



JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI QUARTERLY

APRIL - JUNE 2021

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Director's Note

With an unswerving focus on our mission of pedagogical enquiry and its dissemination, both unaddressed topics and different formats were scrutinised in the past quarter.

A subject which has gained tremendous academic traction globally is New Media Art, a course on which critical interest and engagement was seen at our institute. We are perhaps the first to systematically undertake the prescient study of this fascinating area.

The same goes for 'format' as is evinced in our seminal attempt to read and discuss one text over a period of time. Over ten sessions, we engaged with Plato's *Republic*, a classic foundational text on political philosophy, with an informed group of participants, leading to an enriching level of discussion. The benchmark has been set for other such texts going forward.

Since 2013, we have dedicated the first half of January to one of our rubrics, Islamic Aesthetics. This year too, we invited five international scholars to address the sacred journey and pilgrimage of Hajj from several vantage points which examined the socio-political, cultural, religious and historic dimensions through maps, illustrated manuscripts, textiles, architecture, and certificates, situating them in a vast geography and timeline.

Our commitment to premodern Southasian Painting was strengthened with an incisive lecture series that strove to underscore the intricate and nuanced relationship between text and image. Pertinent questions on the nature of 'words and pictures' were juxtaposed with strategies of illustrating, illuminating, narrating, and copying, to weave a complex reading of this genre.

Our thrust in this terrain continues with a planned semester-long course on the Arts of the Book from South Asia from August to November '21. This course will provide a unique opportunity to get a ringside view and understanding from world-renowned scholars who are rarely encountered in one place.

As we wind down this academic year at the end of April, the next quarter will witness two unusual seminars – one with its lens trained on a close reading of the Kailasanatha Temple of Kanchipuram and the other on 'The Nature of Landscape' which will address the genealogies of landscape while also traversing the ecological and Anthropocene realms.

Virtual teaching continues giving us the advantage of global scholarship and audience participation. The yearlong course on Indian Aesthetics 2021-22 (expectedly with changes) and the four-month course on Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory (a fresh curation) kick off in July and August respectively. So does the Southasian Painting course and the much-awaited 'Understanding Hindu Tantra' which will present an overview of the history, beliefs and practices of the tantric traditions that developed from the early medieval period.

This *Quarterly* carries all the announcements. We look forward to meeting you virtually along our path to knowledge and discovery.

With my warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rashmi Poddar', written in a fluid, cursive style.

Rashmi Poddar PhD.
Director

AESTHETICS



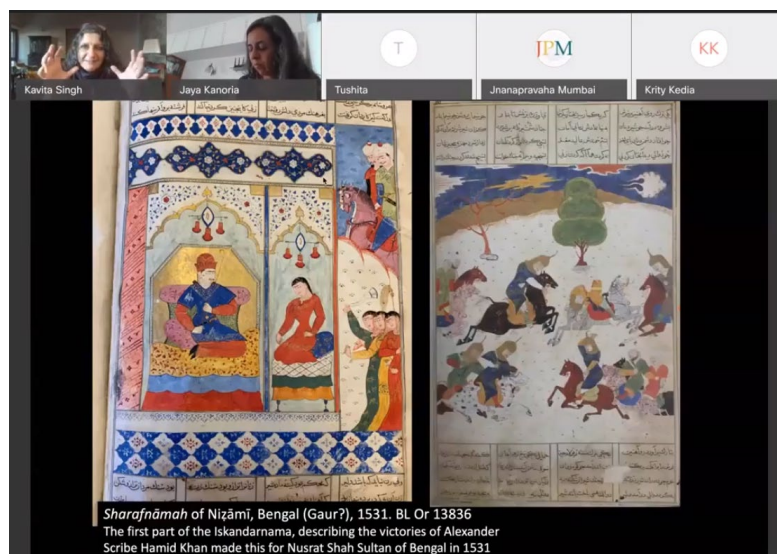
A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacharya Katha: Jaina Tirthankara Enshrined (upper panel), Celestial Dancers (lower panel). c.1475

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

On resuming the Indian Aesthetics course in mid-January, students found themselves mesmerised by images which allowed them to delve into the poetics of Indian painting. These sessions were flagged off by Dr. Kavita Singh, who focussed on the portable images created for subcontinental manuscripts illustrated between the 14th and 16th centuries. In her introduction to the two sessions on the subject, Dr. Singh presented images of delicate and fragile palm leaf manuscripts originating in the early Buddhist and Jain era, some of which were exquisitely illustrated. Her sessions closely examined later Jain, Sultanate and Deccani manuscripts, and her detailed exposition of the *Chaurapanchashika* style and the Bijapuri manuscript *Nujum-ul-Ulum* left students spellbound.

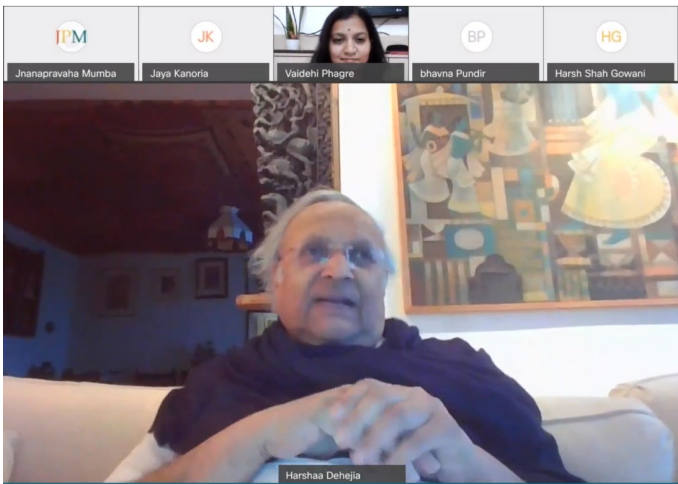


Dr. Kavita Singh speaks during ' Portable Paintings of the Pre-Mughal Period: 14th-16th centuries'

Roda Ahluwalia's lectures explored the sophistication,

sensitivity and delicacy of Persian-inspired Mughal painting, which combined vibrant indigenous colours

and compositions to create a distinctive style. She showed how this genre reached its acme under the patronage of Akbar and Jehangir, and how it gradually ossified during the reign of Shah Jahan. Pahari and Rajput painting have certain characteristics drawn from the Mughal oeuvre. Some artists, who were probably trained in Mughal ateliers, modified their styles to suit different patrons and locations across North India. An analysis based on history and biography reveals much about the portraiture and naturalism discernible in these paintings. Pahari paintings, lyrical in their beauty, were nevertheless concerned with political reality and were shaped by the identities of patron and painter.



Dr. Harsha Dehejia speaks during 'Krishna Shringara: The Many Manifestations and Meanings of Krishna's Love'

Dr. Harsha Dehejia's sessions on *Krishna shringara* not only explored paintings, *pichhwais* and popular forms but also drew in, among other strains of thought, the *advaita* philosophy of the *Bhagavata Purana*, a text that brought together many antecedent devotional strands in the Indian subcontinent. Dr. Dehejia pointed out, however, that the *bhakti* tradition turned towards *dvaita* philosophy, aesthetics and faith as seen in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. *Krishna shringara* was manifested and can still be seen in poetry, paintings, and devotional practices. While the faith of the *bhakta* or devotee results in wholehearted submission, the aesthetically inclined *rasika* enjoys *Krishna shringara* through the senses. Aesthetic worship is practised at various centres to this day: Vallabhacharya's *Pushti marga* sect has its prime seat at Nathdwara, *Vitthala* worship continues at Pandharpur, and *Krishna* is still venerated at Jagannatha Puri. At each of these centres, the devotee can witness *shringara*, song, dance, and *bhoga* or food offerings, all examples of the aesthetic means through which *bhakti* is practised.

The *Chitrastotra* of the *Vishnu Dharmottara Purana* lays down the rules of painting. Such subcontinental texts are considered by scholars to be descriptive rather than rigidly prescriptive, and were most probably codifying an already mature practice. Dr. Leela Wood

explained that the techniques and descriptions seen in the *Chitrastotra* seem to have played some role in the execution of the magnificent murals at Ajanta. Using her extraordinary photographs of the world-renowned paintings at the Ajanta caves, the scholar logically, and at the same time intuitively, analysed pictorial conventions, styles and modes of expression seen there. Dr. Wood's explication of the visual narratives of the *Jataka* stories at Ajanta, notably in Cave 17, threw light on the complexity of the site. She decoded the random spatial distribution of this visual narration. The speaker was able to show IA students characteristics of rapidly executed painting, and contrast this rendering with careful and detailed depictions at Ajanta, also drawing parallels between the depiction of landscape in the painted murals and natural rock formations around the site.

Dr. Jaya Kanoria introduced students to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, first explaining the critical term in relation to European painting, before making a smooth transition into the colonial period. Evidence of the Orientalist mindset is apparent in paintings of the Company School, images of which the speaker used to push her analysis forward. Dr. Kanoria introduced students to subject matter that was most common in these paintings, showing that they mapped the land, as well as its people, flora, fauna and culture for European patrons in a manner that enlarged the coloniser and diminished the colonised. The Western categories of Romantic, Picturesque and Sublime can be discerned in Company School landscape painting.

Alisha Sett examined the history of photography in India, highlighting the importance of the 19th-century explorations of the medium's potential. Explaining that photography arrived in the subcontinent almost simultaneously with its popularisation in the West, she worked through the colonial gaze, discussing some early artist-photographers, and the tension between the aesthetics of photography as an artistic medium and its documentary quality. Finally, the role of digital archives was exemplified through the speaker's own Kashmir Photo Collective. Such attempts draw the family photograph outside the studio and the album, and understand it as an artifact or relic with the potential of unearthing untold histories.

Dr. Pushkar Sohoni introduced colonial architecture to the class using representational images. He closely analysed the architecture and function of the colonial market hall, an unusual typology that reveals much about the era. We look forward to the concluding lectures of the IA course in April which will focus on popular art, Indian aesthetics and philosophy in the nationalist period, and colonial, modern and contemporary architecture in the subcontinent. – J.K.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Opening The Temple: Meaning in Material Form at The Kailasanatha Temple in Kanchipuram

April 6th & 7th, 2021, 6:30 - 8:30 pm IST | Dr. Padma Kaimal (Michael J. Batza, Chair in Art History, Colgate University)



The Kailasanatha temple complex, constructed ca 700-728 CE by men and women of the Pallava dynasty in Kanchipuram, reveals much about thought worlds of the ancient Indic South. The material elements of this complex fit together like the pieces of an elegant puzzle, to articulate nurturing, fecund energies and triumph over threats from outside and within. This monument encourages both modes of being, holding them in dialogue and revealing them through secret and public signs.

6th April 2021

Session 1: Looking North and South: Celibacy and Intimacy, Struggle and Grace

Session 2: Looking East and West, with and without Sons: Deities, Royalty, Family, and Lineage

7th April 2021

Session 1: Circumambulating This Way and That: Complementarity Set in Motion

Session 2: Word-Image Tango: Telling Stories with Words and Sculptures

The Kailasanatha Temple, Kanchi P1010689 c P. Kaimal

Islamic Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

HAJJ: A SACRED JOURNEY

January 13th, 2021 | **The Sacred Journey: An Introduction** | Dr. Venetia Porter (The British Museum, London)

January 20th, 2021 | **The Hajj from Colonial India** | Dr. John Slight (The Open University, Cambridge)

January 27th, 2021 | **The Hajj from Southeast Asia: A Story in Sources** | Dr. Annabel Teh Gallop (The British Library, London)

February 3rd, 2021 | **The Prophet, The Holy Cities and Islamic Devotional Texts** | Dr. Guy Burak (New York University)

February 10th, 2021 | **The Arts of Hajj: Gifts and Memorabilia** | Dr. Luit E.M. Mols (SABIEL, Research and Consultancy on Islamic art)

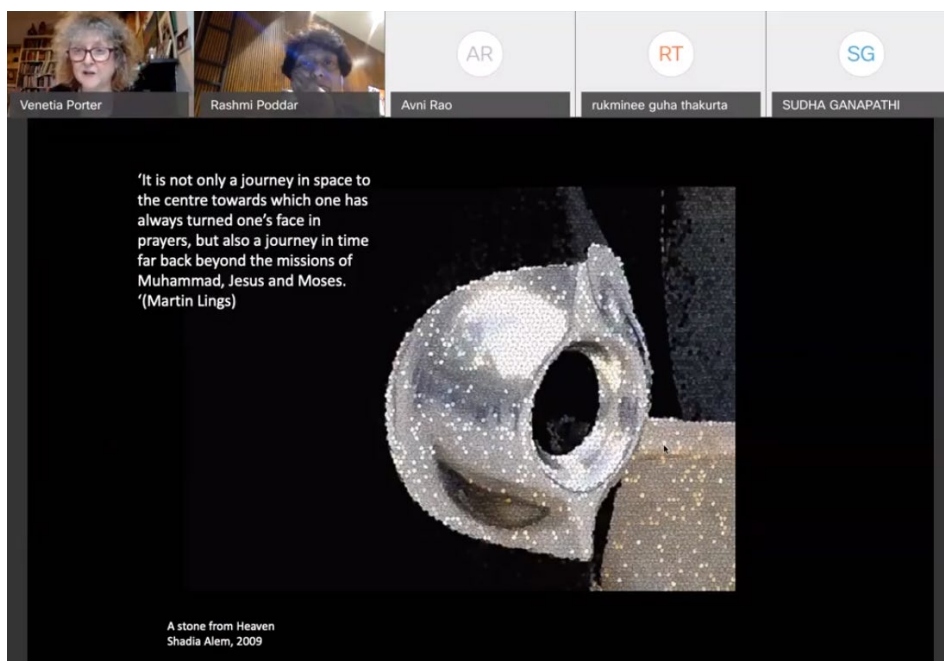
This five-lecture seminar covered various aspects of Hajj, which is the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims undertake at least once in their lifetime. According to the Quran, Mecca was where the first house of worship was established. Perhaps this is why Mecca is considered to be the heart of Islam, while Hajj is thought of as the very essence of Muslim faith. Hajj is not just a pilgrimage but an emotional state which draws each pilgrim into a larger brotherhood of Muslims from all over the world. Each lecture in this series threw light on various aspects of the Hajj through material objects, texts, and images, to reiterate how the journey is not just a movement of people, but one of ideas.

The first session, 'The Sacred Journey: An Introduction'

presented by Dr. Venetia Porter, introduced the idea of Hajj and its immense spiritual significance for Muslims. Dr. Porter explored the origin of Hajj rituals, the journey, and the development of some land routes to Mecca.

Hajj takes place between the 8th and 15th of the last month of the Muslim calendar. Each day of Hajj has a prescribed set of rituals, most of which originate in Abrahamic times. This includes the ritual of *tawaf* or circumambulating the *Kaaba* seven times (Abraham and Ishmael, his son, walked around the *Kaaba* seven times after they finished building it); the *Sa'i* or the walk between the hills of Safa and Marwa (Hagar searched for water between these two hills); and the *rami al-jamarat* or stoning the devil (Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael stoned the devil for tempting them). These rituals were first performed by Prophet Mohammad during his Hajj, and remain unchanged today.

Land routes to Mecca started to develop as an increasing number of Muslims began to travel there for Hajj. One of the most extraordinary routes is the Darb Zubeida from Kufa, which covers 700 miles and takes 271 days to complete. Other important routes are from Sinai to Aqaba; from Timbuktu in Mali; and from Damascus, which was a trade route set up by the Nabatians before the coming of Islam.



The Hijaz Railway, which was built along the same route as that from Damascus by the Ottoman Sultan Hamid, changed land travel for Hajj just as steamships changed travel by sea.

Hajj pilgrims travelled to Mecca in caravans usually organised by rulers of the land they came from. These rulers would not only organise caravans, but also send gifts, textiles, money, etc. along with the caravan. The *mahmal*, a tented structure that symbolised the ruling power, would lead the caravan for Hajj.

Although Medina is not part of the Hajj circuit, it is visited by pilgrims either before or after the pilgrimage. Medina is important as the Prophet began his own Hajj from there; it is also where he is buried along with his wife Fatima, and two early Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Omar.

Dr. Porter concluded her lecture with photographs by Adel N. Duresh, which portray the last of the Aghas or eunuchs, who were considered guardians of the sacred tomb of the Prophet. The role of the Aghas is more ceremonial than custodial today.

The second lecture, 'The Hajj from Colonial India', was presented by Dr. John Slight, who traced the British engagement with Hajj through a study of colonial archives and Hajj *safarnamas* or travel stories. The lecture demonstrated how geopolitics directed the policies of the British empire, which ruled over the largest number of Muslims in the world.

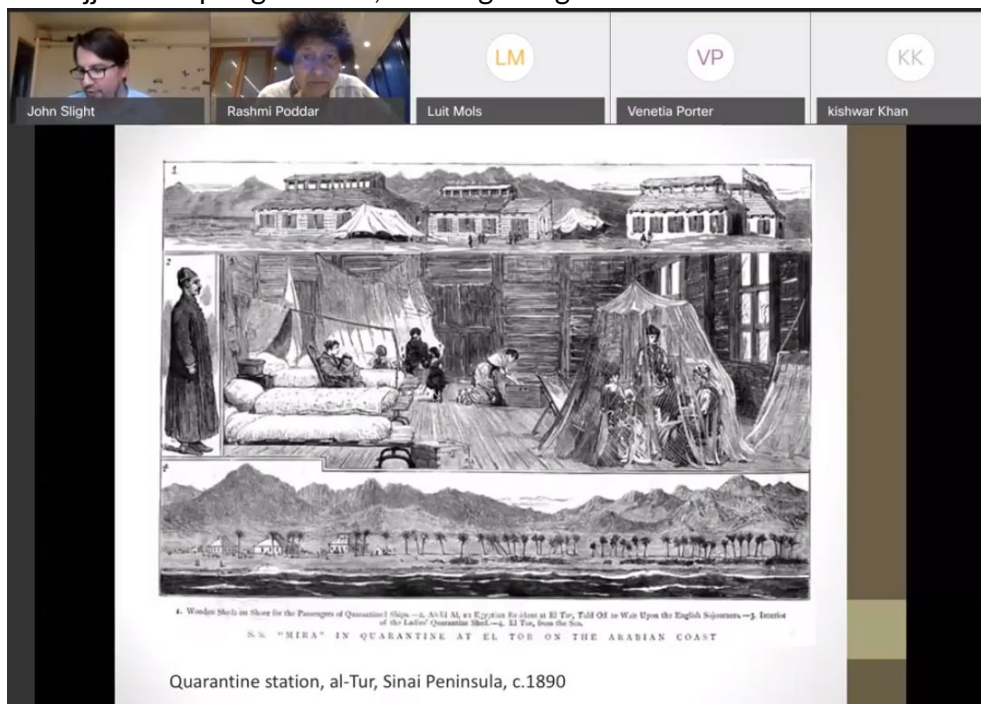
It was the exploits of the infamous Victorian explorer, Richard Burton (an officer of the Indian Army), that led to the beginning of the colonial engagement with Hajj. Burton disguised himself as a Sufi Muslim and went on Hajj in the spring of 1853, creating a huge scandal

when his book was published. During his journey, Burton noticed that a large number of Indian pilgrims were destitute, and that poverty was widespread, and wrote to the British government about it.

Steamships entering the Indian Ocean in the 1840s changed travel for Hajj – it reduced the time taken to travel to Jeddah (the port nearest Mecca), making the journey affordable for many more people. This also led to a rise in the number of colonial port cities, driven by development, like Bombay, a key transport hub for pilgrims going across the Indian Ocean to Arabia.

The subsequent rise in the numbers of Hajj pilgrims led to overcrowding in ships. These travellers were willing to undergo all forms of humiliation, suffering, and sickness, to be able to get onboard Jeddah-bound ships. The overcrowding caused a cholera epidemic, making public health history in 1865. The epidemic began in India, and travelled with Hajj pilgrims on steamships to Mecca, where it spread among the pilgrims to other parts of the Muslim world, causing the death of nearly 200,000 people worldwide. The 1865 cholera epidemic further deepened the colonial engagement with Hajj, an engagement that was first begun with Richard Burton's letter to the British government.

The epidemic led to quarantine measures for Hajj, with quarantine stations set up in the Red Sea islands for pilgrims from South and Southeast Asia. The quarantine experience varied depending on whether pilgrims were elite or non-elite Muslims, as each group was treated differently. There are also accounts of pilgrims successfully evading quarantine restrictions and regulations by starting the trip earlier or taking different routes to reach Mecca.



Around the end of the 19th century, about 1/3rd of Indian Hajj pilgrims were classified as destitute. The British attempted to address this issue using several methods, which included setting up an endowment to fund the return of destitute pilgrims to India, and appointing Thomas Cook as the official travel agent for Hajj pilgrims from India in the 1880s. However, the contract was terminated in 1893 after Thomas Cook faced strident criticism from the press, regarding their treatment of pilgrims.

Bombay was an important

embarkation port for pilgrims in the 19th century. At the turn of the 20th century, it is estimated that 30,000–50,000 pilgrims from all over the country, and even from as far as Kashgar in China, set off for Jeddah from Bombay. A Pilgrims' Department was set up in the Bombay Municipal Corporation, with a Protector of Pilgrims as the head, to manage the enormous pilgrim flow – from their arrival at train stations to their stay in hostels and camps before embarking on their voyage.

Mecca and Medina were part of the Ottoman Empire, and when they chose to support Germany during WWI, it meant that British colonial subjects could no longer go for Hajj. Since this had the potential to create problems for Britain with its Muslim subjects, the British persuaded Sharif Hussein of Mecca, an independent ruler under the suzerainty of the Ottomans, to rebel. Hussein, who aspired to become the king of all Arabs, agreed and Hajj resumed. But his mismanagement led to the British distancing themselves from him and turning towards Ibn Saud, another British ally. Saud, who had aspirations of his own, launched an attack against Sharif Hussein, who lost and abdicated in favor of Saud. This ended 400 years of Ottoman rule in the region, heralding the beginning of another era.

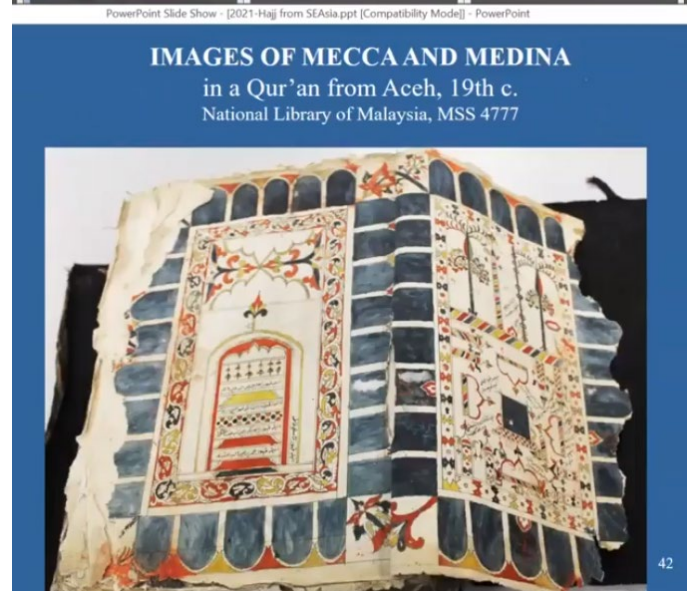
Dr. Slight concluded the lecture by noting that as British colonies like India started gaining independence, the administration of Hajj moved from the British to the Indian government, with personnel continuing to stay on in their posts to maintain continuity.

The third lecture, 'The Hajj from Southeast Asia: A Study in Sources' presented by Dr. Annabel Teh Gallop, explored the Southeast Asian experience of Hajj through sources such as seals, letters, manuscripts, maps, and the imagined depictions of holy cities.

Dr. Gallop explained that though Muslims have been trading and living in Southeast Asia from the earliest days of Islam, tracing the origin of Hajj is difficult. The main wave of Islamisation was in the 13th century, and the earliest materials regarding this are stone inscriptions. The most important inscription is the Terengganu stone, which was issued by a local ruler setting out Islamic laws in 1303. Inscriptions on funerary monuments from Pasai and the kingdoms of North Sumatra also reveal information on Islam in the region from the 14th century onwards.

The *Hikayat Raja-raja Pasai* (History of the Kings of Pasai), probably composed in the 14th century, is the oldest chronicle of the coming of Islam to Southeast Asia. The earliest Malay account of the Hajj is in the *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, the story of Hang Tuah, a 15th-century admiral of Melaka (Malacca).

Henri Chambert-Loir's extensive study of Malay, Javanese and other Indonesian sources reveals that while rulers in this region paid tribute to Mecca as the source of Islamic authority, they did not undertake Hajj themselves. In fact, the earliest evidence of Hajj by a ruler in this region is as recent as the late 19th century. A possible reason for this is related in the *Taj al-Salatin* (Crown of Kings), a Malay text composed in Aceh in 1603, which states that, for a king, dispensing justice was more important than undertaking Hajj. However, proxy Hajj pilgrimages were not uncommon in Southeast Asia, as Malay wills and documents reveal. Those who were unable to undertake Hajj in their lifetime would leave funds for someone else to undertake the pilgrimage on their behalf.

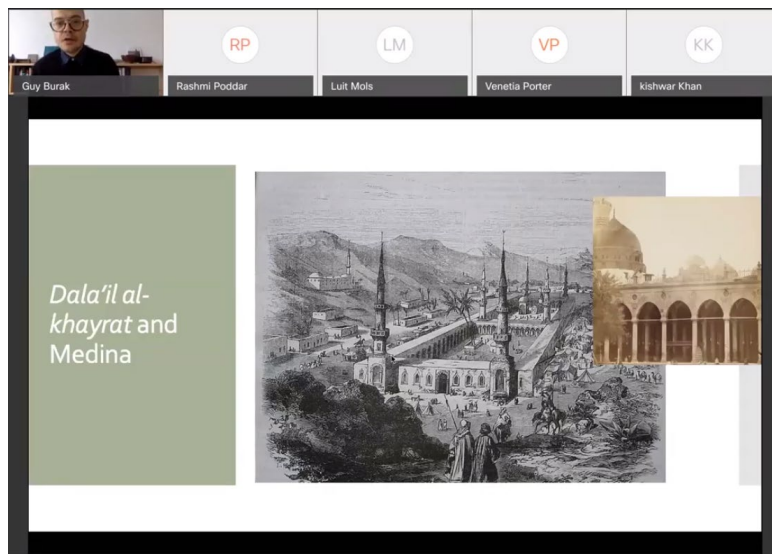


There were many renowned Malay scholars who lived in Mecca for a considerable amount of time and perhaps undertook the Hajj as well. One of the earliest was Hamzah Fansuri, a 16th-century Malay Sufi poet. Others included Abd al-ra'uf of Singkil, Aceh (1615-1693), who wrote the first commentary on the Quran in Malay; and Shaykh Yusuf of Makassar (1623-1699), who performed Hajj in 1644. There were Malay calligraphers in Mecca when the Ottomans took control of the holy city in 1617, who were trained in the Ottoman calligraphic style and produced illuminated manuscripts in Mecca, but used the artistic style of Southeast Asia. There are also manuscripts and images which do not reveal whether they were produced in Mecca or Southeast Asia. However, Malay artistry stands out, and such depictions reflect the art history and manifestation of the imagination of people from the region.

Dr. Gallop concluded her lecture with images of different groups of Malays by Dutch photographer Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje. His book, titled *Mecca*

in the 19th Century, was filled with astute observations of how Southeast Asian pilgrims were harassed and cheated – more than any other pilgrim group – by unscrupulous locals in Mecca.

Asia. Both texts circulated widely and were owned by both men and women across social and linguistic divides.



The devotional texts were popular in areas which had converted to Islam in the 13th and 14th centuries. Part of the popularity of the texts was fueled by the interest of those people in royal courts for whom going on Hajj was practically impossible. These texts were a way of bridging not just geographical distance, but also the psychological distance to Mecca.

Since these texts were usually owned by people who could not go to the holy cities themselves, questions of how they engaged with them emerged. By observing how certain portions in these texts have faded or been rubbed off, it is clear that the owner did not just see them as text or image, but probably imagined being in the holy cities themselves, thereby bestowing

these images with talismanic powers. It is clear that such images have a complex relationship with the accompanying text and are not just images the secular-minded scholars have inferred them to be, Dr. Burak concluded.

The penultimate lecture in the series was 'The Prophet, the Holy Cities and Islamic Devotional Texts', presented by Dr. Guy Burak who spoke of the depiction of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina in devotional texts, in general, and two texts, in particular – the *Dalail al-Khayrat* (The Signs of Benevolent Deeds) and *Futuh al-Haramayn* (Description of the Holy Cities).

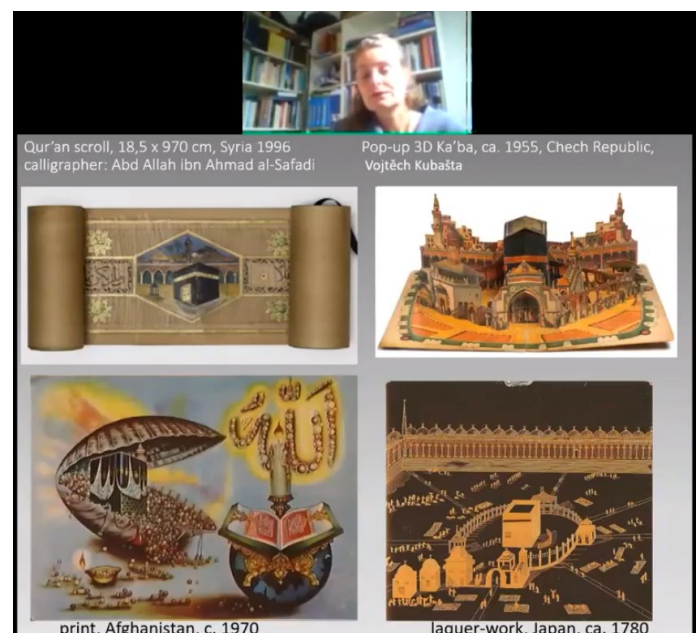
Not much scholarly work exists on devotional texts, as they were considered repetitive and formulaic, with unclear narrative. Art historians were the first to study them but did so more for the art and calligraphic style rather than the text itself. Emerging research on these texts reveal how incorrect these perceptions have been. Studies show how complex these texts are, and how they aid in the understanding of the theological and visual sensibilities of society at the time.

The final lecture in the series, 'The Arts of Hajj: Gifts and Memorabilia', was presented by Dr. Luit Mols, who drew upon her research and experiences gained in organising an exhibition on Hajj at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden. The focus of this lecture was on gifts presented by the ruling classes to the sanctuary at Mecca, and the objects brought back by pilgrims as mementoes of their spiritual journey or as gifts for family and friends.

It was in 775 that the *Kaaba* was covered with fabric and Islamic inscriptions for the first time. Known

Rivalry between patrons in the arts and intellectual fields in Mecca (for example, Gujaratis and Ottomans) led to the production of some remarkable texts and images of the holy cities. It is believed that most of these were copied by a small group of scribes in Mecca, however, it is difficult to ascertain the actual place of production. Illustrators came from all over the Islamic world, leading to local flavours being captured.

The *Dalail al-Khayrat* is essentially a prayer for and to the Prophet Mohammad and was written by Mohammad bin Sulayman al-Jazuli (d.1465), a Sufi saint from Marrakesh. The focus of this text is not Mecca but Medina, following the tradition of praising the Prophet. Over time, this text came to be known for its depictions of both Mecca and Medina and led to what scholars call "the battle of two cities in images". Muhi al-Din Lari (d. 1526-27 CE) was the author of the *Futuh al-Haramayn*, a text that was popular in South



as the *kiswah*, the textile coverings were produced not only for the *Kaaba*, but also for the Prophet's burial chamber at Medina. Initially, the *kiswah* came from numerous places, but from the second half of the 13th century, they were provided exclusively by Egyptian rulers. It was probably woven in a mosque, and later on at the Cairo citadel. From 1870 onwards, a special workshop, known as the Department of the Noble *Kiswah*, was set up for this purpose, with 4,000 specialist workers. Before the *kiswah* joined the caravan heading to Mecca, the rulers would organise a huge ceremonial procession for the public to view it.

While the exterior *kiswah* of the *Kaaba* is changed every year, the interior *kiswah* is changed only when damaged. The old covering is cut up into strips, squares, and sometimes larger pieces, and sold to pilgrims who would take them back home and use them as bookmarks for their Qurans, or as wall hangings. Other gifts sent by rulers to Mecca included money, candlesticks, wax candles, candle lighters, locks and keys for the *Kaaba* door, and copies of the Quran.

The markets of Jeddah and Mecca were filled with items to be bought and textiles and perfumes, among other items, were traded. Pilgrims brought back the holy *zamzam* water in China or copper bottles, pieces of the *kiswah*, dust from the Prophet's tomb made into hard cakes, frankincense, rosewater sprinklers, fibres of the palm tree, rosaries, everyday objects, etc.

Another item that pilgrims liked to return with was a Hajj certificate, which served as a testimony and

personal memento of having performed Hajj. The earliest Hajj certificates were hand-painted, which meant only a few could afford them. The introduction of printed certificates made it possible for pilgrims to buy a certificate and take it back with them; nowadays, these certificates can be printed off the Internet!

Mecca/*Kaaba* tiles are another type of 'souvenir', but it is possible that they were less a souvenir of a Hajj than a reminder of the *Kaaba* in Mecca, and the direction of prayer towards Mecca. These tiles could have also had the same function as that of pilgrim certificates in the past. Only 60 Mecca/*Kaaba* tiles, all made in Turkey in the 17th century, are known today, of which 19 are preserved in situ.

Dr. Mols concluded the lecture with a talk on Egypt's long-standing tradition of painting the external walls of a Hajji with images that relate to the pilgrimage. These painted walls announce to the community that the pilgrim has fulfilled his or her obligation and offers relatives and friends a share of the Hajj experience.
- S.G.

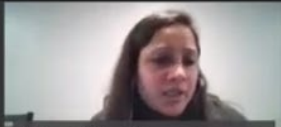







Southasian Painting

PAST PROGRAMMES

Text and Image in Southasian Painting

February 2nd, 9th, 16th & 23rd, 2021, 6:30 - 8:30 pm IST | Dr. Neeraja Poddar (The Ira Brind and Stacey Spector Associate Curator of Southasian Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art)

				
Neeraja Poddar	Rashmi Poddar	Jnanapravaha Mumbai	P G	shweta garg



Birth of Krishna, Isarda Bhagavata
North India ca.1570; San Diego Museum of Art 1990.585

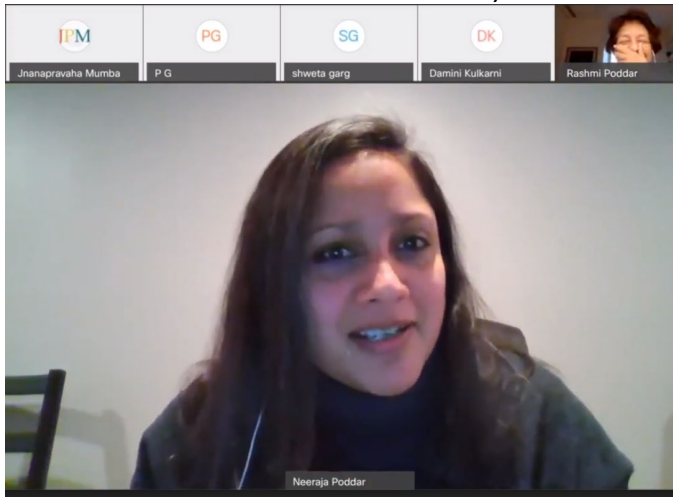
Early manuscripts and series of Southasian paintings often rely on texts for their subject matter: indeed, inscriptions and text are ubiquitous in Southasian painting, whether they are in the Buddhist, Jain or Rajput context. Dr. Neeraja Poddar discussed different facets of the subject over a series of four lectures. Issues such as the diverse arrangement of text and image, their relationship, different languages used in texts, artistic endeavour to translate text into image, the transformation of narrative into illustration, and text and image in different painting formats were considered.

Dr. N. Poddar began the first session discussing several examples of text and paintings from the *Rasikapriya* (a poem composed at the end of the 16th century at Orchha, classifying various situations of love) popularly

commissioned at Rajput courts in Rajasthan and the *Pahari* region from the 17th – 19th centuries. A painting from Mewar with the *braj bhasha* verse inscribed on top of the painting depicting the *Abhisarika nayika* (one who is driven by passion to meet her lover) painstakingly illustrates the demons, ghouls, menacing snakes, lost trinket and clouds of thunder mentioned in the poem, as the *nayika* hurries under a cover of darkness to meet her lover. In paintings of the *Abhisarika nayika* from Kangra (1780-1800), however, painting and verse differ. Though the lost anklet and menacing snakes are not mentioned in verses inscribed on the reverse of the *Pahari* paintings, the anklet and snakes appear in the paintings as tropes that have become essential to the iconography of the *Abhisarika nayika*.

Various illustrations from the seven books of Valmiki's

Ramayana belonging to a monumental manuscript commissioned by Rana Jagat Singh of Mewar, (1649-53, popularly known as the Mewar *Ramayana*) was then examined as an example of a complete book with illustrations. The Sanskrit text is inscribed on horizontally formatted (*pothi*) pages between paintings of the narrative, and chapter endings and colophons are inscribed in red. The last page of each volume has the notation 'Ra' for *Ramayana* and 'Aa' for *Ayodhyakanda* (for example, in the book of Ayodhya) denoting the name of the book as well as the chapter just read on the top of the page. Colophons are also inscribed in red and impart a great deal of information regarding the patron, place of production, year of completion, name of artist, scribe and librarian. The well-known Mewari artist Sahibdin depicts the narrative with the help of 'continuous narration', whereby the protagonists are sometimes depicted three or four times in the same painting. With this clever device, it is possible to condense three or four chapters in a single painting, as well as to include a great deal of visual imagery, features that become necessary in the illustration of the colossal *Ramayana* narrative.



Dr. Neeraja Poddar speaks during 'Day 1: Words and pictures, words in pictures'

In the second session, Dr. N. Poddar considered various ways in which an artist translated text into image. Buddhist non-narrative Sanskrit texts of the *Astahasrika Prajnaparamita* (AP), commissioned for the express purpose of gaining merit were explored. These books expressed philosophical concepts of *shunyata* or nothingness, which made one wonder what kind of imagery artists could conceptualise to adorn such esoteric texts. Paintings illustrating these books usually depicted scenes from the life of the Buddha or important Buddhist pilgrimage sites; which endowed the text with greater sacrality, thereby increasing the merit gained by one who commissioned it. A comparison was made between the images on the AP text and similar scenes from Buddha's life carved on the surface of a votive *stupa*, encapsulating it. Like the *stupa*, therefore, the text was meant to be worshipped. Similarly, painting

important deities (for example the goddess Tara from the pilgrimage site of Vaishali) relating to Buddhist pilgrimage sites within an AP manuscript, enhanced it with sanctity as well as provided the viewer a way of experiencing these sites. An important feature indicated by this study revealed that image and text often reveal the purpose and use of a manuscript.

In the Rajput courtly context, manuscripts of the tenth book of the *Bhagavata Purana*, describing the exploits of Krishna, were illustrated in a variety of ways. Paintings from the Isarda *Bhagavata* manuscript (1570) appear to closely follow the Sanskrit text inscribed on top; they elevate Krishna to an iconic status, usually depicting him in the centre of the painting with the colour red framing him. Vernacular captions inscribed on the verso or sometimes on the top of the illustration may be in Gujarati, indicating that the owner was probably Gujarati. A double-sided *Bhagavata Purana* manuscript from Mewar (1600-1625) depicts Sanskrit text sandwiched between a commentary, with a vernacular caption in red below, describing the painting. The caption appears to have been added on later, perhaps for the use of the patron. A delightful Malwa style *Bhagavata* from the Kanoria collection (1688) with vernacular text inscribed on the verso has box-like compartments featuring different episodes; a viewer who is well versed with the narrative would realise that the artists seem to be aware of every nuance of the *Bhagavata* story, painting details that emphasise important elements from the text. Another *Bhagavata* manuscript from Datia (1800) has complicated imagery with detailed Sanskrit captions next to each incident, explaining the story; even so it could prove difficult for a reader unfamiliar with the narrative to read the image, as incidents appear haphazardly across the painting.

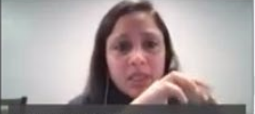




The third session addressed the transformation of stories and paintings as they are transmitted. An important element of Southasian painting is that copies were an inherent part of the production process and took place in workshops with the help of tracings or pounces that a master artist may have previously sketched, or copying the composition and iconography of a series. An example of the latter is the Bundi Chunar *Ragamala* (1591) which was used as the model for painting the *Ragamala* series in Bundi for almost 200 years. Details painted in the original version were missing in later copies. Explanations that have been offered are that perhaps artists often misunderstood what a painting was meant to convey, or the importance of details. Or perhaps an artist decided to update a painting in order to depict one that was in sync with the times. A comparison was drawn between three similar looking Jain *Kalpasastra* manuscripts termed 'monotonous' by scholars. As the


objective of these manuscripts was to provide merit to the persons who commissioned them, it was considered important for the text and paintings to be identical to the model being copied. The purpose of the manuscript therefore often throws light on its character. Copies made of paintings in the Malwa style *Bhagavata* (1688, Kanoria collection) have several omissions which unfortunately has led to changes in the story the copy paintings tell.

The fourth and final session focussed on text and image in different formats of painting; a *pattachitra* made by travelling minstrels in Bengal (19th century), a codex book from Mysore (bound with a spine, 1840), a wonderful Nepali scroll depicting the story of Usha and Aniruddha (1795), and a *kalapustaka* manuscript from Nepal that folded like an accordion (1600). The Nepali scroll with the story of Usha-Aniruddha was compared with another extraordinary manuscript with Nepali captions, now widely dispersed (1775-1800), both having similar dates of production. It was a treat to look at the energetic images from both scroll and manuscript, both of which were lavish commissions illustrating minute details from the story. The artists of the vibrant manuscript helped the viewer with devices such as differing iconographical details identifying each city. Shonitapura, also known as Agnigadh, was always depicted with a band of flames bordering the city; Dwarka, which was supposedly built by Krishna in the middle of the ocean, always presented a body of water on its borders when painted.

The session ended with a fascinating finale: a discussion of a splendid 'Pilgrimage to Gosainkund' *vilampu* or Nepalese scroll (1800), which depicted the important pilgrimage site of Lake Gosainkund in the Kathmandu valley, the abode of Shiva and Avalokiteshvara. Details of the cities of Patan and Kathmandu, the landscape and topography, sacred sites and temples of the Kathmandu valley region, (that approximated an actual Google-map by way of geographical location and direction), two pilgrimage routes that are used by trekkers today, moving from the left of the map (South) to the right (North), displayed a stunning conceptual example of a painting without a text, that was interpreted skillfully by Dr. Neeraja Poddar. According to the famous 'Churning of the Ocean of Milk' myth, the Gosainkund Lake was created by Shiva's trident as he wandered the Himalayas, to assuage his thirst when he swallowed the poison that arose from the churning. This myth and the remnants of rituals that exist in the Lake, define its sacrality, and perhaps give us a clue as to the use of the *vilampu* scroll; it could have been an object of worship for pilgrims who could not make the arduous journey on foot. Instead, they traced their own personal pilgrimage route by seeing the geographical markers on the painting and eventually reaching the pilgrimage site, gaining some merit while doing so.

The four meticulously researched lectures delivered by Dr. N. Poddar imparted a wealth of knowledge and insights as she led us step by step through the fascinating world of Text and Image in Southasian Painting. – R.A.

				
Neeraja Poddar	Rashmi Poddar	Jnanapravaha Mumbai	P G	shweta garg



Aniruddha sleeps, Usha identifies his portrait (recto)
 Mewar ca. 1600-1625
 Bonhams auction New York September 18th 2013

Yoga & Tantra

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Understanding Hindu Tantra

August 3rd, 5th, 10th & 12th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Gavin Flood | (Professor of Hindu Studies and Comparative Religion, Oxford University)



A tantric form of the Hindu Goddess Kali. Folio from a book of Iconography, Nepal, 17th century.

This course presents an overview of the history, beliefs and practices of the tantric traditions that developed from the early medieval period. We will examine the heyday of Tantrism from around the 8th to 13th centuries and raise critical questions about how best to understand these complex forms of belief and practice and whether they have anything to say to us today. We will begin with the historical context within which the tantric traditions arose and with a clarification of terminology. The word 'tantra' is, of course, a Sanskrit term referring to texts regarded as revelation from God (Shiva at first) that arose in the early medieval period, initially within Hinduism and later in Buddhism and Jainism. This new religion developed quite quickly and attracted the patronage of kings, spreading to Southeast Asia and even into China and Japan. Tantric traditions are to this day important and thriving in India and Nepal, and the course will trace their development.

- Day 1: Tantra in Historical Context
- Day 2: The Core Traditions of Shiva
- Day 3: The Netra-tantra
- Day 4: Other tantric traditions

CRITICISM & THEORY



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

JPM's Criticism and 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

PAST PROGRAMMES

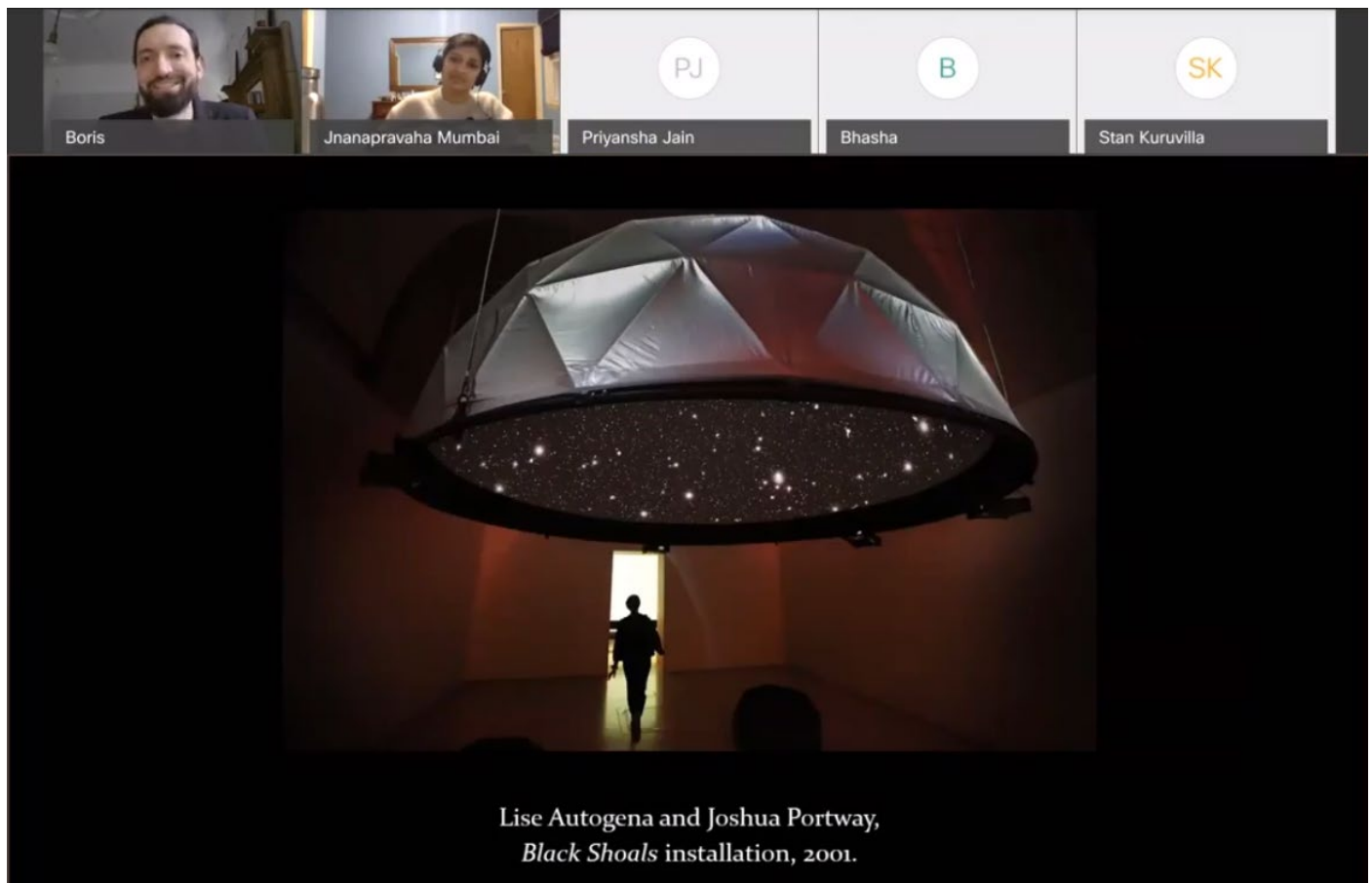
Techniques of Enchantment: An Introduction to Art & Media

January 5th, 7th, 12th, 14th, 19th, 21st, 25th & 28th, 2021, 6:00 - 8:30 pm | Dr. Boris Čučković Berger (Associate Lecturer, The Courtauld Institute of Art)

The virtual seminar 'Techniques of Enchantment' traced a history of reification and mythology in the modern world; more concretely, it outlined how mass media creates a culture of spectacle and commodity fetishism. The lecturer was Dr. Boris Čučković Berger, who is an Associate Professor at The Courtauld Institute of Art, and works at the intersection of art history and information science, especially focussing on the cultural status of digital production and its evolution. His mission for the course was to combine two discourses: of enchantment and disenchantment, and of media and art, in order to see how one might illuminate the other. This gave students the opportunity to interact and engage with new media artforms, while receiving the tools of a framework that can be applied to any artistic practice.

The first week of the course covered considerable ground, contextualising the history of new media and technology in space and time to determine a trajectory

of thought. Although the term 'enchantment' is not completely defined, students attempted, throughout the course, to identify occurrences of enchantment and its kin – re-enchantment and disenchantment. Beginning with Max Weber, who believed that industrialisation and technology are disenchanting something of the old world while producing modern re-enchantments, the question that arose was: is the artist a part of the process of enchantment or disenchantment, or is the artist outside of this spectrum altogether? An interrogation of enchantment was initially conducted by viewing Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway's *Black Shoals* (2001), an installation mimicking a planetarium view of constellations, in which the glimmering lights are algorithmic manifestations of the stock exchange in real time. Arguably, this work was more enchanting than disenchanting due to its attractive abstraction of data – that might otherwise be disenchanting – forming a crystallised, comfortable format invoking



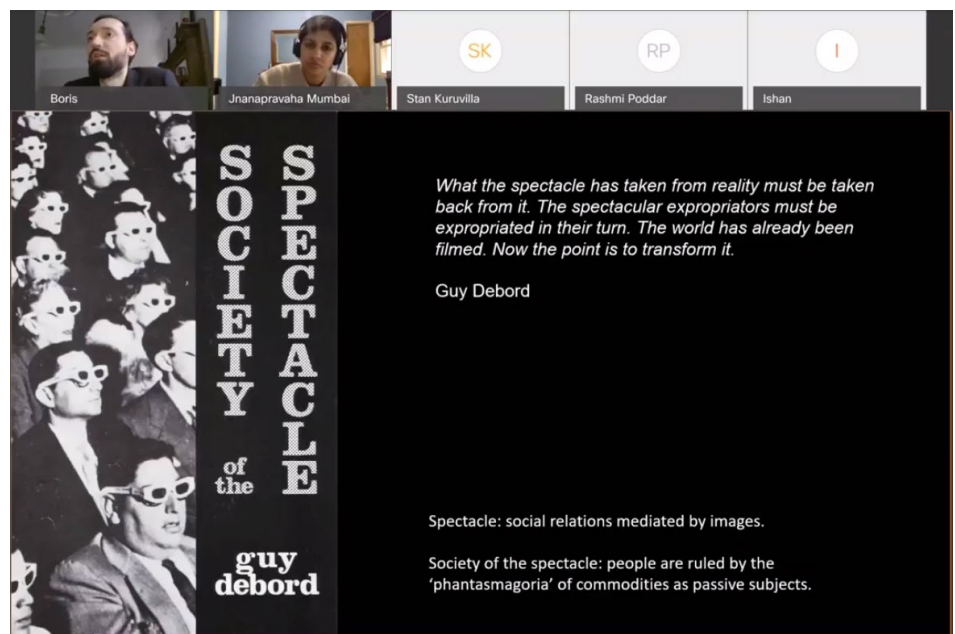
stars and galaxies.

The first week of the course also grappled with the complexity of definitions, unpacking terms such as 'media', 'medium', and 'new media'. Technological determinism was tackled through the lens of Marshall McLuhan, who believed that innovation in technology changes society, rather than the other way around. His worldview was consistently challenged in these lectures, as the class explored practices that contradicted this pervasive belief system. The productive takeaway from his work was the importance of this shift in perspective: of new technologies reshaping culture. However, the question that must still be asked is: can we change technology to suit the cultural changes we want to see?

A brief introduction to Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* offered a critique of consumerism, switching focus to the zombification and passivity of individuals via commodity fetishism and spectacle culture. The work of Walter Benjamin, one of art criticism's grandfathers, was also delved into. Benjamin believed that theory is the practical application of philosophy to culture and society. A reading of *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* nurtured an understanding of Benjamin's explication of the historical relationships between art and technology, and more specifically, how new art forms are defined, how they transform the art world, and what is lost in the process. For Benjamin, what is lost is the aura of an artwork, its specificity in space and time, its uniqueness and temporality. What is gained is that reproducible works of art are capable of making more of its audience into collaborators. Benjamin does not completely buy into technological determinism; rather, he has a more fluid perception of the intermingling of technology and culture, as is evident in the now-famous quote, "Just as an entire mode of existence of human collectives changes over long historical periods, so too does their mode of perception." Benjamin examines cinema through this lens, going deep into the role of the actor on stage, compared to on screen, but more importantly, perhaps, he addresses the democratic nature of cinema and its accessibility. As Claire Bishop summarises: "the work of art is better the more readers or audiences it turns into collaborators."

In this newfound Benjaminian light, a study of Martha

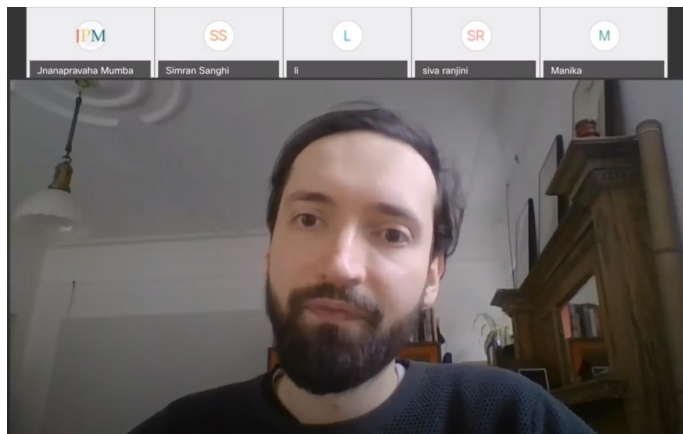
Rosler's *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-72), followed. This series of collages juxtaposes images from print media of the Vietnam War and domestic interior design catalogues. The work collapses the physical and conceptual distance between the war and the consumer (the home). However, it is not Rosler's collages that circulate widely in the general public, but rather the print media that she draws from. Her work remains known only in the realm of contemporary art. A similar critique came up when examining the practices of Forensic Architecture that use "architectural techniques and technologies to investigate cases of state violence and violations of human rights around the world". The work *The Bombing of Rafah*, for example, analyses images of bomb clouds from the 2014 Gaza conflict to determine the size of



artillery used. These findings are used by local and international authorities for their investigations of abuse of international law. This information has a very obvious effect of disenchanting us. But larger ethical issues are also at play because these images are displayed internationally in museums and biennales rather than solely used for legal purposes. Is it feasible to enchant abuse? And should artists even try to engage with questions of broader public dissemination? The thorny question of whether confining complex new media work to the realm of contemporary art will ultimately make it lose public relevance is dealt with later.

The second week of the course explored the seemingly oppositional concepts of medium specificity (Laocoonism) in contrast to the convergence of various art forms (Gesamtkunstwerk), and investigated the dichotomy between post-medium and post-media conditions. The main thinker for this discussion on Laocoonism was Clement Greenberg, the American art critic who canonised the idea that in order for art

not to be subsumed in mass culture kitsch, it must research its own medium. To him, abstraction was the key characteristic of postmodern painting, because it was primarily concerned with itself, its painterlyness. As abstract expressionist painting grew in popularity, artists like Pollock started gaining success. In Greenberg's view, as painting surrendered to its flatness, something was revealed in the constraints of the medium. A critique of Greenberg's manifestly elitist attitudes arose throughout the lecture; due to his preoccupation with preserving his decidedly purist attitude, he was unable to see that an obsession with medium specificity was not serving the cause of making art more accessible or even more avant-garde.



Dr. Boris Čučković Berger speaks during 'Techniques of Enchantment: An Introduction to Art & Media'

Sven Lutticken, who served as the scholarly stalwart for the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk, is interested in the synthesis of art and mainstream culture. In his essay, *From Media to Mythology*, he analyses Bolter and Grusin's framing of media in terms of immediacy and hypermediacy, the denial of medium, and presence or opacity of medium, respectively. Lutticken applies his framework to the current conversations in contemporary art; here, immediacy can be compared to hyperrealism, where medium and reality merge, while hypermediacy is like abstract expressionist painting where the medium is at the forefront. Remediation is the imitation of one medium in another, for example, the trend of photography getting more painterly. Through these terms, Lutticken discusses the blurred line between entertainment and contemporary art, and the current need for these spillovers, asking the poignant question: "does the need to oppose the pressures for convergence from the entertainment industry have to mean a self-imposed isolation of art from the dominant media?" while stating in the same breath, "the hermit who remains free from worldly temptations may be pure, but risks being forgotten by the world." As an example, he questions what happens to the image of Marilyn Monroe after Andy Warhol. From this lens, it is apparent that the icon is demystified through repetition, the iconicity or as Walter Benjamin would describe it, its 'uniqueness' breaks down. Here

Dr. Berger brought in a contemporary example: the @insta_repeat account on Instagram that posts virtually the same picture taken by many users/photographers, revealing prominent tropes. Through this act of repetition, there is a sense of disenchantment; not only do we get a sense of being subtly controlled by the same social media we participate in, but we grapple with the lack of originality in our framing of our private worlds.

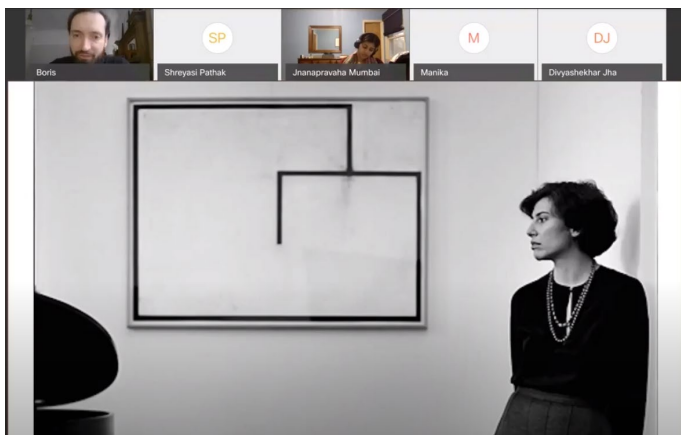
The issue of post-medium and post-media conditions was probed through the perspective of Rosalind Krauss, an acolyte of Clement Greenberg, who is less concerned with medium specificity (its technicality and materiality), than with art's aggregate support system, or in other words, art historical traditions and conventions. She settles on a more ambiguous perspective, where the artist reinvents a medium by creating their own conventions, which then becomes a recursive structure. In the preface of her book *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, Krauss articulates the shortcomings of modernist critique in its understanding of Maurice Denis's 1890 dictum about any pictorial medium: "[it] was now being read, for example, as merely presaging an essentialist reduction of painting to 'flatness'. That this is not Denis's point, that he is instead describing the layered, complex relationship that we could call a recursive structure – a structure which will produce the rules that generate the structure itself – was (and is) just...ignored. Further, that this recursive structure is something made, rather than something given, is what is latent in the traditional connection of 'medium' to matters of techniques, as when the arts were divided up pithing the Academy into ateliers representing the different medium – painting, sculpture, architecture – in order to be taught."

The post-medium art specificity that Krauss is arguing for involves recurring aspects in an artist's work, which become conventionalised in their practice. This perspective was exemplified in the classroom through the practice of artists like Cindy Sherman and William Kentridge, who have reinvented their respective mediums, creating their own conventions, recognisable through repetition. This is the self-differential specificity artists must establish, which has to be consistently reiterated to be validated in the art world. Krauss states at the tail end of her excursus: "artists such as James Coleman or William Kentridge have embraced the idea of differential specificity, which is to say the medium as such, which they understand they will now have to reinvent and rearticulate."

The split between contemporary art and new media is a divide that Domenico Quaranta explores in *The*

Postmedia Perspective. He addresses the 'ineradicable inferiority complex' of new media as a more-recently established practice. The new-media art world is still more interested in its medium, argues Quaranta, while contemporary art has moved away from medium into recursive structures. To further examine these divides, Cory Arcangel's *Super Mario Clouds* was discussed. This is a multi-channel installation from 2004, in which one can see projections of pixelated cloud animations from a popular video game. The old-school Nintendo cartridge has been hacked by the artist and rejigged to be exhibited in a contemporary art context. An exploration of the process of commodification that this work underwent was conducted, questioning what happens to these types of ephemeral experiential digital works when they are purchased by a museum. This work is open source and Arcangel's process and codes for hacking the game console cartridge are available for anyone to use. However, it is the limited-edition installation that is sold to the museum, not the cartridge nor the code. This is an interesting example of how new media art is trying to find its way through the use values of contemporary art, which still depend on the uniqueness of the object.

Another example that was recurrent in the course was Michael Wolf's *The Transparent City* (2008), a series of photographs that document the grid-like structures of high-rise buildings in downtown Chicago. The photobook plays on ideas of opacity and transparency, as Wolf accidentally realises that upon zooming into this abstract architecture, he is able to see the individuals in the buildings with some of their expressive features intact. These zoomed-in shots "reveal(s) the social constructs of living and working in an urban environment". One might argue that without this additional discovery the work remains concerned purely with a cold urban aesthetic. It is the added dimension of unintentional portraiture that brings this work into complex conversations about the 2008 financial crisis, its impact and repercussions, and how its representations appear in the world of art and media.



Through David Joselit's *After Art*, the course took

a conceptual step further from Rosalind Krauss's object-oriented approach towards understanding the power of populations of images. For Joselit, artists are reconfiguring the narratives between images; art to him becomes a currency or network supplanting objects onto theory. He is concerned with the media buzz around the object, and its popularity as a commodity. The course then moved to the materiality and immateriality of the digital, exploring it through new media examples such as Nikola Bojic's *Felton Street Emptiness* (2014), where the artist maps a no-wifi zone between two university campuses, and then renders this space into a 3D-printed object. Questions were raised in relation to this, such as why artists are still insisting on the preciousness of objects, and how this commodification is manipulated.

While the course situated these practices in terms of Joselit's 'formats', an interesting justification to the act of thing-ification arose – the issue of temporality. Perhaps the materialisation of 'concept' is necessary as a starting point in order to create a concrete archivable entry point into the concept and practice that the artist is trying to present. Here, the course engaged in a push and pull between the importance of thing-ification and the existence of a concept/idea. As the lecture shifted into the post-medium condition, some students chose the belief that it is "the idea that makes the art" (Sol LeWitt), and therefore materiality comes later. This conversation led to debating a thought experiment in materiality, an interactive and performative work, *Free Sol LeWitt*, by Superflex (2010), where a large workshop was set up in the museum to produce reproductions of one of Sol LeWitt's minimalist wall sculptures that were then given away to museum-goers. The Danish artist duo reveal something that isn't usually revealed – that the production becomes the art. This then becomes a continuing investigation into open-source practices; LeWitt sells the recipes for his work, not the work itself; he responds to industrialisation by mimicking it. During the classroom discussions, the issue of accessibility arose once again: if the media that circulates is primarily about Sol LeWitt, that means questions about the labour of workers in this installation are almost non-existent, even if the labour is made visible within the space of the museum, and the aura of the artist's magic touch is somewhat dismantled; and although free to take home, if the size of the reproductions are still fundamentally inaccessible to a mass audience, what purpose does reproduction serve?

The thread in most examples in this course was an entanglement between art and its commodification, and issues of ownership and legality created sometimes self-consciously and at other times surprisingly by

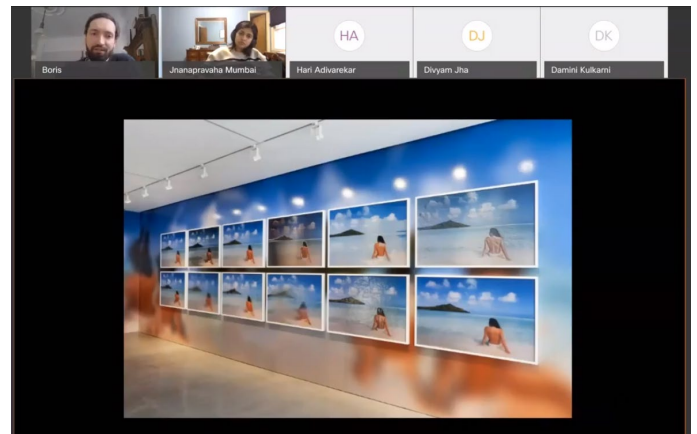
new media artwork. This was exemplified through the controversial exhibition by Constant Dullaart, *Jennifer in Paradise*, which stands in as an anthropology of Photoshop – the questions of cultural ownership and privacy are at the forefront of the story of this artwork. Here, Dullaart recontextualises the first ever Photoshopped image, an image that was used in Photoshop demonstration videos and made available with the software, to evaluate the values within the image. As he explains, “The fact that it’s a white lady, topless, anonymous, facing away from the camera; and that it was his wife; he offers her, objectifying her, in his creation for the reproduction of reality.” To Dullaart, this image is an artefact, while for Jennifer and her husband, this recontextualising encroaches on their privacy (as known through their lawsuit).

The course dove deeper into the discourse of subject and object and their relation to reification through Diedrich Diederichsen’s reading of Hito Steyerl. On reckoning with emancipatory feminism’s need to become subject to gain agency, and the current shift of self-objectification and “freedom to be object”, Diederichsen simultaneously grappled with the societal obsession for subjectivity. He concludes his essay *Animation, De-reification, and the New Charm of the Inanimate* by explaining that reification turns things into commodities and, therefore, we must be rid of the commodity. On the other hand, “thingness” perfectly encapsulates the instability of the object, because we are overly obsessed with those objects which we can conceptualise as subject.

In order to expand the conversation, students watched *Liquidity Inc.* (2014) by Hito Steyerl. This piece can be thought of as a video collage, with more elements than the viewer can comprehend. The overwhelming array of narrative linkages allows multiple entry points into the work, through which she approaches her subjects and this, in turn, produces her own recursive structures. In the conversation around this work, questions were raised around the enchantment/disenchantment and reification of this work. The clumsiness of the CGI, as well as the unveiling of certain systems in play, like how the financial crisis is a problem of flow, although mystifying in themselves, serve as a mode of disenchantment. And yet this work is extremely alluring and reified. Even through its disruption of the medium – like when messages around the budget of the project and outsourcing come up – there still is a synthesis that holds it all together. Using humour and silliness, Steyerl is very aware of the short attention spans of today’s viewers, offering easy-to-digest lynchpin narratives of the rise and fall.

Early in the course, the issue of the syllabus being too European or Western was raised, a rather

predictable problem when a European professor is remotely teaching a course in a Southasian country. This issue is bigger than any one lecturer or any one course and won’t be solved easily in academia. However, in a consistently globalising world, where the spillover of cultures is so vast, it can be difficult to apply a geography to thought and artwork in terms of its ideological mapping. This issue was addressed by inviting students to present work to widen the context of conversations, which resulted in two brave practitioner-students sharing their practices in and around new media and disenchantment.



Ishan Gupta shared a project he had worked on for the Foundation of Environmental Monitoring (ffem). They were creating an open-source water testing kit that utilised a smartphone and small, easily available objects. He spoke of the struggles of commodifying open source concepts and also shared 3D works he had printed for artists, following their precise directions, which were then shown in the contemporary gallery context.

Bhasha, a course participant and painter, shared an amusing example of disenchantment in her work *Jeans (Repaired)* (2019). She ordered multiple pairs of ‘distressed’ jeans online from luxury brands, which she then mended and returned. She was reimbursed for all but one pair of repaired pants. Another work-in-progress Bhasha presented was a found-footage video montage titled *loot*, which traces the Southasian origins of the word and follows the word’s journey into the politicised present realm as a term associated with the Republican view of Black Lives Matter protests. Viewing these practices of classmates sparked a vibrant conversation among students, and the issue of transparency in aesthetic practice kept returning. The class inevitably leaned on *The Transparent City* as a point of reference for examining how artists work with transparencies. Artists like Hito Steyerl expose the social weaves of reification, creating practices for critical contemplation, where using materiality to intervene in the seamless surface of media spectacle is central to placing art in its historical relevance.

For the penultimate lecture, students read about how video games train and discipline players into productive post-industrial workers, studying the example of *Inside Star Citizen*, a crowdfunded game that has been in the making for a number of years. Students began to see the spectacle within the production process of the video game, where the production is the spectacle, not the video game itself. It seems that we are, nowadays, enchanted by transparency in and of itself, wanting to know how our products are made, rather than knowing the product itself.

The last lecture revolved around reading Nathan Brown, and investigating the distribution of the insensible as a concern of artistic practice. He critiques Jacques Ranciere's "distribution of the sensible" by asking how aesthetic functions can be conceived without thinking about their insensible effects. Zach Blas's *Face Cages* (2017) was studied, which is a series of grid-like sculptures accompanied by videos of structures overlaid on faces – a critique of the biometric facial recognition industry. This exhibition seems to have an impactful disenchanting effect by exposing how frameworks change, and by interlinking technological shifts with a critique of technology as the artist makes the public grapple with biases in facial recognition algorithms. In these structures, it's not the algorithm that changes shape to match our faces, but rather our faces which are mapped onto existing shapes. This inevitably becomes a sign of who was present and who was behind the creation of these systems, and who was excluded. An especially successful aspect of this work is that it does not use 3D print as a trivial medium, but rather applies it to the distribution of the insensible, that the artist is then redistributing through their work. One might argue that Nicolas Baier's *Vanitas* work is merely theoretical and allegorical, while Zach Blas achieves a deeper sense of de-reification.

As the course drew to an end, another burning question arose: how do discourses in niche realms of aesthetic practice and critical theory spillover to the mainstream? Alisha Sett, the course director, pointed out that one rarely sees these discourses enter mainstream publications or popular spaces. Interestingly, Dr. Berger took a very diplomatic stance on this issue, but one that helped settle students' inner conflicts: he pointed out that maybe the contemporary art world and public would always be disconnected, as theorists haven't yet resolved several issues of contemporary art, and might never do so, but maybe this inaccessibility shouldn't be viewed as a complete negative. The institutions that help preserve space for autonomous thinking might be inaccessible, but they also allow for the production of art and media that disenchant its own aesthetic value. The work

of building common ground between these worlds is important but maybe there's a reason for this separation and gatekeeping – apart from the obvious elitist, colonialist, classist implications – which means we must not stop being critical of these institutions even if they are the only spaces for these discourses.

The goal of this course was to deliver the framework of enchantment, disenchantment, and re-enchantment as a way of viewing and discussing aesthetic practices. As promised, from contemporary art and new media art to more approachable examples from social media, students were given opportunities to apply this methodology to their readings of artists' work. Dr. Berger succeeded in his goal, delivering a new way of thinking to a diverse group of students through the medium of video lectures. There was a frequent sense of demystification, as the class examined the role of myths in the post-industrial internet world, and how mass media manipulates and influences its audience. Although often running in loops, contradicting itself, sometimes completely jumbling up brains into disenchanted mush, the learning and messy framework of enchantment will likely remain with these participants for a long time to come. - L. K.

Plato's Republic

February 26th, March 3rd, 5th, 10th, 12th, 17th, 19th, 24th, 26th & 31st, 2021 | 6:30 - 9:00 pm IST | Dr. Ioannis D. Evrigenis (Professor of Political Science, & Director of International Relations, Tufts University)

Testimonial: Afreen Azim - Student of Plato's Republic

"This course is happening at such a perfect time for me. I'm currently in the midst of transitioning from a university to a school/alternative education model of teaching. Plato's *Republic* and the discussion around it is raising all the right questions for me as an educator looking for a model outside of the university setting to learn and teach in."



Peloponnesian War. The tragic loss of Athens in the war, its subsequent devastation and impoverishment, serves as the historical background in which Plato wrote *Republic*, and we understand it as an exposition of the idea of justice and a subliminal critique of Athenian democracy. Focussing on the setting of the book, Prof. Evrigenis explained the importance of Athens in the Greek intellectual world, describing the city in the words of the Greek historian Thucydides as "The School of Greece". The discussion following this remark was instrumental in formulating a working understanding of 'the economy of knowledge' that governed Athenian democracy, through public institutions and open debates. The establishment of this power-knowledge dialectic is instrumental in comprehending the relevance of the figure of Socrates and his use in the works of Plato.

Socrates, who was the son of a carpenter and mid-wife, features as a central interlocutor in many of Plato's works. While no written work is accredited to Socrates, we know about him from the numerous playwrights and thinkers who were his contemporaries and succeeded him. Pronounced by the oracle as the wisest man in Athens, a city that was brimming with experts in every field of knowledge and the arts, Socrates quickly rose to relevance in the politics of Athenian democracy through his unique dialectical approach and a persistent penchant for proving right. The rule of the '*demos*' or 'the body of the people' functioned through the currency of mastery in rhetoric, which was at that time understood as the art of holding political sway in public opinion through speech. The figure of Socrates, as revealed by Plato, is characteristically disinterested in gaining political capital. This is highlighted by the fact that he chose the markets and streets of Athens as his stage to question and lecture the young and old of Athens, instead of only engaging in official public debates about the rule of law and governance that were held at public offices. The death of Socrates by hemlock, following his trial for 'corrupting the youth' and 'maligning the gods of the city' served to eulogise and make him a martyr in the history of Greece. He is also said to have fought for Athens in the Peloponnesian War and have displayed utmost courage on the battlefield. His execution

Interim Report:

In this ten-session seminar on Plato's *Republic* with Prof. Ioannis Evrigenis, we are privileged to be undertaking a rigorous and close reading of this canonical and influential text with a leading Greek American philosopher.

In the three sessions that have elapsed so far, *Book I*, *II* and *III* of the ten books in Plato's *Republic* have been discussed at great length, and I will delve into these in this interim report. On the first day, we understood the historical context in which the text was written and established a methodological framework for approaching the text. Prof. Evrigenis outlined the political scenario in Greece, and the position of Athens in the Peloponnesian War – that was fought between Athens and Sparta in 5th century BCE – as a result of the Persian Invasion of Greece. The Peloponnesian War became the apotheosis of ideological polarity about the most suitable forms of governance within the Greek context. This struggle for ideological legitimisation, between the democratic and oligarchic structures of social cohesion, that were characteristic to Athens and Sparta, found an articulate confrontation in the

served to transform him into a symbol of fortitude and commitment to a mythical idea of truth and the city of Athens. This, by and large, is attributed to be the reason for Plato's decision to use the figure of Socrates throughout his works. Socrates, as an interlocutor as demonstrated by Plato, is thus, not merely a literary trope but, in fact, serves to consolidate the truth value and historical legitimacy of the dialogues in Plato's work. At this point, it is necessary to point out that unlike most of Plato's work, *Republic* does not assume the form of a dialogue. While the subject matter of the work is largely dialogical, the form of the work is a first-person narrative, with the reader treated not as a mere bystander but as the central subject of the narration, which is provided through the character of Socrates.

The central theme of *Book I* is to develop a foreground for the exposition into the idea of justice. It features a number of interlocutors, including two of Plato's brothers. Glaucon and Adeimantus; Thrasymachus, a young Athenian who is excited to debate Socrates; and Cephalus, an affluent, older friend of Socrates. The use of poetic definitions in *Republic*, to define justice, during the initial attempts, is testimony to the epistemological authority practised by poets in Athens (later, to be banished by Socrates from his *Republic*). Socrates uses his special method of interlocution, called the Elenchus, to delegitimise the definitions of justice given by the poets, and reveals the inherent contradictions in them. As Cephalus, the first character to utter the word 'justice' in *Book I*, departs to perform his rituals, the reader is met with the excited figure of Thrasymachus who is described as a 'Wild Beast', which upon close reading translates to 'a wolf' (336b). Thrasymachus posits the definition of justice in the lines of the popular Greek notion of 'might makes right'. This definition is skilfully dismantled by Socrates. We notice the adroit use of simile in the way Plato designates the position of a lion to Thrasymachus (341c) as he climbs (rhetorically) to a position of power in the debate, later diminishing him to a wolf again, and finally into a snake at the beginning of *Book II*. However, by the end of *Book I*, the party is unable to arrive at a conclusive definition of what justice really is. This, Socrates attributes to his own gluttony as he has feasted indiscriminately on everything that was offered to him, diverting us at every step from a true dialectical meditation on the idea of justice. The form of public debate, which is quite common to Athenian society, is presented as a contest for power and domination. The apparent 'failure' of *Book I* provides evidentiary support for the conception that 'might does not make right'. The 'victory' of Socrates in the debate signifies the triumph of his intellectual might among the interlocutors, whereas its lack of significance in the face of real truth

and virtue is articulated by the fact that the party has been unable to define justice satisfactorily.

Dissatisfied by the 'snake'-like withdrawal of Thrasymachus from the debate, Glaucon takes it upon himself to defend the position 'might makes right' in order to unfold the unexplored aspects of this debate, and bring it to a more satisfactory form of fruition. The majority of *Book II* explores the various facets of this argument, particularly definitions of justice given by poets like Homer. Glaucon makes a sincere effort to refine the argument made by Thrasymachus in order to illustrate how it is profitable to 'appear just' as opposed to 'being just'. He narrates the tale of the Ring of Gyges which allows the wearer to wield the power of invisibility and the inevitable pursuit of power that would follow. Through this tale, Glaucon is trying to bare the reality of how humans truly live and perceive each other in society, and who is perceived as just seems to have little to do with those that act just without making it known. Glaucon's exposition is meant to lead us to accept that if a person is able to escape punishment for being unjust, it is most likely that the person in question will take up unjust means to gain power and profit and, therefore, the idea of being just is merely related to gaining validation within society. Prof. Evrigenis was able to show us why Glaucon's arguments could rarely hold true. Through examples, we understood how 'profit' gained from unjust action would, most often, be short lived. In a fundamentally unjust society, the erosion of trust would result in persistently stressful situations where no scope of cohesion or cooperation would be possible.

In order to understand justice better, conceptually, Socrates proposes the analogy of a city and asks his interlocutors to look for justice in a city rather than an individual. This is an important movement within the scheme of the debate on justice. The reason Socrates employs this analogy is quite plain: justice, being a social value, cannot be practised or illustrated in isolation. The need for a point of reference outside of itself, the need to frame justice towards something, or in relation to someone else, makes it imperative to move to a plural frame of reference as opposed to the singular one of attempting to find virtue in justice itself. Prof. Evrigenis consistently iterated the difference between an analogy and an equation, and reminded us that the analogy should not be misunderstood as an equation. The analogy serves only to relate two concepts, and it is not useful to try to balance the equation perfectly.

In *Book III*, what follows is a long exposition into the building of an ideal city from the first principle that "each one...assigned one thing, the one for which his nature fitted him, at which he has to work

throughout his life" (374c) or what we referred to in shorthand as the one man-one job principle. What we have as a result of this first 'rule', is a city with three major classes: the craftsmen, the guardians, and the auxiliaries. Much stress is given by Socrates to the kinds of education and training the guardians need to receive so as to make them friendly to friends and aggressive towards enemies.

The key learnings thus far include focus on the

'goodwill' of the interlocutors. The importance of goodwill, to allow for concessions in the scope of the dialectic becomes increasingly important in the scheme of the sections that follow the ones discussed above. However, this idea already begins to become palpable in the first three books. Secondly, the tone of approach towards the text, as an exposition into justice, within the soul and not as a treatise on establishing a political state, is made clear. - **R. J.**

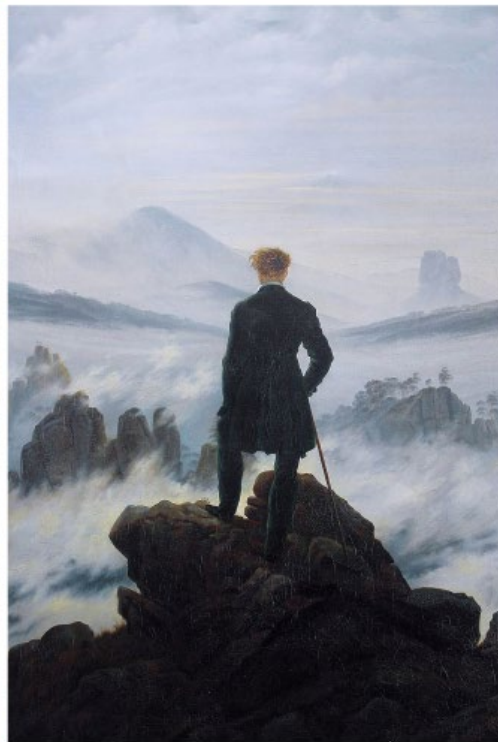
FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Seminar: The Nature of Landscape

April 9th, 16th, 23rd & 30th, 2021, 6:30 - 9:00 pm | Dr. Kajri Jain (Associate Professor of Indian Visual Culture and Contemporary Art, University of Toronto)



Yogini with a Mynah Bird, by "the Dublin Painter," Bijapur, early 17th century.



Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog by Caspar David Friedrich, 1818.

This series of four seminars on 'The Nature of Landscape' with Prof. Kajri Jain is aimed at those students interested in participating in an intensive, postgraduate, proactive classroom environment. Reading the assigned texts before each class, including looking up basic background on their authors, will be essential. Prof. Jain will introduce the materials and topics, but not lecture extensively. She will guide our discussion on the subject, helping us navigate and interrogate new ideas and images together.

What is a 'landscape'? To address this question, as this seminar does, is to think about how this category emerged as part of European ideas about something called 'nature' and its relationship to human subjectivity. Here, landscape became a way of seeing as a way of knowing: in particular as a way of understanding land as property and as a resource, as well as a reflection of human emotions and a way of engaging questions of existence. In order to 'provincialise' these ways of seeing/understanding – that is, to identify how they emerged within a very particular set of historical, geographical, cultural, political, and economic contexts that nonetheless came to claim universality – we will compare Western landscape painting traditions with visual forms from other traditions that might be seen as akin to landscapes. These include South and East Asian traditions, as well as indigenous art from India, North America, and Australia; seminar participants are encouraged to bring their own specific interests to the table. Understanding the genealogies of 'landscape' through scholarship in art history, anthropology, history, and geography will equip us for a more globally oriented and critical approach to those strands of modern and contemporary art concerned with the environment and our existence in the geological age recently dubbed the Anthropocene.

Announcements

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

July 2021 – April 2022 | Typically Saturdays, 2:00 – 6:00 pm IST | ONLINE



Introduced in 1999, Jnanapravaha Mumbai's academic, yearlong 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 5,000 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.

*Panel with deities, outer wall,
Hoysaleswara Temple, 12th century CE,
Halebidu, Karnataka
Photo credit: Arvind Sethi*

For admission, you are required to submit:

A digital copy each of your last degree certificate, CV, short bio (100 words) and passport size photograph.

Fee structure:

Diploma (subject to writing and attendance) – Rs. 50,000 | Certificate (subject to attendance) – Rs. 40,000

Registration: www.jp-india.org

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN SOUTHASIAN PAINTING

ARTS OF THE BOOK IN SOUTH ASIA

August 2021 – November 2021 | Typically Wednesdays, 6:15 – 8:30 pm IST | ONLINE



Krishna returns to Dwarka with Jambavati. Folio from a dispersed series of the Bhagavata Purana
Nepal ca.1800. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994. 1994-148-614

This course covers Southasian arts of the book from the 12th through the 19th centuries, focussing on illustrated histories, mythological stories, religious texts, and poetic works. Courtly as well as religious contexts of book-making will be considered; speakers will explore the different aspects of book patronage and production, including the nature of workshops and libraries, the formation of visual idioms, the aesthetics of the painted page, the relationship between text and image, the roles of originality and imitation in artistic practice, and the circulation of artists, materials, and ideas across the Subcontinent and beyond. A key goal is to foster an understanding of the role of illustrated manuscripts and illuminated books in the early modern world. This course will provide a unique opportunity to learn about the arts of the book from some of the leading scholars in the field who are rarely encountered in one place.

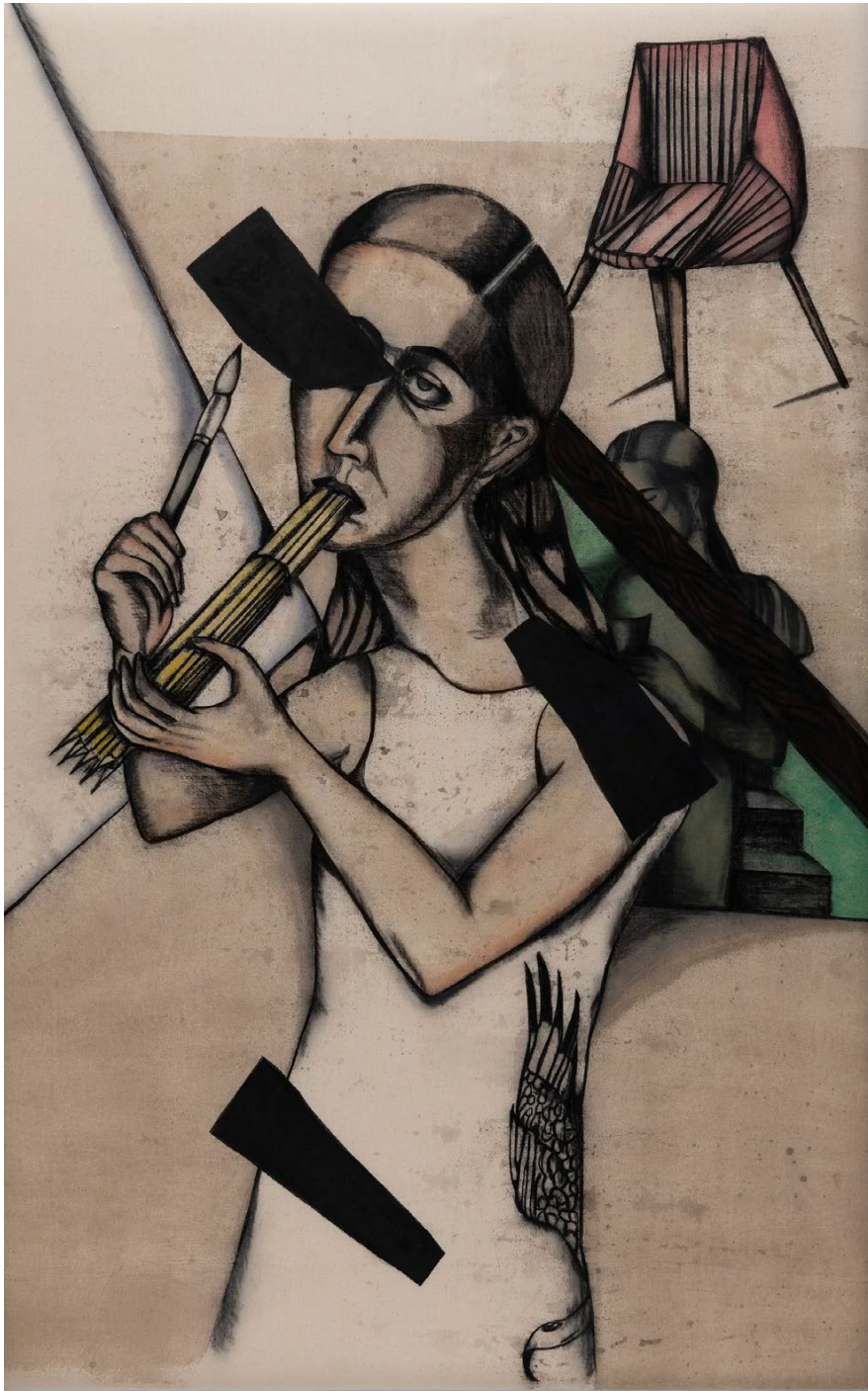
Faculty Scholars:

Caroline Widmer
Daniel Ehnbohm
Jinah Kim
Kavita Singh
Krista Gulbransen
Laura Weinstein
Marika Sardar
Molly Aitken
Navina Haidar
Neeraja Poddar
Robert del Bonta
Yael Rice

Fee structure: – Rs. 15,000 | Students Discount (subject to verification) – Rs. 10,000

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN AESTHETICS, CRITICISM & THEORY

August 2021 – November 2021 | Typically Tuesdays & Thursdays, 6:30 – 8:30 pm IST | ONLINE



Anju Dodiya. *Studio (with Phoenix)*, 2019
Watercolour and charcoal on unbleached cotton fabric stretched on padded board. 64 x 40 x 1 in
Photo Courtesy: Chemould Prescott Art Gallery

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory (ACT) is an intensive four-month online programme of in-depth seminars providing students with a rigorous introduction to art history, criticism, aesthetics, critical theory, and a breadth of artistic praxis.

The programme commences with a foundational grounding in aesthetics in Western philosophy with

careful attention to Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Foucault and the Frankfurt School. It then analyses the historiographies of Art History and Criticism through a transnational perspective, before critically looking at the colonial and postcolonial worlds, and the modern histories of South Asia. The final month focusses on contemporary debates around architecture, anti-caste struggles and resistance in art, as well as the philosophies of photography, new media and the sonic through approaches marrying theory and practice.

Students are exposed to a range of historical and contemporary creative practices through sustained engagement with scholars and practitioners who consciously move between disciplines, institutions, curating and diverse forms of making and exhibiting. ACT brings together the very best Indian and international faculty; those experienced in pedagogy that tacks between lecture, discussion, seeing and close reading.

Learning how to read and engage critically is an essential part of ACT. Scholars carefully select texts, films, exhibitions and artists for each session, and much of this material is available to the students on our online learning management-portal, JPM Think. Students are expected to come to class well-prepared.

For admission, you are required to submit:

A digital copy each of your last degree certificate, CV, short bio (100 words) and passport size photograph.

Fee structure:

Certificate (subject to attendance) – Rs. 20,000

Registration: www.jp-india.org

Jnanapravaha Mumbai is deeply indebted to the following for their support:

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We know we have made a difference. Our endeavour to encourage and facilitate pedagogy meaningfully continues with the firm belief that the humanities are indispensable to the well-being of the community and the individual.

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