTING, 1500-1800

MURAD KHAN MUMTAZ

April 17th, 18th & 19th, 2024 | Lecture: 6:30 - 8:45 PM IST | Registration Fee: Rs. 3,000/-, Students*: Rs. 1,500/-

Online on ZOOM | Register: www.jp-india.org



Islamic art is often misrepresented as an iconophobic tradition. As a result of this assumption, the polyvalence of figural artworks made for Hindustan's Muslim audiences has remained hidden in plain view. By combining an art historical survey with an analysis of primary Indo-Persian literature, this series of seminars shows how figurative painting was intimately linked to a unique Indo-Muslim religious expression that had a wide circulation across South Asia.

Squirrels in a Plane Tree : ,attributed to Abu'l Hasan, ca. 1608.Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. 36.2 Å~ 22.5 cm. British Library,London (J.1.30)

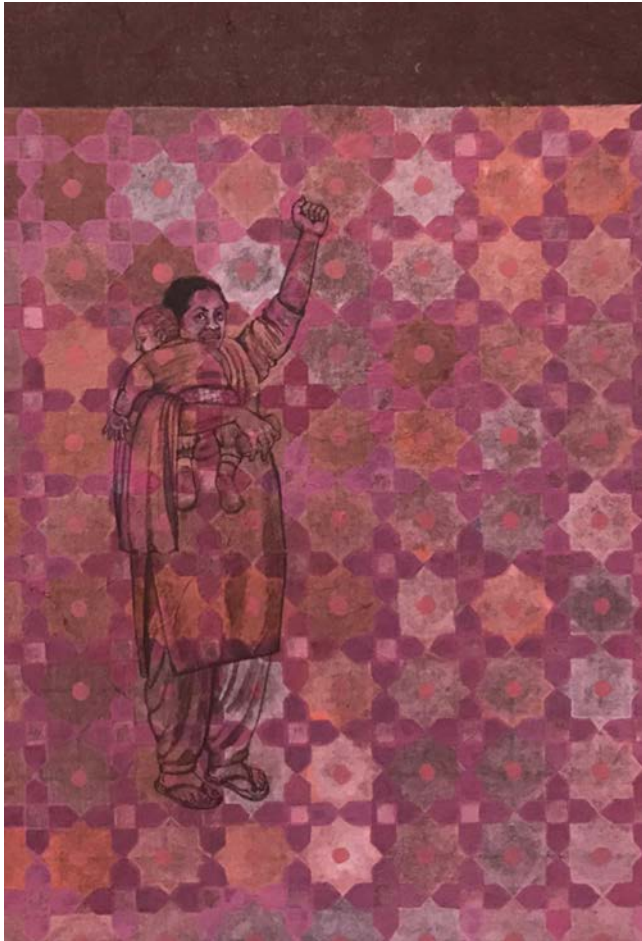


Murad Khan Mumtaz is an assistant professor of Art History at Williams College. He examines historical intersections of art, literature and religious expression in South Asia, with a primary focus on Indo-Muslim patronage. By combining art history with textual analysis, his recent book, *Faces of God: Images of Devotion in Indo-Muslim Painting* (Brill, 2023), examines the cultural contexts within which these Islamicate images of devotion were made and viewed. Murad is also an artist trained in traditional Hindustani painting techniques, and continues to exhibit his work internationally.

CAPUT MORTUUM

VARUNIKA SARAF

April 27th, 2024 | Lecture: 5:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Free Online Public Lecture on ZOOM | Register: www.jp-india.org



Dr. Varunika Saraf is interested in the complex histories of South Asia, specifically how they shape our current socio-political reality. In this illustrated lecture, she will share her experience of working with Caput Mortuum, a synthetic iron oxide pigment that resembles dried blood. In alchemy, this pigment is classified as 'worthless remains' – the residue left on the bottom of the heating flask once the nobler elements sublime. She will discuss what drew her to this particular pigment and how she uses this metaphor of decay and decline to address marginalised histories and the role of the past in the making of the present.

*Those Who Dream | Watercolour on Wasli backed with cotton textile
6.5 x 5 in*



Dr. Varunika Saraf is an artist and art historian based in Hyderabad. Saraf has participated in several group shows such as *Sangam/Confluence*, Heidelberger Kunstverein (2020), *Critical Constellations*, Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art, New Delhi (2019), *Days Without a Night*, Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi (2018), and *Phantoms of Asia*, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (2012). She is the recipient of Asia Society's Asia Arts Future Award (2023). In 2016, Saraf received the Amol Vadehra Art Grant. She was a Summer Research Fellow at the Getty Research Institute, Visiting Fellow at the Max-Planck Institute, Florence, NTICVA Visiting Fellow at the V&A Museum and the CWIT fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge. Saraf holds a Ph.D. and an M.Phil. (Visual Studies) from JNU and an MFA (Painting) from the University of Hyderabad. In 2023, she participated in the Sharjah Biennial 15, where she received an honourable mention for her embroidered series, *We, The People*. Saraf is represented by Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai.

HAND-HELD HUBRIS: DECOLONIZING BRITISH MEDALLIC ART, INDIA AND BEYOND

SHAILENDRA BHANDARE

April 30th, 2024 | Tea: 6:00 PM | Lecture: 6:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Free In-Person Public Lecture



In recent years, Decolonization has received tremendous traction in public and academic discourse. But what does it mean to decolonize art objects, from a curatorial standpoint? This lecture will focus on the art of British commemorative and campaign medals, particularly with regard to unpicking their visuality, in answering that question. We will be looking at historicizing and problematizing visual stereotypes, design contexts and afterlife of imagery in our quest.



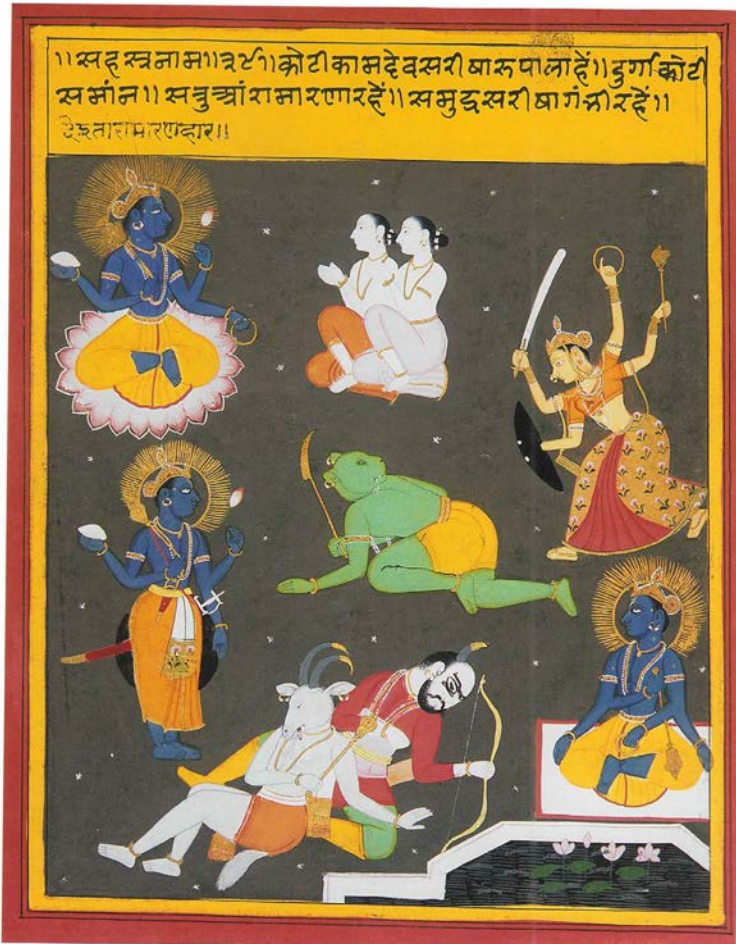
Shailendra Bhandare is Assistant Keeper, South Asian and Far-eastern Numismatics and Paper Money Collections, a Fellow of St Cross College and a member of Faculty of Oriental Studies. He started his career as a Numismatist with a visiting fellowship at the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge. He was then appointed as a post-doctoral fellow of the Society for South Asian Studies, and worked as a curator in the British Museum on the coins of Later Mughals and the Indian Princely States. He was appointed as curator of coins in the Ashmolean Museum in 2002. He was born and brought up in Mumbai,

India where he received his first degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences. He holds a Masters degree in History and a Doctorate in Ancient Indian Culture awarded by the University of Mumbai. His latest publications are – ‘Ruling the Waves: the Maritime World and Networks of the Kadambas of Goa’ – in CSMVS Research Journal, Centenary issue, ed. Saryu Doshi, CSMVS, Mumbai, 2023 & ‘Gold coins of the Hindu Shahi ruler Bhimadeva’ – Journal of the Oriental Numismatic Society, 255, Spring 2024

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

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July 2024 – April 2025 | Typically Saturdays, 1:30 – 5:30 pm IST | Hybrid Mode: Physical & Online* | Platform: Zoom



Introduced in 1999, Jnanapravaha Mumbai's academic, year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics (IA) examines the historical development of visual forms in context, employing the disciplines of art history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature and philosophy. The course traverses 5000 years of Indian visual art, including pre-modern, modern, and contemporary forms as well as popular traditions, to illuminate aesthetic trajectories in the sub-continent. Internationally renowned scholars introduce students to this art, ensuring a material, geographical, historical, social and cultural base that is broad and extensively representative. In keeping with JPM's mission, the course has evolved over the years to include topics of current research.

Vishnu the Vanquisher of Demons
Illustration to the Vishnu Sahasranama
Udaipur c.1680-90,
25.5 x 20.5 cm
Gouache with gold on paper

For admission, you are required to submit:

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