![Jnanapravaha logo]

JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI
QUARTERLY

JANUARY - MARCH 2022

CONTENTS

Director's Note

We end the last quarter of 2021 with both hurrahs and dismay. Hurrah as two of our 'first time ever' programmes ended on a high note. Both participants and scholars voted on the success of the semester-long course, 'Arts of the Book in South Asia', which traversed a wide arc from early Buddhist palm leaf manuscripts to 19th-century Company school painting, highlighting current research and developments. 'Panoptical Views on Politics', with its last session on Islamism (after Liberalism, Secularism and Nationalism) had all attendees asking for more. Suggestions of possible 'isms' that can be further addressed have been flowing in – all very heartening! Another hurrah for the successful completion of our noteworthy and challenging ACT (*Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory*) course, a detailed report of which is carried in the inner pages. We will be continuing to address the rubrics of *Southasian Painting* and *Criticism & Theory* in the next quarter through courses on Modernism, Eros in Mughal Art and Urban Imaginaries, while also welcoming our internationally renowned scholars who will take us through the rich and variegated world of the Mamluks.

A big hurrah for a dear friend and supporter of Jnanapravaha Mumbai (JPM) – the legendary Pepita Seth – for winning (along with two others) the coveted and prestigious centenary Burton medal awarded by the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. To quote the official announcement, "Over the past fifty years, Pepita Seth has devoted her life to the exploration of the closed worlds of the Guruvayur Temple and Theyyam Rituals in Kerala. Her remarkable dedication and stamina in extraordinarily demanding circumstances, whether living with the Theyyam community or photographing rituals of the Theyyam and of the Guruvayur Temple alone would fulfil the criteria for receiving the Burton Medal. Her achievement is all the more remarkable since as a woman she has penetrated these patriarchal and secret worlds. In addition, however, she has meticulously recorded these hidden universes, and through her accessible writing and brilliant photography, opened them to a broader public – in India as well as internationally. She has no academic position and manages on a minimal income from various sources." We at JPM have been privileged to have Pepita amidst us, sharing these hidden universes.

Amidst all these accolades, the news of Aveek Sen's unexpected passing came as a deep and painful shock to all who had the privilege of knowing him. For many, the first encounter with Aveek came through his deeply honest, open and sharp writing on photography, art, life, and on the artist's world. To read him was to witness windows and doors being prod open and passages carved out through the dense, often impenetrable terrains between the artist, the work of art, the viewer and human experience itself. As a teacher, he had the uncommon ability of critically yet empathetically engaging with diverse groups of participants, weaving in their own experiences to reveal what is fundamental about art and therefore life. His friendship was and continues to be intensely and fiercely cherished, enveloped in his gleefully addictive humour, in conversations on currents both visible and invisible, and even in its deep and meaningful silences.

In October, a time which now feels both too close and immensely far away, Aveek taught two sessions on the Sublime for students of the *Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory* course at Jnanapravaha. Over tenuous internet connections, with monsoon rains battering the country, we listened to Wagner's operas and dwelled on the terrifying enormity of being, as Aveek led us through the roots of Theory, or *theoria*, which is to both witness and contemplate, its interchangeability being crucial to what makes all practice possible. Even as it remains difficult to come to terms with his passing, we return to his work with eagerness, to seek both solace and joy.

Wishing you Health, Happiness, Peace and Love in the New Year.

With my warmest wishes,

Rashmi Poddar PhD.
Director

AESTHETICS

A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacarya 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

Since the IA course began in mid-July this year, students have had a taste of classical Indian aesthetics, exploring art and sculpture through the lenses of form, content and meaning in addition to Sanskrit poetics and *Rasa* theory. After an introduction to Buddhist aesthetics, IA diploma students along with a few certificate students attended two Friday evening sessions on the basics of academic writing. Dr. Jaya Kanoria took students through a technically oriented discussion of the requirements for academic writing in the first session, followed by an interactive second evening during which students presented their analysis of sections of an academic text. The sessions were useful not only as a guide on how to write academic papers but also on how to read such texts thoroughly and analytically. Students submitted their first essays for the diploma at the end of November after a rigorous process of carefully guided refining and rewriting.

The repetitive and static aesthetic of Jain *tirthankara* icons is challenging to decode, as such figures present unusual iconography in the context of the Indian subcontinent where narrative sculpture is most common. Dr. Viraj Shah not only offered a reading of *tirthankara*

iconography through *vira rasa* and *shanta rasa*, but also gave the necessary backdrop of Jain philosophy, art, texts and lesser-known Jain cave architecture, the latter being the subject of her primary research. The scholar's work on Jain caves of the Western Deccan was a fitting launchpad for the exploration of the myths and legends of the Jain *tirthankaras*. Jainism, like most other religio-philosophical systems in the subcontinent, came to include *tantric* elements roughly between the 5th and 13th centuries CE. Additionally, it drew in myths and stories where popular heroes such as Balarama and Krishna played a role, and the worship of folk deities to appeal to the laity and to attract new adherents. The laity could then look upon *jinas* as the supreme exemplars of detachment and tranquility but turn to folk deities to fulfil worldly and material desires.

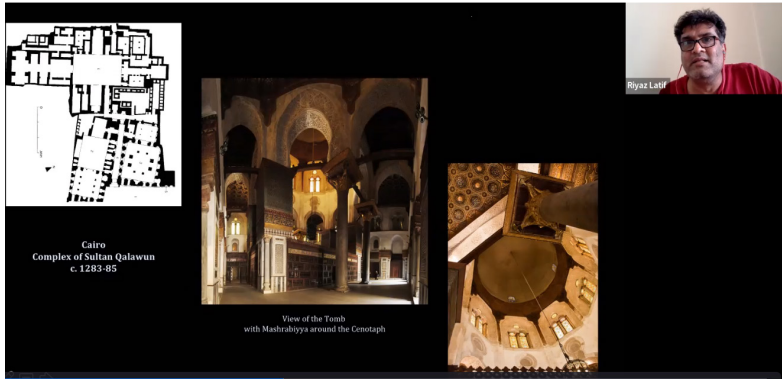Kalyanasundara, Ellora 9th CE
or sometimes called Vaivahik murti
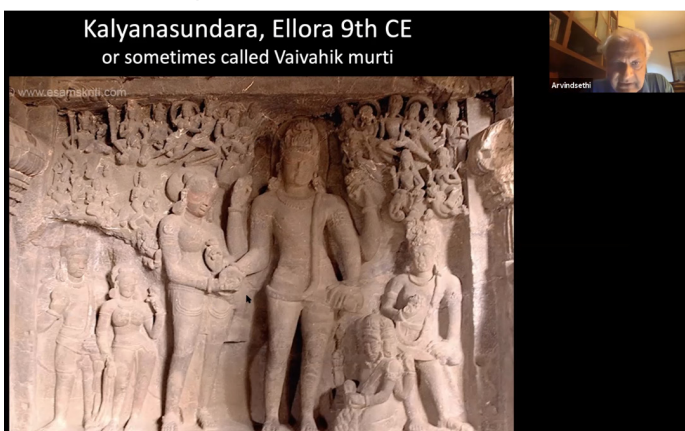
The section of the course on iconography began with Arvind Sethi's detailed and painstaking exploration of Brahmanical iconography, which offered clues on how to understand the various figural forms found in temple complexes around the subcontinent. His sessions included major deities such as Shiva and Vishnu but did not neglect other widespread depictions such as Surya, Ganapati, the *ashtadikpalas* and the *navagrahas*. The sessions organically drew in stories, myths and legends which gave rise to iconographic details. These richly illustrated sessions also familiarised students with the present location of some of these important icons. Dr. Rashmi Poddar's session on Devi, the divine feminine, explored the contradictory yet complementary elements by which she is characterised. Devi, the mother who protects, is also presented as the dangerous and war-like destroyer of evil: her images convey *vatsalya rasa*, associated with motherliness, and *raudra rasa* in her fierce manifestations such as Durga and Kali. Worshipped by warriors and by *tantrikas*, both of whom tapped into her *raudra* persona, Devi is associated with blood sacrifice. In *Shakta* theology, she is independent and unitary, unattached to any male god, the locus of supreme power and a symbol

of ultimate reality. This theology stresses her potent might by seeing her as the kinetic principle or *shakti*, which is the animating force of several male gods, including Shiva.

Brahmanical temples are not seen simply as hallowed space but also represent sacred time. This reflects in their architecture. Temples were also carved in caves. A focussed study of the great cave at Elephanta, a well-known example, was presented by Dr. Alka Hingorani. This narrowing of the usually broad and sweeping arc of the course is aimed at showing students how selective critical analysis can be useful and illuminating. Dr. Hingorani dwelt on the sculpture found in this exceptional Shaiva cave temple in tandem with its architecture, revealing hidden and poetic meanings. The interaction with students at the end of the lecture was wide-ranging, dwelling on architecture, design and art history. Dr. Pushkar Sohoni continued the exploration of the Brahmanical temple through a masterful overview of its development and morphology, explaining that the design and carving of early cave temples reveals the existence of wooden precursors that are now lost. The scholar's comprehensive survey showed the broad extent and variety of temples in the subcontinent. He also showed how the form of the hut is ingrained in temple architecture, both in macro and micro form, as it splits and multiplies. Of special note was the presentation of his primary research on Maratha temples, a fairly recent typology with strong links to political power, which are often unsatisfactory blends of various architectural and ornamental styles. Many such temples are still active.

Kamalika Bose undertook a detailed study of the many types of hybrid temples in Bengal. These are highly unusual in their use of terracotta and brick, and especially in their designs which imitate the varied styles of thatched huts in the region. The unavailability of stone suitable for temple-building in Bengal led to this unique development. Similar acculturation due to socio-political and economic conditions was responsible for the emergence of particular styles in the Jain temples of Bengal and Ahmedabad in the 18th century. The scholar's primary research into the context of these temples shows how the contemporary political situation in these regions determined the architecture, location, and manner of worship in these temples.

Dr. Poddar's session on *tantra* elucidated the anti-ascetic, anti-speculative, and heretical nature of

Cairo
Complex of Sultan Qalawun
c. 1283-85

View of the Tomb
with Mashrabiyya around the Cenotaph

such systems that use radical experiential methods. The present-day biases regarding *tantric* systems stem from a lack of knowledge about their goals. The basis of this practice is the desire to expand the practitioner's consciousness by using forbidden and esoteric means. One such instance can be seen in the belief that *panchamakara*, that is the body-affirming excitants *mada* (alcohol), *mansa* (meat), *mina* (fish), *mithuna* (sex) and *mudra* (parched grain), abjured by mainstream practice, can heighten the senses and bring about the highest bliss when used under the guidance of an adept or *guru*. *Tantrikas* do not believe in ascetic practices aimed at improving the afterlife but strive to achieve the highest bliss while still present in the body.

Dr. Riyaz Latif introduced students to Islamic aesthetics through funerary architecture in the subcontinent. Commencing with premodern Islamic architecture, he explored the extensive building of tombs during the Sultanate period, along with Mughal forms. He also delved into regional architectural funerary expressions, ending his extensively illustrated sessions with an analysis of Dawoodi Bohra *rauzas*. The Indian Aesthetics course has traversed an expansive terrain in the past three months and is poised to foray into the painting of the subcontinent in January. *– J.K.*

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Murals and the Written Word in Early Modern Southeast India

February 04th & 11th, 2022, 7:00 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Anna Lise Seastrand (Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota, USA)

Purushottama, Sri Vaikuntham, Tamil Nadu

Murals produced in southeastern India after the 16th century are distinguished by the profusion of text, both enframing the painted images and intruding into the space of imagistic representation. Never before had writing played such an important and conspicuous role in murals that adorn both palaces and temples. And not only does text appear in painting, but images of writing, reading, recitation, teaching, manuscripts and even books proliferate.

This pair of talks explores the question of why text and writing became inextricably joined to painting in the 16th through 18th centuries in the Tamil region. This exploration leads us to ask not only about writerly endeavors, such as the production of texts, and practices of reading that dominated the period. We also explore how familiarity with the written word influences the major genres of graphic representation: portraiture, narrative, and topographic images.

Day 1: Writing the Self in Nayaka-period paintings
Day 2: Picturing Place, Composing a Landscape

Islamic Aesthetics
FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Mamluk Cairo: An Architectural Panorama

January 28th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Professor (emerita), SOAS, University of London)

The Mamluk rulers of Egypt and Syria (1250-1517) created in their capital Cairo a remarkable architecture that was stylistically unparalleled elsewhere in the sultanate. This talk will present highlights of this architecture while discussing its urban context, commemorative function and stylistic evolution.

David Roberts 1840

Building the Sultanate: Mamluk Architecture in Bilad al-Sham

February 03rd, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Ellen Kenney (Associate Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, Director of Graduate Studies, Unit Head, Islamic Art and Architecture Program Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations (ARIC), The American University, Cairo)

Jerusalem, Andrew Shiva (Wikipedia)

More details will be made available on our website shortly.

Ports and Shores in An Age of Sultanates: Tracing the Structures of Western Indian Ocean Trade, 1250–1500.

February 10th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Roxani Eleni Margariti (Associate Professor, Department of Middle Eastern and Southasian Studies, Ancient Mediterranean Studies Program DGS, Islamic Civilizations Studies PhD Program, Emory University)
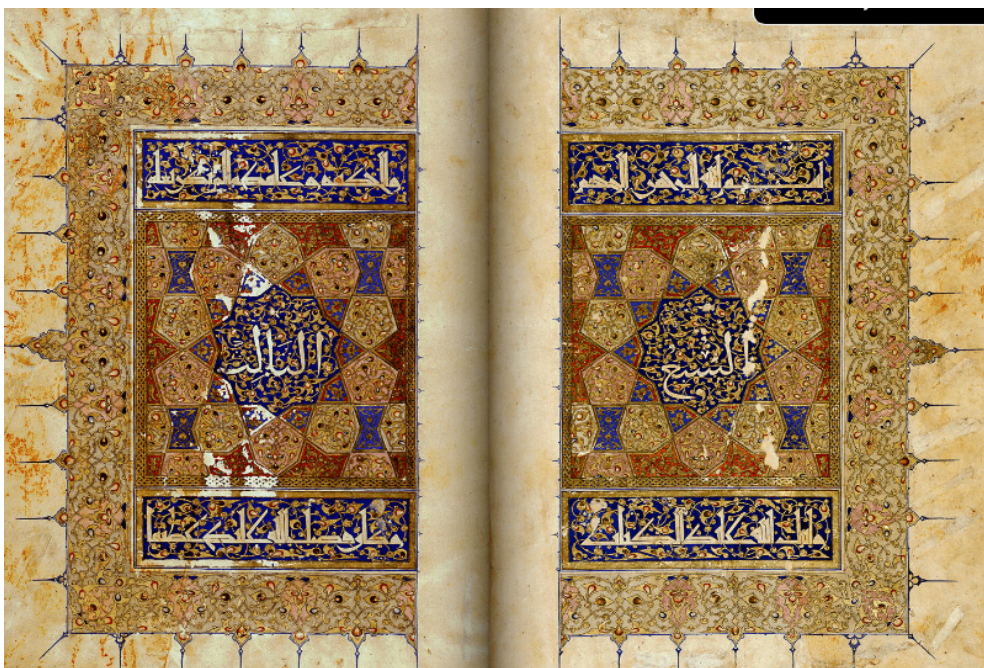

Aden as portrayed in Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, Civitates Orbis Terrarum, vol. 1 (1572/1612

More details will be made available on our website shortly.

Splendour and Might: The World of Mamluk Manuscripts

February 17th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Noha Abou-Khatwa (Adjunct Assistant Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture, The American University, Cairo)

This talk will be an exciting journey in the world of the written book of the Mamluks from the late 13th to the early 16th centuries. Such magnificent manuscripts will be surveyed as a product of a vibrant intellectual life of their era. From Quran manuscripts, *hadith* encyclopedias, and poetry to veterinary manuals, the journey will be a comprehensive one highlighting the immense value of this written culture and its cosmopolitanism.

British Library Add. MS 59874 - Baybars al-Jashnakir Q MS

Judging a Book by its Cover: An Introduction to the Ornament and Techniques used to Decorate Mamluk Bindings

February 24th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Alison Ohta (Director of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland)

This paper traces the development of bookbinding techniques and decoration throughout the Mamluk period 650-922/1250-1516. It examines bindings that can be dateable by the colophon of the manuscripts, *waqf* inscriptions or dedications to a patron's library they contain.

From this, a picture emerges of a vibrant and dynamic binding tradition that drew on a variety of sources for its inspiration. The bindings of the 14th and early 15th centuries are decorated with geometrical patterns of measured complexity, which continue to be developed until the end of the Mamluk period and are reflected in architectural decoration and other media. In the late 15th century, changes in both ornament and technique begin to occur, which are incorporated into the Mamluk binders' repertoire reflecting developments that are noted on Persian bindings of the early 15th century. It was these designs along with pasteboard covers and gold tooling that the Italian binders of the Renaissance adopted and adapted, producing smaller and lighter books in leather bindings with gold-tooled decoration.

Doublure,The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, Ms.508

Mamluk Metalwork: Styles and Statements

March 03rd, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Doris Behrens-Abouseif (Professor (emerita), SOAS, University of London)

Metalwork from the Mamluk period (1250-1517) belong to the highlights of Islamic art. The lecture will show the splendor of princely silver-inlaid brass objects and discuss the ceremonial and political significance of their imagery and inscriptions. It will also present objects of more common use and discuss the significance of their inscriptions. The presentation will also follow the evolution of this art during this period.

Image detail of basin, V&A Museum

Glazed Tiles under the Mamluks, their Origins and Successors

March 10th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Mr. Arthur Millner (Consultant in Islamic, Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian Art, London)
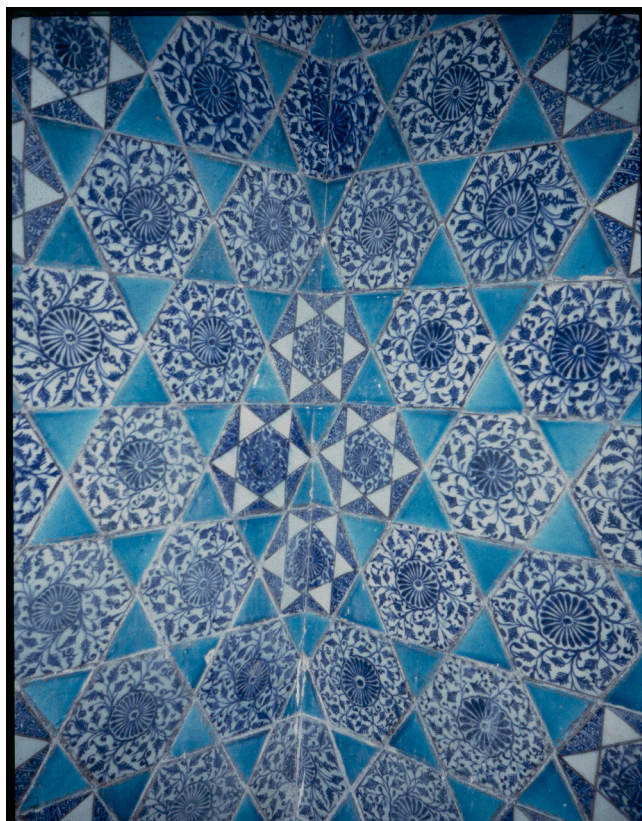
The wide variety of ceramics produced in Egypt and Syria under the Mamluk rulers (1250-1517) at first mostly consisted of vessels, but the beginning of the 15th century saw a sudden profusion of glazed tiles, mostly in a distinctive blue and white palette. In this lecture, we will consider their origins, designs and context, as well as their kinship with tiles produced in Ottoman Europe, Iran and even in the Indian subcontinent.

Photo Courtesy: Arthur Millner

Enamelled and Gilded Glass from Syria and Egypt

March 17th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Melanie Gibson (Editor of the Gingko Art Series and formerly Head of Art History at New College of the Humanities, London.)

The application of coloured glass enamels to blown glass objects was a highly-skilled and lengthy process perfected during the 13th and 14th centuries in Egypt and Syria. The highly-decorated pieces were in great demand by the Mamluk elite: enamelled and gilded objects, many of them mosque lamps, were commissioned by those attached to the court, while bottles and beakers were brought back to Europe and kept in church treasuries and the private collections of the aristocracy.

This enamelled and gilded glass beaker decorated with curling tendrils and leaves is known as the 'Luck of Edenhall', a name that reflects its history after it had reached England in the 15th century, when a finely decorated leather case was made to contain it. Syria, c. 1250-1300. London, Victoria & Albert Museum, C.1-1959.

Southasian Painting

PAST PROGRAMMES

Portraits of the Rajas of Bundi: A Study in Mughal-Rajput Cultural Exchange

September 22nd, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Krista Gulbransen (Associate Professor in the Art History Department at The Graduate Center, CUNY and the Art Department at CUNY's City College of New York)

Dr. Krista Gulbransen explored the origins and social functions of Mughal portraiture before elaborating on its connections to 16th- and 17th-century portraits of the Rajas of Bundi. She narrowly defined portraits as those resembling the subject physically, differentiating them from generic 'portraits' that did not capture individual features or characteristics such as age or personality. Mughal portraits first appeared in the reign of Akbar, usually representing male political, religious, and cultural figures in full-length depictions, indicating body-size and stature. These visual historical documents presented the face in profile or three-quarter profile. In contrast, a painting of a woman holding Jehangir's portrait (identified as Nur Jahan) is stiff and idealised rather than realistic.

The Akbari period shows formative stylistic experimentation and variety in portraiture which solidified into highly refined, delicately detailed, and static portraits in Shah Jahan's reign. Small, with a slight variation in size, Mughal portraits were meant to be part of albums, though no bound albums from Akbar's reign are extant, as paintings were distributed and rebound, and often ensconced within later borders. While Mughal *durbar* scenes contain portraits of many courtiers, the scholar focussed on single-figure portraits, especially of *mansabdars* or officials in Akbar's hierarchical bureaucracy, many of whom were Rajputs. The portraits enabled Akbar to recognise the subject, also functioning as tools of governance through *farasa* (Arabic: insight), an Islamic physiognomic practice that discerned both personality and loyalty. Such Mughal portraits embodied the subject, echoing the neo-Platonic notion that inner spirit was reflected in external appearance.

Contrary to Coomaraswamy's view that portraiture was an idiom antithetical to Rajput style, examples abound. Three almost identical portraits of Suraj Singh of Marwar were probably created using the technique of pouncing. The first portrait, taken from life to accurately represent the inner and outer truth of the subject, was used to create future depictions to retain this quality. A new kind of portrait called a *shast* was worn as a pendant or turban-ornament by Akbar's high-ranking officials who received it as a sign of discipleship in the theological-philosophical system of *din-i-ilahi* formulated by selecting common

Suraj Singh of Marwar,
circa 1590, Bishandas,
Metropolitan Museum of Art (55.121.10.7)

Raisal Darbari,
from the Salim Album, circa 1600,
Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (In. 44.2)

principles from multiple religions. Jehangir continued the gifting of *shasts*, important markers of status and of a connection with the emperor, to favoured personages. Painted portraits and *shasts* frequently use the *jharokha* window setting in which Akbar and Jehangir gave *darshan* to their subjects. The hand resting on a rug is common to these images which conveyed royal authority. Jehangir did not permit such portraits to all and sundry, but the type was reproduced in later portraits of Bundi rulers.

The rulers of Jodhpur, Bikaner, Amber and Bundi allied with the Mughals and were *mansabdars*, often stationed at the Mughal court and away from their own painting workshops whose output reveals complex cultural interactions and experimentation with new aesthetics, rather than mindless copying. The Chunar *Ragamala* manuscript of 1591 displays this cultural exchange. Painted by the Mughal-trained artists Shaykh Hasan, Shaykh Ali and Shaykh Hatim, for the rulers of Bundi at Chunar, it has stylistic links to Mughal painting and compositional links to later Bundi paintings that returned to a more abstract, linear, harder style using less shading, as artists continued to experiment. The stiff *jama* of later portraits and characteristic feet show the move towards abstraction. Larger heads and eyes indicate an idealised, generalised style to accommodate Rajput taste. Rajput styles were also influencing Mughal painting. The role of the artist, and not just the patron, seems important in this cultural exchange. A portrait of Rao Surjan Singh of Bundi in Mughal style with a facial-type close to that of

example. Painters moved from the Mughal court to Rajput workshops when the Mughal atelier shrank significantly late in Akbar's reign.

Dr. Krista Gulbransen speaks during ' Portraits of the Rajas of Bundi: A Study in Mughal-Rajput Cultural Exchange'

The impact of gifts and collecting, documented in paintings and inscriptions, cannot be underestimated as they made these paintings accessible to different artists. Along with treaties and promises, rulers forged alliances by gifting socially valuable portraits. Connoisseurship of paintings can reveal multiple owners, indicated by the impression of more than one stamp that show that these highly portable paintings were exchanged between courts, including Rajput ones. Inventory numbers, and later, not always accurate inscriptions in Devanagari, rather than Persian, might show that a Mughal painting was collected elsewhere. Sometimes Mughal portraits were incorporated in Rajput paintings, as is seen in a page which includes earlier portraits of Prince Daniyal and his sons, inserted in *jharokhas*. The existence of posthumous portraits, along with these other factors, complicates the dating and interpretation of portraits and related evidence.

As a mode of artistic 'influence', the Mughal painting style was apparently not an imposition but the instigator of curiosity, awareness, and a desire for cosmopolitanism and status for some Rajputs. Portraits of Surjan Singh, Bhoj Singh and Chhatrasal of Bundi display a Mughal-inspired vertical orientation, formal representation, and de rigueur celadon background, but Rajput

Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur, circa 1660-1665, Cleveland Museum of Art (1981.5)

Kunwar Suraj Singh of Bikaner, circa 1611-1613, Cleveland Museum of Art (2018.188)

Raja Bhao Singh of Amber, circa 1600-1620, British Library (Johnson Album 24, no. 11)

Rao Surjan Singh of Bundi, circa 1590, Kanoria Collection (GKK 31)

the contemporary Chunar *Ragamala* shows how this aesthetic travelled to Rajasthan through the movement of artists who may have painted both. A Mughal portrait of Chhatrasal shows a darker, perhaps realistic complexion compared to a Bundi

elements show that political and social relationships between these elites cannot be generalised. The formulation of a single 'Bundi style' has arguably been an interpretive process by scholars rather than inherent in the paintings themselves.*– J.K.*

Communities of Practice: The Mughal Manuscript Workshop under Akbar

September 29th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Yael Rice (Assistant Professor of Art History and Asian Languages and Civilizations at Amherst College, Massachusetts)

Page from the Shah Tahmasp *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), Tabriz (Iran), c. 1525, 55.9 x 40.6 cm (Met Museum, NYC)

Illustration from the *Hamzanama*, c. 1570, 68.5 x 52 cm (MFA, Boston)

Prof. Yael Rice examined the formation of the Mughal manuscript painting idiom through a sample of surviving paintings whose inscriptions reveal intensive collaboration between Akbari artists. A comparison between a painted folio of the early *Hamzanama* manuscript (1562-5) and one from the later, now fragmentary *Akbarnama* (1590-5) at the Victoria and Albert Museum shows a tremendous shift in style. The latter has denser illustrations, fleshier mass-bearing main figures, and atmospheric perspective, though both were painted during Akbar's reign. Some scholars consider the personality of the patron, the emperor Akbar, to be of primary importance in the formulation of the Mughal idiom, a view prompted by the official account of Akbar's reign in Abu'l Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* (completed 1596-7). However, the rhetorical, ideological, and political bent of the text, along with its hagiographical view of Akbar's salutary influence in multiple spheres undercuts this position considerably. Secondly, the Mughal style of painting is said to have stemmed from the impetus of a small group of master artists, seventeen of whom the *Ain-i-Akbari* lists as forerunners, beginning with those that had Iranian roots. Scholars such as Coomaraswamy and Percy Brown essentialised geographical locations and

considered place to be the basis of style. Prof. Rice is sceptical of this view and believes that the most likely catalyst of this distinctive style was a holistic workshop endeavour which involved over a hundred painters and brought about a synthesis of three painting styles: Iranian, Southasian and European.

Such a synthesis of different cultural traditions in early Mughal manuscripts is unsurprising since the Iranian artists Mir Sayyid Ali and Abd Al Samad were involved in the creation of the *Hamzanama* at this time (though they were not active in the atelier after the 1570s) along with many local artists who came from Southasian painting traditions. Additionally, European prints gifted to Akbar by Jesuit missionaries were available to the artists of his atelier. Even prior to this, illustrated stories of the life of Jesus were collected at the Mughal court. The speaker demonstrated this synthesis of styles through comparisons of Akbari paintings with paintings from the three traditions: many correspondences are seen between a page of the 1525 *Shahnama* painted for Shah Tahmasp in Tabriz and a *Hamzanama* folio (1570), such as vertical orientation, the use of pinks, lavenders and blues, similar rock formations, the three-quarter profile

of important figures, and the use of a bird's-eye perspective. However, the *Hamzanama's* larger size and volumetric presentation of the figure of Iskandar are different from the flat, clothed figures in the smaller *Shahnama* page. In comparison with a page of the Isarda *Bhagavata Purana* (1560-5) which has a horizontal orientation, smaller size, and lacks the recession and deep background of the *Hamzanama* painting, there are also some similarities. The former presents faces in profile, as also seen in the minor figures in the latter. Both render trees in dark green and yellow, depict swirling water with similar strokes, and flag important figures with the colour red. Bilateral symmetry and the use of an upper and lower register can be seen in another *Hamzanama* painting, aligning it with these characteristics in a page from the Mandu *Chandayana* (1525-40). European prints prompted the Mughal interest in composition and their fascination for the volumetric rendering of human and animal forms through shading and modelling.

Dr. Yael Rice speaks during 'Communities of Practice: The Mughal Manuscript Workshop under Akbar'

A majority of the seventeen artists listed as forerunners by Abu'l Fazl were very active in Akbar's workshop, but emphasis is laid on three artists with Iranian and Central Asian origins. The other artists might have been included due to their ability to work collaboratively, as this played a central role in the productivity of Akbar's well-organised and stringently run workshop. Inscriptions in the lower margins of paintings, which record the roles of designer, colourist and portraitist of each, indicate that collaboration was the norm. In some of the heavily illustrated examples such as the *Tarikh-e Khandan-e Timuriyah* (1584-6), the *Razmnama* (1584-6), and the Mughal *Ramayana* (completed 1589), there are records of sixty painters working on a single manuscript. The double pages of the *Akbarnama* reveal that the side bearing Akbar's image is invariably more finely finished to convey his unique capacity to judge and to rule. A workshop

directive must have budgeted greater resources and time for these pages. There is visual evidence that a handful of designers returned to these folios after the colourist completed his work, to reinsert erased outlines, make corrections to the page, and adjust Akbar's portrait, rendering it consistent across the manuscript. The fine quality of the painted folio was dependent on these factors and not on the artist executing it. The hands of different artists cannot be distinguished in Akbari manuscripts.

Applying a computational lens to these manuscript projects, Prof. Rice used graphs of the involvement of artists in creating paintings for a single manuscript to map the structure of artist teams and the methods of collaboration. Her hypotheses were that teams of artists would have worked closely together, would have remained stable across different manuscript projects and been formed based on familial ties. All were proved wrong. The graphs showed that a small number of artists who were forerunners were extremely active and collaborated with many other artists who were minimally involved, sometimes only once in an entire manuscript. A tiny manuscript with a small number of illustrations such as the *Khamsa* of Nizami (1585) shows a similar involvement of a formidable team of artists, leading the scholar to conclude that large teams were probably involved for the sake of expediency.

The speaker coined the term 'betweenness centrality' for nodes in the graphs representing artists who collaborated with many others and functioned as bridges connecting other artists. Overall, this computational study showed that collaborations were not consistent across projects. Rather, the workshop seems to have relied on mixing to become a more effective training ground, relying on 'the strength of weak ties' to transfer techniques more broadly across networks of artists, resulting in a synthesis of knowledge, styles, practices and making. There was clearly a mixing of hands under Akbar's unique patronage, showing that the forerunners were not only excellent artists but project managers and master pedagogues who also learnt from others in the workshop. An investment in cosmopolitanism seems to have been a driving force in Akbar's atelier, but there appears no doubt regarding the aleatory nature of the Mughal painting idiom which was the product of crosspollinating collaborative practices. *– J.K.*

Books that Bind: The Persianate Album in South Asia

October 06th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Yael Rice (Assistant Professor of Art History and Asian Languages and Civilizations at Amherst College, Massachusetts)

Prof. Yael Rice dwelt on several intriguing aspects of the Mughal *muraqqa*, a stitched book that originated in Persia, examples of which were also made in the Deccan. The term *muraqqa* (Arabic: patched, mended) reveals a characterisation very different from the term 'album' (Latin: white) that indicates a blank slate awaiting inscription. Rather, a *muraqqa* is made by stitching together pre-existing material from a variety of sources. An examination of extant material reveals an explosion of album-making in South Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries. This widespread production is characterised by inscriptions that were rewritten and recopied, and images that were modified, repainted and re-collaged, providing evidence of multiple episodes of reuse and remaking.

Late 18th-century album of paintings and calligraphies
Page: approx. 29 x 20 cm
Private collection

Mid- to late-17th-c., Mughal court

Late 18th-c., Murshidabad

It is unusual to find intact *muraqqas* in South Asia, but an extant example from Murshidabad assembled in the late 18th century is a collection of paintings and calligraphies from diverse sources. This *muraqqa* is a framing device which levels paintings separated by a century and includes a mid-to-late 17th-century Mughal court painting. Mughal *muraqqas* were usually constructed from bifolios of thick paper stacked on top of each other, rather than sandwiched, and can be taken apart with ease. These *muraqqas* are sizeable, highly selective, and globally oriented collections of paintings, drawings, calligraphies and European prints which show a preference for Persianate illustrations and calligraphy in Turkic languages.

One of the earliest Mughal *muraqqas*, the dispersed 'Salim Album' (1600-5) made for the Mughal emperor Jehangir may have contained portraits of court grandees made for Akbar. The extant leaves mainly comprise of illustrations and offer no evidence of being bound in the past. A leaf in Washington D.C. depicts a centrally positioned, aged courtier in a classic pose, leaning on a cane with crossed hands. This work is not presented as a portrait but contextualised in a metaphorical poetic framework by two lines of Persian verse that refer to "that old wisdom spinner", though the album also contained portraits which are not framed by poetry. A Nath *yogi* is presented through a courtly frame, juxtaposed with a verse that repeatedly refers to the connection between medicants and princes. Individual faces are distinguished in these renderings, but figures are typologised. A leaf depicting the figure of a woman with a fan reveals the function of *muraqqas*, which wove in works from other cultures, other times and made by other hands. A leaf from the 'Salim Album' in the Malek Library at Tehran, later trimmed and mounted on a new paper support, is inscribed with the name of the artist. This *muraqqa* is therefore not just a locus for illustrations and portraits but is also interested in particular artists. European models are visible in some paintings in the album.

Pages of the dispersed *Gulshan Album* assembled 1599-1618 (begun when Prince Salim – later Jehangir – was in rebellion against his father Akbar and presided over a counter-court at Allahabad) are in the Gulistan Palace Library, Tehran as well as the Staatsbibliothek Museum, Berlin. The mode of the *muraqqa's* dispersal is speculatively assigned to looting by Nadir Shah in the 18th century. In Tehran, the album was repaginated, and additions were made, illustrative of the long, 'other' lives of such *muraqqas*. The range of material in the *Gulshan Album* stretches from mounted prints of European engravings and Mughal paintings, to works from the Safavid and Uzbek traditions, including inscriptions and calligraphic specimens, all with decoration in the margins. These margins are equally diverse, variously depicting standard tropes found in Persian manuscripts, European figures as well as figures from the Mughal artists' imagination. The *muraqqa* is organised so that illustrations face a similar page, as do calligraphies. European engravings appear alongside both calligraphy and images, since their depiction of form in black lines

allows them to travel easily between text and image.

The *Gulshan Album* is a curated collection as well as a site of memory. This can be seen from the inclusion of calligraphies by Mir Ali Heravi, a celebrated calligrapher from the environs of Bukhara, who never visited South Asia. Apparently, his son Mir Mohammed Baqir came to the Mughal court to seek his fortune and was responsible for the fact that most calligraphies in the album were his father's, illustrating that albums were wont to reflect the dynamics of the courtly ambition of princes, artists, and calligraphers. The work of different artists was collected and showcased in the *Gulshan Album* which was used to archive previous events associated with Jehangir's predecessors. An instance is seen in an *amal-i-nowruz*, a 16ᵗʰ-century work created to commemorate the Persian new year celebration, which marked the day of the Mughal emperor Akbar's accession to the throne. The work was claimed to have been made in half a day, from dawn to midday. The *nowruz* works are an archive of previous celebrations, performances, and presentations for the Mughal emperors themselves, and were created on the day of the vernal equinox, an imperial as well as a ritual occasion. The *muraqqa* presents other paintings related to performance where artistic ability can be judged through comparison, with Bihzad's famed depiction of a camel fight facing a copy by the Mughal artist Nanha. Other such instances are present, while an unusual performative page fuses three exemplars from different cultures, European, Safavid and Indic, where imitation is used to create a comparison between these styles. The Gulshan Album reveals a penchant for novelty that is clearly outward-facing and concerned with other traditions which it includes in a selective manner.

'amal by Sanwala   tarh by L'al   'amal by Babu Naqqash   tarh by L'al

Additionally, the album uses an organisation of pages into quadrants, earlier seen in the *Bahram Mirza Album* (Herat, 1544-5), where four separately painted figures were inserted in a single page. The configuration lends itself to comparative analysis both of style and subject matter. The *Gulshan Album* modified the former usage by painting around the images to create a unified, seamless composition that conveyed a fictional, yet meaningful gathering. One such page brings together Akbar, Jehangir, a figure perhaps meant to represent Prince Daniyal, and Madho Singh Kachhwaha, the latter dressed in Mughal attire and leaning on a cane. The page creates a new cross-dynastic genealogy, acknowledging the political and marital connections that the loyal Kacchwahas enjoyed with the Mughals. Another page with quadrants commemorates the residence of Jehangir's court in Ahmedabad by including paintings of personages linked to that place and time with inscriptions of names in Jehangir's hand. It is closely wedded to the context where it was made and consumed and is far from simply depicting figures of royal types. A similarly organised folio presently in Berlin depicting the gifting of paintings along with figures of artists brings the value placed on paintings at this time to the fore.

Prof. Rice argued that a study of Persianate *muraqqas*, the earliest Southasian pictorial works to enter the European market, reveals that they were not meant to be stationary objects. Rather, they were made to go out into the world. Evidence of such circulation is apparent: in Samuel Purchas's *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, an unknown engraver reproduced figures from Mughal painting; drawings in ink by Rembrandt made in the 1650s are obviously inspired by paintings and portraits from Mughal *muraqqas* made just a couple of decades prior. *Muraqqas* were widely circulated through gift exchange, trade, and purchase, through inheritance and as loot. Copying and reproduction of the materials in albums was common both in South Asia and in Europe, with artists occasionally replicating their own work and sometimes that of others. Professor Rice illustrated such copying and reuse through many instances. Europeans emulated Southasian patrons by becoming patrons of art who built up their own ateliers. *Muraqqas* were social and socialising objects, 'binding' patrons with artists, calligraphers with painters, and creating a meta-commentary on reading and writing as their contents were used and reused, changed and repainted as subsequent owners made them their own. As objects not only connected with their spaces of use but also staging these very spaces, albums invite an analysis into their own making. – *J.K.*

In The Age of Non-Mechanical Reproduction:
Copying in Southasian Illustrated Manuscripts

October 13th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Neeraja Poddar (The Ira Brind and Stacey Spector Associate Curator of South Asian Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Though copying was an integral part of the painting workshops of medieval India, it is not a topic that has been studied in detail. In her lecture on the ubiquitous practice of copying in the production of painted manuscripts of Northern India, Dr. Neeraja Poddar explored the idea of what constitutes copying. Facsimile, repetition, interpretation, inspiration, emulation and response all fall within the scope of copying, an act that upsets the modern-day bias of privileging the original.

Using three folios from the *Kalpasutra*, all showing the initiation ceremony of Mahavira, Poddar illustrated that copying was used as a way of establishing a formula for depicting the initiation ceremonies of other *jina*s too. Prescriptive iconography demanded exact copies as the efficacy of these manuscripts which held ritual value would be compromised by newness.

Gujarat ca.1450
Walters Art Museum W.910

Western India late 15th-early 16th century
V & A Museum IS.46-1959 (45r)

Gujarat 15th century
Met Museum 55.121.38.17

Mahavira's initiation

Poddar introduced the scholar Molly Emma Aitken's idea of the "response painting" by presenting an example of the British artists, the Singh Twins' (Amrit and Rabindra Singh), response to a Mughal painting. In the Mughal painting, credited to the artist Abul-Hasan, Jahangir, known as the light of his faith as per his birth name, Nur-ud-din, is depicted as shooting the head of his archnemesis, Malik Ambar, the Abyssinian General of Ahmednagar, whose army was known as the army of darkness. In place of Jahangir, the Singh Twins painted the

boxer Muhammad Ali, a black man, shooting a Ku Klux Klan mask (associated with the American white supremacist group) with a pen-like arrow. There is a play between darkness and light in both paintings, and the Singh Twins use symbolism to subvert this theme in their response to the Mughal painting.

According to B.N. Goswamy and Eberhard Fischer, drawings were often retained for study by the families of painters and by workshops, but identical copies were rarely made as artists would make drawings their own by adding variations. The process of making non-mechanical transfers involved placing a *charba*, a semi-transparent material, on a drawing, making pin pricks along its outlines and using a bag of charcoal powder for pouncing to achieve a dotted outline through the holes. These dots would then be joined. Another transfer process involved smearing red chalk behind a drawing and scoring the outline with a stylus onto a receiving material. Through practice, preparatory and process drawings made by copying, artists learned to make exact reproductions.

Comparing two very similar Pahari paintings from the *Bhagavata Purana* that depict Krishna slaying the snake Aghasura, Poddar showed us an example of variations in copies. While the general compositions in both paintings were strikingly similar, variations could be seen in the colour palette as well as the landscape. One of the works was transformed simply by a higher placement of the horizon line.

Two Pahari folios of Shiva chasing Mohini and similar folios from Mewar *Rasikapriyas* showing the *abhisarika nayika* were also compared for variations. Sahibdin, one of the major artists of Mewar from the 17th century, was a much-copied artist, and his compositions often formed the basis for later manuscripts that were commissioned and given away as dowries for the daughters of the Mewar kings. Taking examples from *Rasamanjari* folios of Basohli, Poddar demonstrated how artists

occasionally modified the story by replacing Krishna with a generic hero.

Dr. Neeraja Poddar speaks during 'The Age of Non-Mechanical Reproduction: Copying in Southasian Illustrated Manuscripts'

Poddar presented two case studies to study variations in copies. Based on the Chunar *Ragamala* (dated 1591), her first case study, twenty other sets were made by several generations of artists in the kingdoms of Kota and Bundi over a period of two hundred years. The almost exact copies of Vilavala *ragini* had compositional as well as iconographic similarities. However, artists contemporised certain elements and transformed the paintings into products of their own times by adding changes in depictions of textiles, jewellery, colours and architectural elements. Some questions then arise: were the artists also trying to convey different meanings through these changes? In the act of making variations, did discrepancies or storytelling errors occur? In her second case study of the Kanoria *Bhagavata Purana* manuscript (1688) and its copies (1700) made in the Malwa style, Poddar presented some examples of misinterpretations of narratives that led to further questions on what these can tell us about production processes of the times. Were some of these paintings made quickly and therefore with less care in order to meet the demands of patrons? Were these successful copies despite sometimes not conveying the story correctly? Against what parameters should we make these judgements? Though we know very little about the conditions of production for these manuscripts and must extrapolate based on the material at hand, we do know that copying was an important part of the process of making Southasian paintings. **– R.G.T.**

Deccani Arts of the Book

October 20th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Laura Weinstein (Ananda Coomaraswamy Curator of Southasian and Islamic Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)
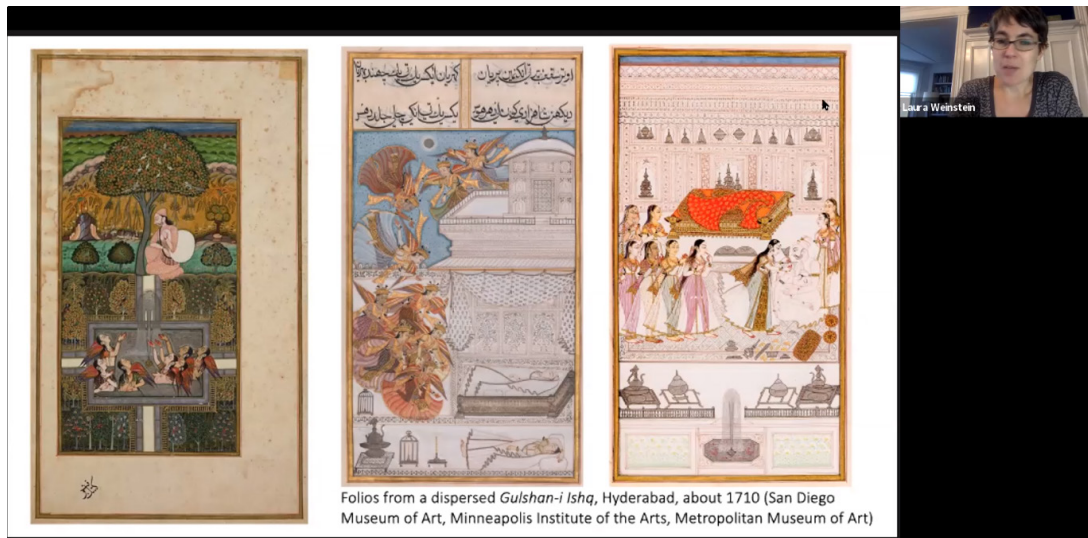
The thriving co-evolution of diverse cultures, constantly interacting and negotiating with one another through an assorted network of artists, connoisseurs, warriors, court nobles, and so on, was a feature unique to the Indian subcontinent. This became even more apparent when Muslim cultures began to grow in the subcontinent simultaneously with native Indic cultures. While it becomes necessary to study the peculiarity of each of these cultures and delineate their distinctive contribution to the realm of art, one may often find in the intersection and overlapping of their styles, some of the best examples of their artistic manifestations. This process – of intersection of diverse styles – was however not always outward; it differed from reign to reign and state to state. It was different in the Deccan than it was in other parts of the subcontinent. The artistic traditions in the Deccan evolved almost contemporaneously with those in the Mughal domain; yet they were distinct on several planes. It was this distinctiveness that Prof. Laura Weinstein discussed in her session by tracing a comprehensive trajectory of Deccani paintings from the period of the Bahmani Sultanate to that of the post-Bahmani kingdoms of Ahmednagar, Bijapur, and Golconda.

Islamic culture penetrated the Deccan – once dominated by native dynasties such as the Yadavas, Kakatiyas, Hoysalas, and so on – during the expansion of the Delhi Sultanate in the late 13th century. The confluence of the Islamic culture, rooted heavily in the Persian tradition at the time, with the classical Indic culture, brought about several changes in the political and cultural landscape of the Deccan. The session began with a look at the artistic manifestations of this change that occurred during the period of the Bahmani Sultanate (1347-1538). As not many manuscripts composed during this period survive, Prof. Laura Weinstein drew our attention to the tomb of Ahmad Shah I, the ninth ruler of the Bahmani Sultanate. The ornamentation

of the tomb's interior, comprising painted floral motifs, geometric patterns, calligraphic bands, and cartouches, was resonant of designs of carpets and illustrated manuscripts produced in Iran in the 15th century C.E. It led one to contemplate the art

made in Ahmednagar in the late 16th century; they exemplified the multifarious heterodox nature of Deccani paintings. While some seemed to have an explicit stylistic similarity with illustrations made in the Shirazi style, some had a pronounced

Folios from a dispersed *Gulshan-i Ishq*, Hyderabad, about 1710 (San Diego Museum of Art, Minneapolis Institute of the Arts, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

influence from the classical Indic style. The illustration of a woman, standing along with her *sakhis* and causing the tree to bloom with her tender touch, stood out as the most striking example; it was most certainly a visual redolent with *salabhanjika*, a recurring image in classical Indic art.

of the manuscripts that may have been composed during the Bahmani period. Given that there was a constant influx of migrants from Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, and Arab lands during this period, it was not an anomaly for the works of art to bear such a strong nexus with Persian culture. Works of art such as illustrated manuscripts often travelled from across the subcontinent to the Deccan, facilitating a cultural trope that came to be profoundly associated with courtiers and elites. Prof. Laura Weinstein showed several manuscripts that were made in Shiraz in the 15th century and compared them with those that were most probably produced in the Deccan during the Bahmani period. One could easily draw parallels between their artistic styles. It was clear that there was an ever-growing fervour at the Bahmani court to promote itself as the epicentre of Persianate culture.

There was, in the immediate period that followed the disintegration of the Bahmani Sultanate into regional successor states, a temporary lapse in the production of any particular paintings. It was only after the mid-16th century, when these states consolidated their power and accumulated resources, that the production amped up. Also, by this time, well-established styles from other parts of the subcontinent, most notably from Western and Northern India, had made headway in the Deccan and begun to influence styles of artistic production. At the same time, there was a continuous infusion of ideas from Iran. Prof. Laura Weinstein demonstrated illustrations from the *Tarif-i-Husain Shahi* manuscript

The other brilliant example that Prof. Laura Weinstein brought up was the manuscript called *Nujum-ul-Ulum*, literally, the Stars of the Sciences. It was composed by Ali Adil Shah of Bijapur in the late 16th century. The manuscript is an unusual Persian text written in a local Deccani language, and serves as a pictorial dictionary for a wide range of topics under science, astronomy, astrology, and religion. The content of the manuscript, aside from bringing to the fore Ali Adil Shah's personal predilection for knowledge of the celestial and earthly worlds, also resonates with the esoteric quality of Tantrism. Perhaps the manuscript was employed as a tool to attain and augment untrammelled power, or to introduce to the Iranian literati, the Indic tradition. Whatever the reason, the manuscript doubtless amalgamates the Islamic cultural tropes with non-Islamic ones. The illustration of the planet Mars in the garb of the Persian hero, Rustam, holding a trident similar to that of the Hindu god, Shiva, and of *luhanis* who resemble Hindu *yoginis*, well epitomises this. The artistic styles of the illustrations in the manuscript seem to have influences from both the North and South. It is not hard to imagine this, given that historically, the Deccan always remained a bridge between the North and South. Even while the Bahmani successor states were engrossed in battling each other and strongly resisting the Mughal expansion in the Deccan, their boundaries remained very fluid and conducive to cultural exchanges. Contrary to the Mughal imperial style, the output of which was often a statement of splendour and pomp, the Deccani style remained decentralised

and heavily embedded in vernacular cultures.

Prof. Laura Weinstein then drew our attention to the style of paintings that were being produced at the court in Golconda at around the same time. Illustrations from a very important manuscript, *Kulliyat*, the collective poetry of Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, were examined. Although stylistically the illustrations relied on the Persianate model, the poetry itself was composed in Deccani Urdu. The highlight of the illustrations, however, was the use of marble paper. In more than one instance, one could see pieces of marble paper glued to the surface of the painting. Citing the use of a similar technique employed in a 17th-century manuscript of *Mahabharata* that was attributed to the same region, Prof. Laura Weinstein pointed out that this technique was not after all an aberration and may well have been inspired by similar local techniques. This once again proved the embedment of the Deccani style in local cultures and also indicated the extent of the continuing transculturation in the Deccan.

Prof. Laura Weinstein further emphasised this transculturation by referring to works of Farrukh Beg, a Persian artist who had a wide-ranging career in the Indian subcontinent. He served the Mughal court and travelled down to Bijapur, where he worked closely with Ibrahim Adil Shah, before returning once again to the Mughal court. This going back and forth led him to experiment with and synthesise a fusion of styles from both Mughal and Deccan repertories. Prof. Laura Weinstein attended to two great examples of this style. The first was the portrait of Ibrahim Adil Shah playing the *tambur* and the second was the illustration of Goddess Saraswati playing the *veena*. These illustrations stood as great examples of not only the amalgamating artistic styles but also of the syncretic and eclectic nature of Bijapur courtly culture. This was further attested to by looking at an illustration from *Kitab-i-Nauras*, a text comprising devotional songs and couplets composed by Ibrahim Adil Shah in Deccani Urdu. Prof. Laura Weinstein also looked at a few more examples of portraiture in Bijapur that bore strong affinity with the Mughal style. This style of portraiture was a direct upshot of several Mughal officers from North India settling in the Deccan around the 17th century. New models of paintings based on new styles and genres were being experimented at around this time. One such genre of painting was the courtly processions and events in the lives of the Qutb Shahs. Very different than any paintings seen before, these paintings had a celebratory

connotation and attempted to reflect courtly life and pageantry in detail. Though the style of these paintings was fusion, the genre in itself, being the most favoured among the Mughals, seemed to have direct influence of the Mughal culture. By the late 17th century, as Bijapur and Golconda fell to the Mughals, Hyderabad became one of the important centres of the Mughal empire with several painters flocking to the city for patronage.
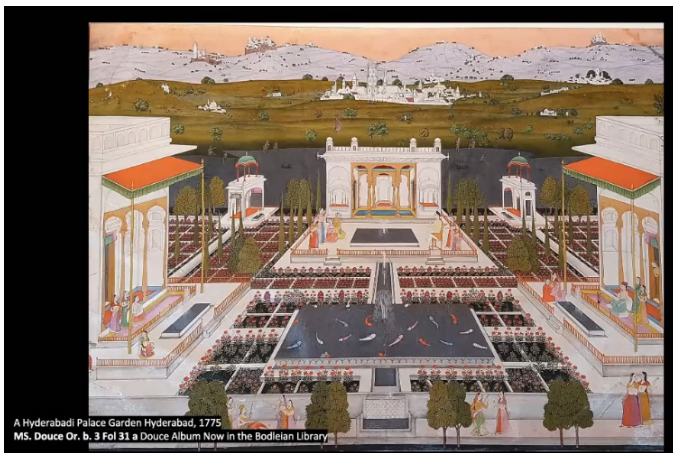
The illustrations from *Gulshan-i-Ishq*, a Sufi-inspired text originally composed in Bijapur, stood as testaments to the sophisticated styles of painting that flourished in the Deccan around this time. The illustrations skilfully depicted elements of nature – such as flowers, trees, wild creatures and so on – so as to resonate with spiritual states of the minds of the characters, and were meant to eventually lead the spectator to spiritual insight. Rooted deeply in the Indo-Islamic milieu, this became a prominent theme across the Deccan in the 18th century. Prof. Laura Weinstein also highlighted that this manuscript was a culminating masterpiece of the Deccani arts of the book, for there were not many instances of manuscript paintings being produced after this period. She further emphasised that this could be a starting point to explore the nuances of Deccani painting that emerged in the 18th century, a sphere that largely remains undocumented by most scholars.

While several styles of painting from the North and South wafted to the Deccan, often resulting in a wondrous amalgamation of styles, there was also an ongoing dissemination of the Deccani style across the subcontinent. Prof. Laura Weinstein addressed some examples of paintings from Bikaner, Mewar, and the Punjab hills, which bore strong links to the Deccani style in their compositions, stylistic features, and depictions of landscape, architecture, and ornamentation. It led us to reflect on how on the one hand, the conjoining of the Deccani style with other styles may have played out across diverse cultures of the subcontinent, when on the other hand, the Deccani style itself was being continually transformed through its interactions with vernacular and far-off cultures. Indeed, one has to be cautious while defining Deccani art in isolation from other styles of art in the subcontinent and yet not fail to consider its particularities and the significance of its transnational role. *– H.S.G.*

Expanding Spaces: Painting in the Mughal Successor States

October 27th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Kavita Singh (Professor at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University)

In the 18th century CE, as the Mughal grip over power loosened, the empire broke into fragments. Scholars no longer see this as a period of cultural decline but as a time of great efflorescence in the arts at courts such as Lucknow and Hyderabad where former Mughal painters employed their artistic language to aggrandise the rulers of provincial pockets of wealth who expressed their power by using the Mughal idiom. A genre that emerged in Awadh at this time consisted of paintings depicting deep perspectival landscapes with an idyllic terrace scene in the foreground that invariably presented activities of pleasure, seemingly an excuse to produce a dazzling background of an immense cityscape, replete with pleasure pavilions and gardens and hardly any people. On the foregrounded side of the river was urbanised space, the natural world ordered for leisure and pleasure; on the further shore was the business of life, mausoleums and mosques, fields and labour. The distant landscape is busier than the city; the further shore of the river might show battles, lion-hunts, or processions on elephant-back.

A Hyderabadi Palace Garden Hyderabad, 1775
MS. Douce Or. b. 3 Fol 31 a Douce Album Now in the Bodleian Library

The real protagonist of these paintings, celebrating the urban by multiplying architecture and deep landscape into fabulous vistas, is space. Scholars have seen these views as a failure of imitation of the European ideal of 'scientific perspective', but a painting by the Awadh artist Faizullah unsettles this notion through the depiction of a smaller deep landscape within a centrally positioned archway. According to Dr. Singh, artists appropriated a Western convention to express not only pleasures, but also coded messages of the difficulties and danger posed by complex contemporary circumstances. This was not an occasional diversion but a developed genre between the years 1760 and 1780. Such landscapes depicting the pleasures of the zenana in the foreground, and war, danger, disturbance, and threat in the background inverted the architectural logic of the royal palace, making its walls porous. The vantage point of the viewer, slightly above the sequestered zenana, is voyeuristic, creating a frisson of illegitimate pleasure.

An intriguing painting of the 1770s by an Awadh artist shows Mughal Delhi in the 1730s, with members of the zenana of Muhammad Shah Rangeela on a picnic. His mother is depicted on a white bullock and his third wife pictured near a puddle surrounded by mud and sand, with no evidence of pleasure or luxury, in contrast to other Awadhi paintings. The Shahrashub genre, at first amorous or bawdy and later inverted to a poetry of lament about ruined cities after Nadir Shah's raid on Delhi, was about the cityscape. Awadhi terrace paintings from the late 18th century, where the representation of buildings is a trope rather than mimetic, seem to reflect this poetic genre. Sadat Khan, an Iranian warrior in Mughal service, founded the Awadhi city of Faizabad in 1722. As the Mughals weakened, the subahdar nawabs of Awadh become sovereigns in all but name. Many terrace scenes were painted in the kingdom between 1765 and 1775 during the reign of Sadat Khan's grandson Shuja-ud-Daula, as the second generation of Mughal artists who left Delhi came into their own. These paintings tamed space, recording the growth of the Awadhi cities of Faizabad and Lucknow as their cityscape changed.

The great terrace-scene paintings seem contemporary with building campaigns by Shuja-ud-Daula in Faizabad, where an improved architecture palely replicated the marble palaces of the Mughals in lime and gold paint. Until then, provincial Mughal nobility routinely occupied a provisional, shifting architecture of mud huts, shacks, and tents. In Akbar's time, mansabdars were subject to a deliberate policy of frequent transfer and the system of escheat (property reverting to the emperor after a nobleman's death), preventing both permanence and the formation of strongholds, and discouraging investment in immovable property. The only mansabdars with secure landholdings were the Rajputs, early allies of the Mughals, permitted to retain their ancestral territories even while they

were administrators in other regions. However, tombs were exempt from escheat (*zabti*) and settled in a trust (*waqf*) controlled by the noblemen's families. Resources were poured into architecture for the dead rather than the living until the 18th century when the balance of power shifted with the Mughal emperor anxious for provincial support. Titles became hereditary, heralding an era of settled confidence which was expressed in urban development in places such as Hyderabad, Awadh and Murshidabad. Deep, painted vistas expressed a new relationship with space, place, and territory. In the *Tuzuk-i-Asafiya*, a schematic, cartographic rendering of Asaf Jah II going from Hyderabad to Golconda reveals a similar spirit without focussing on architecture. According to the speaker, space is used as a logo in these paintings which exhibit an impulse to make territory visible. Representations in the provinces perhaps raced ahead of cities full of stones, dust, and architectural intentions.

Unsurprisingly, in the Rajput *jagirs* where power over the domain already existed, this celebration in painting had begun at the start of the 17th century. Careful, large-scale, intensively worked paintings allow scholars to trace developments in their architecture. Buildings dominate Mewari paintings, which render architecture and the specificity of place in a unique manner. In a 19th-century painting of Maharana Jawan Singh at a Vaishnava recital in the Amar Vilas, Udaipur, the artist uses compositional and iconographic techniques making the image *mandala*-like, the building presented as an emanation of the royal seated within. Dr. Singh argued that these various traditions of painting – Mughal and Provincial, Pahari and Rajput, all richly descriptive

and deeply symbolic in their manipulation of space – are more culturally aligned than scholars have so far posited, and can be analysed through similar interpretive frameworks.

In the Rajput courts, the Mughal proclivity to combine description with symbolism sometimes took a more direct path. At the court of Maharaja Abhay Singh of Jodhpur, a painter from the court of Muhammad Shah revised a work which he had earlier created for the Mughal emperor. The Maharaja, placed before an arch that allows the viewer a glimpse of his domains, is presented with greater opulence. In the court of the Marwar ruler Vijay Singh, *Ramcharitmanas*, *Durgacharit* and *Krishna Leela* sets contain panoramic paintings with crystalline architectural views of temples and palaces. The early *Rukmini Mangal* series made at Kishangarh by a prestigious Mughal artist closely resembles *Padshahnama* paintings. The developed Kishangarh style retained a closeness to the Mughal idiom but collapsed imperial with provincial and royal with divine in a double appropriation, presenting the figures of Radha and Krishna on marbled terraces and pavilions in the garb of Kishangarhi royals, depicting the region's fine buildings and giving a sense of expansive territories. This is also evidenced in the Pahari painter Nainsukh's representation of his patron Balwant Singh whom the artist placed in vast palaces which existed only in fantasy. Nainsukh's descendants would transpose literary and devotional subjects into immense Mughalised paper palaces, like him producing a no-place rather than burnishing the image of actuality.

Though the context of Rajput painting differed from
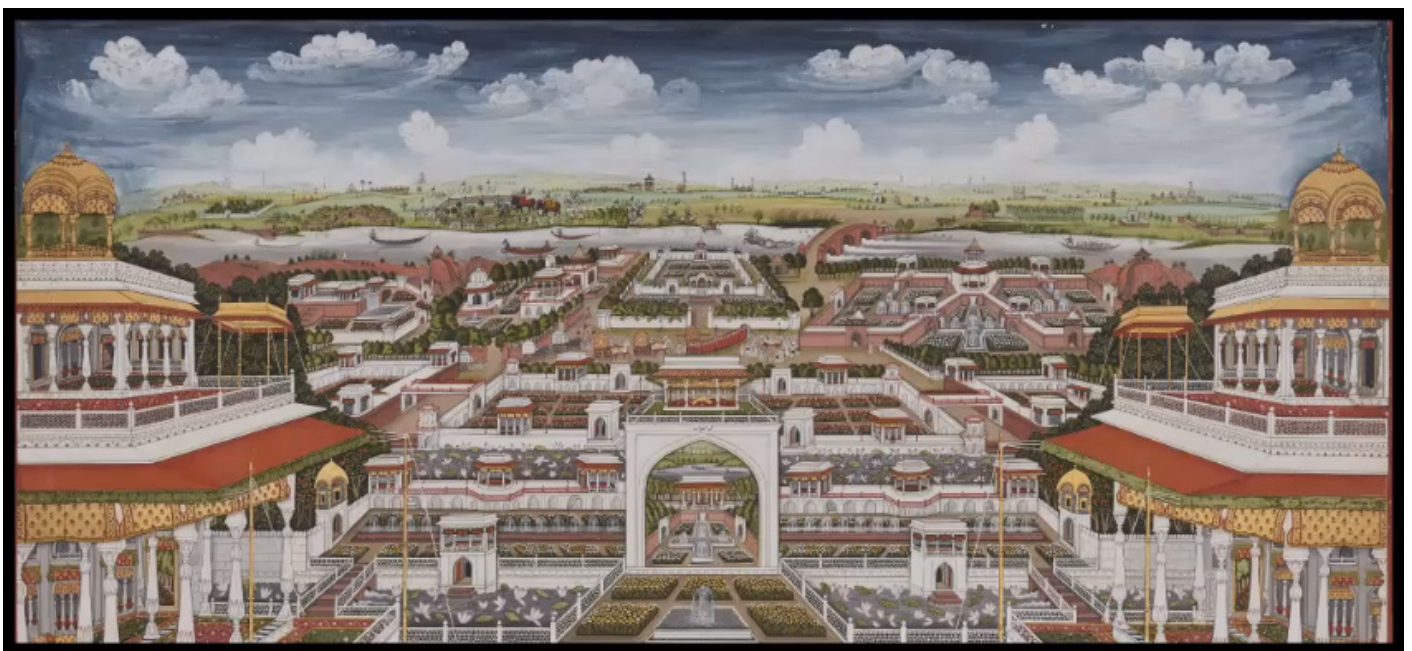
Dr. Kavita Singh speaks during 'Expanding Spaces: Painting in the Mughal Successor States'

that of the provincial Mughal courts, in the Mughal encampments, Shia, Sunni and Rajput *mansabdars* were mingling. Perhaps provincial Mughal states were attempting to catch up with their Rajput neighbours through their own patronage of architecture and investment in place-making, rather than simply emulating Mughal splendour. While there are many Akbari paintings with endlessly unfolding landscapes and deep backgrounds that scholars consider to be 'inspired' by European prints, Ursula Weekes has designated this as a 'God's-eye view' which confers an omniscient perspective to the viewer. Mika Natif connects the depiction of buildings from diverse architectural traditions in the backgrounds of Akbari paintings to the emperor's concept of *sulh-i-kul* or universal harmony, an important pillar of governance which allowed trade to flourish, ensuring the prosperity of the Mughal empire. Under Jahangir, paintings show a lack of interest in background space, but imperial control of the world is retained through cartographic spatial tools; a map in Jahangir's hand or a globe at his feet.

With Shah Jahan, there was a return to deep, seemingly descriptive space in painting, but the background is a screen on which is projected the emperor's authority and wisdom, a zone full of moral meaning. A Faizabad terrace scene has as its background a fort and crumpled bodies reminiscent of the Mughal artist Payag's painting of the siege of Qandahar in 1631, painted two years later for the *Padshahnama*. The tropes and motifs of the *Padshahnama* were repeatedly used in the backgrounds of Awadhi terrace scenes at a time when a copy was available in the region. After Nadir Shah's raid, the empire was besieged by Afghans, Jats, Rohillas and Marathas, involving not just Delhi, but Awadh as it unsuccessfully tried to defend the Mughal centre. These invasions reverberate in Awadhi terrace paintings which attempt the bravado of depicting pleasure in the foreground but returned to the region's deepest concerns in the background.

During this turbulent period, Awadh sheltered the Mughal prince Ali Gauhar who returned to Delhi as Shah Alam II in 1772. The backgrounds of contemporary terrace scenes show the emperor going about his business, hunting on the further shore of the river even as Awadh was testing its own independence from him. A painting by Faizullah shows a juggler entertaining a princess against the backdrop of a Delhi palace. The scene is peaceful but the centrally located Shah Burj in the background shows the tiny figure of the Mughal emperor with no discernible halo. The palace in Delhi seems to depict the real world, a place of problems pushed into the distance.

The sheer number of architectural paintings, with evidence of multiple copies, point to patrons in Awadh beyond the circle of the *nawab,* and perhaps to a thriving market. The Awadhi elite at this time included several Europeans. Records reveal that some were collectors and commissioners of paintings. Jean Baptiste Gentil, a French military man, attempted to compile information on Indian history, society, and the region's political situation for the French sovereign. His records, illustrated by two artists employed by him, were diagrammatic and inscribed in the Western scientific style, for instance presenting Shah Alam II, his courtiers, and the accoutrements of the court in a disembodied form. The artists, one of whom was the son of a Mughal painter at Muhammad Shah's court, painted an atlas of the Mughal empire for Gentil, reminiscent of Mughal models in which vignettes of local flora and fauna, customs and legends were depicted. Antoine Polier, a Swiss military engineer and army man became Shuja-ud-Daula's chief architect, engineer, and military advisor. Paintings made by artists in Polier's atelier carry the visual aesthetic of the terrace scene to its extremity. Buildings and landscape become the raison d'être of these works, entirely evacuated of human presence, or containing ant-like figures in immense spaces. Polier eventually fell out of favour in Awadh and accompanied Shah Alam II to Delhi in 1772. Here, *Bazgasht* paintings (recording the return), probably painted at Polier's instance, have bird's-eye views of unreally symmetrical buildings and citadels, and tiny figures, including that of the emperor, placed within the architecture. The allure of space seems greater than important personages or momentous events, perhaps recording the dwindling significance of the Mughals, by then no longer engaged in creating the spaces of fine buildings or works of art offering visual pleasure. *– J.K.*

Ragamala Paintings: History and New Interpretations

November 10th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Marika Sardar (Curator at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto)

Ragas in a Kalpasutra manuscript

Though *Ragamala* paintings representing musical modes called *ragas*, made between the 16th and 19th centuries, number in the thousands, their interpretations have been a challenge. How, for instance, were musical texts selected for illustration? What was the relationship between text and painting? How did artists visualise *ragas* and how did their imagery evolve beyond texts?

This type of painting relating to musical treatises and modes is unique to Indian art. The characteristics of each *raga* were summarised in couplets in various musical treatises, often, in terms of a human interaction. By memorising these, it was possible for musicians to recall emotions associated with each *raga*, while painters depicted these metaphorical texts literally, turning them into narratives that conveyed the features of *ragas*. As an example, Dr. Marika Sardar presented a painting of Megh *raga*, a *raga* associated with the monsoon, from Pratapgarh (c.1720), which featured a joyous dance amidst a downpour. The dark colours of the painting depicted the night.

Typically, *Ragamala* sets would contain unbound, numbered folios of thirty-six paintings of *raga* families, each with a male head or *raga*, and his five wives, the *raginis*. Sometimes these sets were extended with additional wives and sons. Most often, *raga* families would consist of Bhairav, Megh, Malkauns, Deepak, Hindol and Sri *ragas*. Sardar presented examples of their depictions using male figures across various styles and centuries as also the complete family of Sri Raga, sixth in the line of *ragas* in the *Ragamala* set and associated with winter, with its *raginis*, Pancham, Kamod, Kedar, Asavari and Setmalar. The wife of Sri *raga* is depicted in both Kamod and Setmalar as a distraught ascetic in the forest. As Asavari, she transcends her sadness briefly and tames a snake, but in the concluding Kedar *ragini* we see her return to a mournful state.

In one of the earliest *Ragamala* sets from Gujarat (c.1475) each *raga* is depicted as a god. As the genre gained popularity, several sets from Northern India which contained changes from these earlier representations of *ragas* were made between 1520 and 1570. Horizontally formatted manuscripts with *ragas* depicted as humans continued as a style into the early 17th century. Sardar presented a vertically formatted painting of Bhairavi from Mewar (1520—40) in which most of the page is occupied by an image of a woman worshipping Shiva. A short, descriptive couplet sits on top, while the verso is left blank. Sets from the Deccan and Chunar were also designed in this format that became typical of the *Ragamala*. Other *Ragamala* paintings from the Punjab hills as well as wall paintings from Bundi were presented,

and it was notable that the iconography of the paintings from the Punjab hills differed from those of the Deccani and Rajasthani paintings. Square-shaped folios with wide red borders were typical of this region.

Dr. Marika Sardar speaks during 'Ragamala Paintings: History and New Interpretations'

Knowledge of music was probably considered an important social skill, and ownership of *Ragamala* paintings may have been a way of demonstrating such erudition. This may be why the *Ragamala* was such a popular theme. Scholarship suggests that these paintings were not meant for musicians but for listeners who connected the music to literature such as the *Rasikapriya*, the *Baramahsa* and *Vasantavilas*, thereby deepening their appreciation of music.

These paintings are also interesting for the study of the treatment of texts in Southasian manuscripts. Complete texts are rarely found in illustrated manuscripts. While some use excerpts, summaries or have no text at all, in *Ragamala* manuscripts only texts with the essence of *ragas* and *raginis* were excerpted and used. The sources of the texts remained unnamed.

The genre of musical theory has a long history, the oldest treatise being Bharata's *Natyashastra* and Dattila's *Sangitacharya* (5th c BCE—5th c CE), Matanga's *Brihaddeshi* (the first to employ the term *raga*) and Narada's *Sangita Makaranda* (7th—9th c), and *Sangita Ratnakara* and *Sangita Tarangini* in which terminologies and classifications differed from treatises of the North. The 15th to 17th centuries saw a profusion of new texts such as *Sangitaraja* (1453) in Brajbhasha, *Manakutuhala* (c. 1488), Kshemakarna's *Ragamala* (1570) in which, for the first time, the term '*ragamala*' appears, and Damodara's *Sangita Darpana* (1460—1625) by which time couplets personifying *ragas* became the primary content of musical writing, making them suitable for illustration.

Despite limited access to and knowledge of musical manuscripts, the examples attest to the great variety of illustration of musical texts which, over time, came to focus resolutely on *ragas* and *raginis* in formats established in the 16th century. This is in stark contrast to the improvisatory nature of Indian music itself. Nevertheless, the paintings can be said to have an abstract quality as they capture the essence of *ragas* by equating the emotional tenor of a narrative to that of a piece of music. Not many traditions do this before the modern or contemporary era. *– R.G.T.*

The Immersive Power of Pahari Paintings: The Second Guler *Gita Govinda*

November 17th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Caroline Widmer (Academic & Curatorial Associate at Museum Rietberg, Zurich.)

By the "immersive power" of Pahari paintings, Dr. Caroline Widmer refers not just to the aesthetic of the paintings of the *Gita Govinda* but also their relationship with the text and narrative. Widmer spoke of immersion in terms of a "world-making" quality: all that we read, hear and see that determine our worldviews. India had a diverse narrative culture in several artistic fields, and literature like the *Ramayana*, *Bhagavata Purana* and *Gita Govinda* were popular subjects for paintings. The production of these paintings was considered a matter of prestige for Pahari painters. Widmer presented one folio, among hundreds, of the Shangri *Ramayana* (1690—

Dr. Caroline Widmer speaks during 'The Immersive Power of Pahari Paintings: The Second Guler Gita Govinda'

1710). The complexity of the series raised questions about how teams of painters may have functioned: did they have project managers to decide who painted what and in which style? Who selected the texts and what materials to use?

The narrative technique of Pahari paintings was strongly influenced by the analysis of literature. Many of them don't tell stories as much as help recall them and are not bound to a literal model. Often, a single frame condensed several narrative elements and presented one iconic image. Others presented one important moment from the story or its summary. In a painting titled 'Pilgrimage to Amarnath' (c.1850), from Jammu, she pointed out how a single work often depicted multiple scenes by repeating the characters in the painting several times. The viewer had to imagine the movement of these people and therefore the narrative. Works across multiple folios often used a combination of these narrative techniques. As an example, Widmer presented the Palam *Bhagavata Purana* (16th century), which comprised of several hundred folios made by different artists. It is left to the viewer to dive into the works in order to understand where the narrative begins and ends. This makes for an immersive experience.

The *Gita Govinda* is organised in 12 *sargas* and 24 *prabandhas*, and little is known about its composer, Jayadeva, who was Poet Laureate in the court of King Laxmana Sena in 12th century Eastern Bengal. The literary genre of the *Gita Govinda* is ambiguous: it combines elements of poetry, drama and song. Its storyline is very limited — there are very few characters — but the text has a complex, multi-perspective quality as the narrator constantly changes. In the narrative, it is also hard to tell the past and present apart due to the use of different levels of time and imagination. As an example, Widmer presented a folio that depicts Radha's *memory* of her first night with Krishna rather than what was happening in the story at that moment.

Radha remembers the first night with Krishna
Folio from the second Guler Gitagovinda series of c. 1775
Permanent loan. Collection of Barbara and Eberhard Fischer

The second Guler *Gita Govinda* series (c. 1775), from the Pahari region, originally consisted of 151 paintings. An earlier series painted by the artist Manaku in the 1730s is referred to as the first. The second Guler *Gita Govinda* series has the entire text of the *Gita Govinda* in Sanskrit on the reverse of the paintings with summaries in Takri. The works have complex narrative structures. Comparisons between the folios show that different hands worked on the various folios, but they belonged to a homogenous family style. The painters of this series are referred to, collectively, as the first generation after Manaku and Nainsukh of Guler. Structurally, this series is very similar to the earlier series, and it has the same number of folios, but stylistically, they are very different. While these folios are scattered around the world, several preparatory drawings provide insights into their production. The drawings correspond almost exactly with the paintings. They measure 7 x 11 inches while the paintings are smaller and have dark blue or red borders.

The viewing of these works required more than just *looking*, as paintings and their corresponding verses could not be viewed together. These were objects that revealed their secrets only with the physical engagement of picking them up, turning them over to read the text, bringing them closer to the eye and moving them around to catch light in order to see colours such as gold. The paintings depict the text in great detail and along with the emotional states of characters in the story, key moments in the narrative are portrayed in order to string the story together through the folios. Widmer demonstrated this close relationship between text and image by reading out text that corresponded to the painting of 'The sorrow of Radha' in which Radha's body language, the flora, fauna and the moon are all faithful to the metaphors in the text. The artists, clearly, had a deep engagement with the text and their use of different narrative devices allowed viewers to obtain a full insight into the characters' innermost feelings and immerse themselves in the divine world and emotions of Radha and Krishna. *– R.G.T.*

Fraser Album Unbound: Decolonising Company Painting in 19th Century India

November 24th, 2021, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Yuthika Sharma (Curator , UK & USA)

Amiban, an older woman and a buffalo
Victoria and Albert Museum, Purchased with assistance from the friends of
Robert Skelton, to commemorate his 60th birthday, IS.13-1989.

Herdsman and a buffalo outside a village
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund 97.117a-b

Dr. Yuthika Sharma's talk examined a set of drawings that were commissioned by William Fraser and his brother James Baillie Fraser who were employees of the East India Company. The *Fraser Album*, as it has come to be known, is a visual document with a substantial written component. Sharma looked at colonial modalities of "knowing" India – ethnographic mappings as well as mappings of space – through the album. The collection comprised of nearly a hundred portraits of people from Delhi made between 1815 and 1820. These works were made by artists trained in the Mughal court, and while some paintings were bound in album form, others were loose folios.

The *Fraser Album* has been hailed as a masterpiece of realistic portraiture from late Mughal India, but its reading has been disengaged from the colonial gaze. Some of the portraits looked at Fraser's personal interests such as horse-trading. He had detailed written accounts of the horses he had acquired as well as portraits of those who supplied them to him which included the Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan alongside whom Fraser himself is depicted in *nawabi* fashion. Other portraits mapping indigenous conceptions of space in the Delhi countryside included groups of villagers with their cattle. A group portrait of village headmen posing with Fraser's financial advisor had inscriptions recording information on the tax burdens of the area they came from. Fraser was a settlement officer, and it was his job to fix tax burdens upon surveying the productivity of lands following the takeover by the

East India Company in 1806. Another seemingly idyllic group portrait, of the villagers of Ranneah, listed each individual in an attempt to understand how pastoral communities were organised.

The corporeality of portraits in the *Fraser Album* is another lens through which Sharma examined the performative self of the individual as a modality of resistance to the colonial gaze. She looked at female portraiture in the album: the body of the *nautch* girl, as performers who provided entertainment were called. The artist Hulas Lal made these portraits between 1815 and 1820 for James Baillie Fraser who used to send his brother, William, memos of the drawings that he wished for. In the smaller Mughal courts, it was a matter of prestige to make portraits featuring courtly pleasures. The spatiality of these images were standardised with a group of performers on the left including the *nautch* girl and the observer with a *hookah*, implicated in an explicit form of spectatorship. European officers emulated courtly culture and some, like James Skinner, even maintained his own troupe of performers. He handed out pictorial souvenirs depicting his troupe to his guests. However, the portraits in the *Fraser Album* were removed from this courtly setting and operated at a personal, even intimate, level. James Fraser's diary entries provide the context for the portraits that were made during private sittings in the Fraser residence with a local artist, the dancer and James Fraser in attendance. The sideways pose of the dancer in her diaphanous clothing exposed

much of the body for the onlooker, and an English inscription described her as "a dancing woman of Delhi in the usual undress". The differences in the spatial aspects of Indic against European representations of the female performer reveal much about the access that these performers had to the households of European men. These close-up portraits against plain and pale backdrops turned the sitters into objects of the beholder's gaze. They allowed for a sustained scrutiny of the *nautch* girl that was similar to the ethnographic drawings driven by orientalist curiosity. The *nautch* involved a performative spectrum of dance, song, music and gesture, possibly including narrative sequences, and the *nautch* girl was in the unique position of holding the gaze of the onlooker until she decided to shift the mood by changing the trajectory of the dance. The portraits were not simply likenesses of the performers but also the effect of this performance. The gaze of the performers in response to the colonial gaze subverted the model of spectatorship of the *nautch* and in some depictions the sitters seemed to be able to negotiate her own visuality. These documents of the European fascination for female performers raised questions of their agency in the creation of these works.

Lastly, Sharma looked at the colonial era *muraqqa* (album) as a category, and the Company *kalam* (literally meaning writing instrument) or the sensibility of the times. The hand of the artist trained in the Mughal manner made for a labour-intensive construction of the folios, but the labour of the artists and that of the sitters is absent from current narratives of looking at the *Fraser Album*. Is there another way to look at these paintings and the regimes of labour that they encapsulated within the images, Dr. Sharma asked. **– R.G.T.**

Dr. Yuthika Sharma speaks during 'Fraser Album Unbound: Decolonising Company Painting in 19th-century India'

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

"We are The Mirror as well as the Face in it"; Rumi

Classical Indic beauty in the Visual Arts of the Mughal World

January 19th, 20th, & 21st, 2022, 6:15 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Molly Emma Aitken (Associate Professor in the Art History Department at The Graduate Center, CUNY & the Art Department at CUNY's City College of New York)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom

These three sessions introduce the preeminent mood in Southasian arts during the Mughal era: erotic love. The theme of eros transcended religion, ethnicity and geographic ties, political affiliation and intellectual heritage to foster and even symbolise social cohesion. Eros was a thematic medium of seeming infinite depth and breadth into which singers, painters and poets could fold myriad layers of intricate meaning for people of spiritual and urbane knowledge to discern. It became a way of thinking about all forms of difference and about the yearning for all forms of cohesion, above all for the yearning to unite with the divine. Eros triggered the lowest and the highest in the human soul, and in works of art about love, people discovered one another's sensibilities and acumen. Love, beautiful and thrilling, offered the most exalted mood for the expression of creative genius. In the Islamicate world, India was the land of love so that eros was also, arguably, a poetics of longing for life in the subcontinent. This is an art history masterclass, and all three sessions focus on Mughal responses in the visual arts to the love iconography of classical Indian literature and music. The first

session introduces Mughal eros through a single remarkable masterpiece: the illustrated 1591 Hindi poetic treatise by Keshavdas, called the *Rasikapriya*, that the master painter Sahibdin prepared with his workshop at Udaipur for the Maharana of Mewar in the 1630s. The second session is about paintings that cast ancient Indian archetypes of female beauty, like the *alasya kanya*, as beloveds in Mughal albums or *muraqqa*; *muraqqa* were bound codices of framed painting and calligraphy. The third is about the circa 1760s Bundi/Kota-style 'Boston *Ragamala*,' so-called because it is at the Boston Museum of

Fine Arts. With these three topics, we wade into the ocean of *sringara*, the aesthetic mood of eros, in Mughal times.

Day 1: Classical Indic Eros: Sahibdin's Illustrated *Rasikapriya* of Keshavdas

Day 2: The Hindu Idol: Mughal receptions of classical Indic aesthetics

Day 3: For the Love of Music and Painting: the 'Boston *Ragamala*'

Detail from a page of an illustrated Rasikapriya by Keshavdas, Sahibdin and his workshop, c. 1630, Mewar Opaque watercolor on paper, Government Museum of Art, Udaipur

Buddhist Aesthetics

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

PALA series

March 23rd, 30th & April 06th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Pia Brancaccio (Associate Professor of Art History Drexel University, Philadelphia, USA)

More details will be made available on our website shortly.

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

Sudhir Patwardhan, Street Play, 1981

This report will delve into the *Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory* (ACT) course as it moved through late September to its conclusion in December. A detailed report on the first month of the course is available in the October–December 2021 edition of the *Quarterly*, which can be accessed on our website.

The semester-long ACT course came to a close on 17th December, concluding a whirlwind journey traversed over four intense months of exploration, reading, critique and analysis. In this time, we traced the foundations of Western philosophical thought, the meandering and often conflicting routes taken in the establishment of the discipline of art history, and tackled the myriad complexities of modernity, experienced through the work of artists, writers, philosophers and practitioners in South Asia as well as within Euro-American contexts. Traversing the anxieties, ambivalences as well the periodic euphoria of the modern age across the 19th and 20th centuries, the course concluded within a contemporary imagination that seems unmoored in many ways, and yet remains deeply entrenched within the same foundational questions we began with. Thus, in a beautiful way, we managed to answer no questions definitively, but instead enriched the questions themselves, revealing new and different perspectives through each class.

Late September saw us transition from a rigorous grounding within Western philosophical thought into an investigation of the origins of the discipline of art history. We had the privilege of being led through this terrain of multiple and simultaneous histories by Ranjit Hoskote and Nancy Adajania, renowned cultural theorists, curators and scholars whose collaboration with Jnanapravaha has gone back to its very inception. Over four sessions that spanned the history of Western art, Ranjit Hoskote first demonstrated how the very idea of 'the West' was itself an unhelpful lens to understand a pre-colonial world of confluence. Nancy Adajania traced these ideas further and came to focus on the development of art history as a discipline within colonial South Asia through the 19th and early 20th centuries, revealing how art and art history were central within a political project of identity formation as well as resistance.

Through October, we went further into the questions of identity, ambivalence, collaboration and resistance within the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries as they gave form to what we now understand as modernity. We began our investigation by first grappling with the idea of the sublime, through two wonderfully participatory lectures by the writer and cultural critic Aveek Sen. Centring the question of whether the sublime is within the object contemplated or within us, the audience, as we contemplate it, we enveloped ourselves in the opera of Wagner, the art of Turner and the poetry of Wordsworth, engaging in a lively discussion on the space between experience and understanding. In Dr. Romita Ray's lecture on the evolution of the picturesque within colonial art and architecture, we saw the attempts of state power to bring order and control onto the land and societies of the colonial world. Coming as it did within a context defined both by the delirium of the sublime as well as the desire for control symbolised by colonial power, the picturesque emerged as a precarious bridge that nonetheless had a significant impact on emergent visual mediums such as photography.

The fertile ground these lectures laid out primed us to delve into two fundamental frameworks that have defined our world over the last five hundred years, namely colonialism and capitalism. Over two lectures, Dr. Jaya Kanoria, Course Director of the *Indian Aesthetics* programme here at Jnanapravaha, introduced Edward Said's seminal 1978 book *Orientalism* as a theoretical ground from which to analyse systems of colonial knowledge production. Beginning with Said's original arguments, Dr. Kanoria led us through a nuanced reading of the text, while also highlighting important criticisms of Said's methods through the work of more contemporary scholars both within and outside of the field of postcolonial studies. In her second lecture, Dr. Kanoria specifically looked at the changing roles of museums – especially those with colonial origins – in contemporary culture, engaging the participants in a lively discussion on how the histories of colonial

extraction (both cultural and material) should be dealt with today. In the final two sessions before Diwali break, Dr. Saroj Giri took us through the second fundamental framework of modernity, that of capitalism. The sessions led outwards from Karl Marx's analysis of capitalism in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* to explore the phenomena of alienation, ambivalence and the restless anxieties of capitalism through the lens of popular and avant-garde cinema, leading us in this way back to the work of Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt School.

Refreshed and invigorated after a short Diwali break, we regrouped with enthusiasm for Prof. Iftikhar Dadi's lectures on modernism. By de-centring Europe and approaching the cultural spheres of modernity through a decidedly transnational perspective, Prof. Dadi's riveting sessions rejected established discourses of the 'centre-periphery' to reveal more confluential narratives. Ideas of nationalism and transnationalism were closely examined, specifically in relation to changing political circumstances in South Asia through the 20th century. Prof. Dadi's warm and free-flowing approach proved to be especially encouraging as it allowed for particularly lively discussions and question-answer sessions with participants. As we segued from an analysis of modernity within the framework of art into architecture and the built environment, questions brought to the table in Prof. Dadi's sessions were expanded through Rupali Gupte and Prasad Shetty's lectures. In the first of two sessions, Prof. Shetty laid out a rich philosophical ground from which to conceptualise space, bringing together ideas from Indian intellectual traditions in conjunction with the Western canon we had so far been steeped in. Prof. Gupte expanded this ground in her session by leading us through their extended practice, intersecting art, urban design, institution building, research and curation. Addressing a cohort of participants whose own interests and practices were widely interdisciplinary, their sessions generated an especially enthusiastic response.

Chughtai's book cover designs for modern poets Faiz, NM Rashid, Fehmida Riaz

A question that lay at the heart of the modernist project, and one that informed much of the discussion in these sessions was that of agency, both in an individual and collective capacity. In her final lecture for the course, Nancy Adajania addressed this question by bringing her own extensive practice as a curator into the classroom, leading us through the work of artists whose work has consistently been concerned with identity, agency, assertion and resistance. Over an especially stimulating discussion, she addressed the need for having a strong stance for social justice and actively engaging with the politics of visibility and invisibility within an art world dictated by capitalism. From this space of practice, we were able to traverse with greater clarity into Prof. Y.S. Alone's rigorous theoretical arguments deconstructing the logic of Hindu caste society and the ongoing history of violence and marginalisation that is an everyday reality across every sphere of Southasian life. Over three intense lectures, Prof. Alone reflected on established discourses of modernity and the discipline of postcolonial studies, critically revealing their refusal to address the centrality of caste in determining who were acknowledged as modern subjects and citizens. Through careful engagement with the writings of 19th century anti-caste social reformer Jyotirao Phule and the ground-breaking work of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, we looked at the making of the modern Indian nation state politically, as well as culturally. In an especially riveting final lecture, Prof. Alone took us through the work of artists whose work had consistently stood as a challenge to entrenched ideas of modern art. By also presenting the work of contemporary artists whose works are actively redefining the ways in which identity, resistance, anti-caste struggle and justice are understood, Prof. Alone opened up an immensely productive space for discussion and understanding.

December brought with it a slight shift in gears, as we moved from the space of theory and practice to focus on the *medium*. Photography, the quintessential child of modernity and a medium that has become the most ubiquitous language of communication in our contemporary world, was where we trained our attention first, beginning with a session with Prof. Suryanandini Narain. Over a lecture which analysed visual culture within South Asia as a ground from which to look at the emergence and later proliferation of photography, Prof. Narain laid out a productive conceptual ground from which to understand photography both within a colonial context as well as more vernacular locations of family albums and
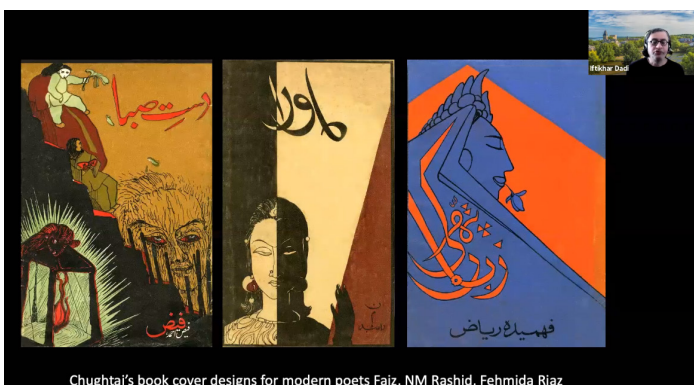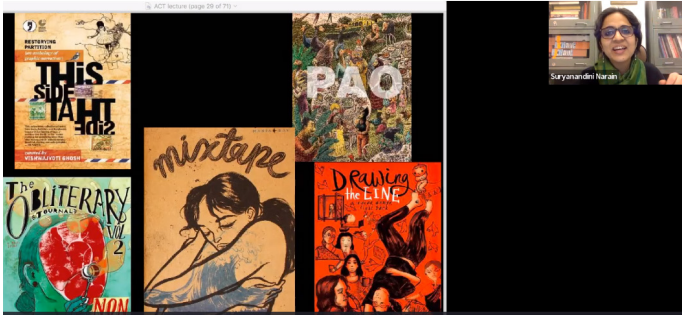
private images. The fact that this session generated one of the most interactive question-answer sessions of the course was testament to both Prof. Narain's generous engagement with a wide variety of questions, but also reflected the deep need for more accessible scholarship on photography from South Asia. In the second session, Prof. Sasanka Perera critically examined the unstable relationship between photography and its use as a research tool, specifically within the context of social anthropology. Drawing from his recent book, *The Fear of the Visual? Photography, Anthropology and the Anxieties of Seeing,* Prof. Perera's lecture considered particular nodes of this instability, from the ethics around the depiction of research subjects to the ambivalence of the photographic image within narrative construction, with broader discussions around contemporary contexts such as the selfie and the implications of publishing photographs of protests.

Over the final week of the course, we had the opportunity to welcome two contemporary artists into the classroom, whose work and perspectives both broadened and complicated theoretical discourses on art, art history, aesthetics and practice. Inter-disciplinary artist and scholar Amitesh Grover introduced us to his multifaceted practice – from which I will highlight two bodies of work here – beginning with a performance piece titled *Kafka's Castle*, wherein Grover had over the course of six months donned the role of a 'worker' of the technology corporation HCL Tech Pvt. Ltd. as an exercise in 'occupational realism'. To quote him, "By going to 'work' every day, I embedded a series of performance acts that somehow allowed me to highlight the structure of social and political relations

with all its ambiguities. I wanted to depict labour or labouring bodies, placed right next to the artist's body." Situating this work within a broader context of embodied and disembodied practice, Grover also presented an ongoing body of work titled *Velocity Pieces,* which takes the form of a public billboard where a new poetic text in the form of an instruction is revealed every day to an audience of a general public consisting of passersby. In the last session of the course, we welcomed sound and intermedia artist Suvani Suri who led us distinctly away from the bastions of language as well as visual art into a history of the more unexplored yet primordial space of sound, both as experience through the means of listening as well as a medium for the production of art in the modern age through advancements in recording technology. In a fascinating lecture that spanned the modern history of sound art, we encountered the work of practitioners who were concerned both with the nature of sound in the abstract, as in Alvin Lucier's seminal 1969 piece, *I Am Sitting in a Room,* to more contemporary works which look at the evidentiary possibilities of sound, as explored within the work of Turner Prize-winning artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan.

In an unexpected schedule shift that resulted in the postponement of our last session by a day, we were able to hold a reading session on Marx along with a feedback session before the last lecture. Reading Chapter 1 of *Capital* together as a group, purely through Marx's own terms proved to be an immensely rewarding exercise as we were able to focus closely on Marx's method of analysis and the terms by which he defined the functioning of capitalist society. Returning to Marx once again at the end of the course brought us back in a deeply meaningful way to a space of critical and methodical unpacking, and a deeper understanding of the dialectical relationships between theory and practice which had been a vital conceptual framework throughout these last four months.

Bringing a course of this magnitude and scale to a successful conclusion has been both immensely challenging as well as a deeply rewarding experience. In moving forward, we carry many important lessons forward on the organisation and pacing of an online course with a large and global cohort of participants. Despite its rigour and intensity, the course generated a sustained and enthusiastic response through its run. We very much look forward to organising a new edition of the ACT course soon. *– A.T.*

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Multiple Modernisms: Europe, Asia and Beyond

January 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th, February 5th, 12th, 19th, & 26th, 2022, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM IST | Dr. Chaitanya Sambrani (Art Historian and Curator, Australian National University, Canberra)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom

S. Sudjojono, Cap Go Meh, c. 1940, Oil on canvas, 73 x 51 cm
Coll: Galeri Nasional Indonesia (National Gallery of Indonesia), Jakarta

This series of eight seminars will explore histories of modernism in the visual arts over a century-long span starting in the late 1860s. It will present an introduction to modernist trajectories in Euro-American art (primarily France, Germany and USA) in juxtaposition to coeval and contrapuntal developments in three Asian contexts (India, Indonesia and Japan). In doing this, the seminars will interrogate the originary mythologies of modernism including the privileged position usually ascribed to white heterosexual masculinity. Having first introduced the mainstream narrative of the 'heroic quarter' characterised by rapid experimentation and multiple 'isms' in European art, the seminars will consider differential developments in Asian art. The three Asian contexts selected for study will be analysed as instances of deep entanglement with the narrative of Euro-American modernity alongside the concomitant invention of

Gulammohammed Sheikh, Returning Home After Long Absence, 1969-73, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm, Coll: Ram and Bharati Sharma, New Delhi

tradition. The impact of colonisation and imperialism on artistic modernity will be discussed together with anti-colonial and nationalist aspirations, and impulses towards decolonial solidarities. Students will be introduced to the careers of significant artists and theorists even as histories of art are explicated in light of political histories.

Euro-American trajectories
- The analytical revolution : avant-garde; 'heroic quarter'
- Europe and others: expressionism and the 'primitive'; surrealism and the 'unconscious'
- After the rain: trans-Atlantic developments post-1945

Asian Modernisms: India, Indonesia, Japan
- Mimicry, agency and improvisation in the 19th century
- Revival, return and reinvention: nationalism and pan-Asianism
- Vernacular and cosmopolitan modernisms
- Oppositions and alternatives to national trajectories
- Politics and narrative: towards the contemporary

Fee structure: – Rs. 8,000 | Student Discount (subject to verification) – Rs. 4,000

Urban Imaginaries: Velocity, Aesthetics, Power

February 1st, 8th, & 15th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Dr. Christoph Lindner (Professor of Urban Studies and Dean of The Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, University College London)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom

Draped, Copenhagen (Photo: Gordon Williams/Unsplash)

Against the backdrop of accelerated living, climate capitalism, and pandemic urbanism, this series of three interrelating seminars explores the generative force of 'urban imaginaries' in transforming spaces, conditions, and communities in contemporary cities. From slow art and green tech to the speed-space of globalisation and the aesthetics of lockdown, the seminars focus in particular on the ways in which urban creativity both critiques and contributes to global trends in city planning, design, and regeneration.

Prof. Lindner, in the first seminar, will speak of the velocity and consider the tensions between fast and slow in visions of sustainable urban futures, in the second seminar he will discuss the aesthetics and address the instrumentalisation of creative practice in urban displacement and dispossession, and in the final seminar he will focus on power and seek to understand some of the forces remaking cities today, particularly under recent pandemic conditions of restricted mobility and social-spatial distancing.

Day 1. Velocity: Speed-Space in the Global City

Day 2. Aesthetics: Arts of Displacement

Day 3. Power: Remaking Cities

Fee structure: – Rs. 3,000 | Student Discount (subject to verification) – Rs. 1,500

Ethics, Aesthetics and the Historical Dimension of Language

A seminar series on the selected writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer

April 13th, 20th & 27th, 2022, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Arun Iyer (Associate Professor of Philosophy, IIT Bombay), Prof. Pol Vandevelde (Professor of Philosophy, Marquette University, USA)

Online Seminar Series | Platform: Zoom
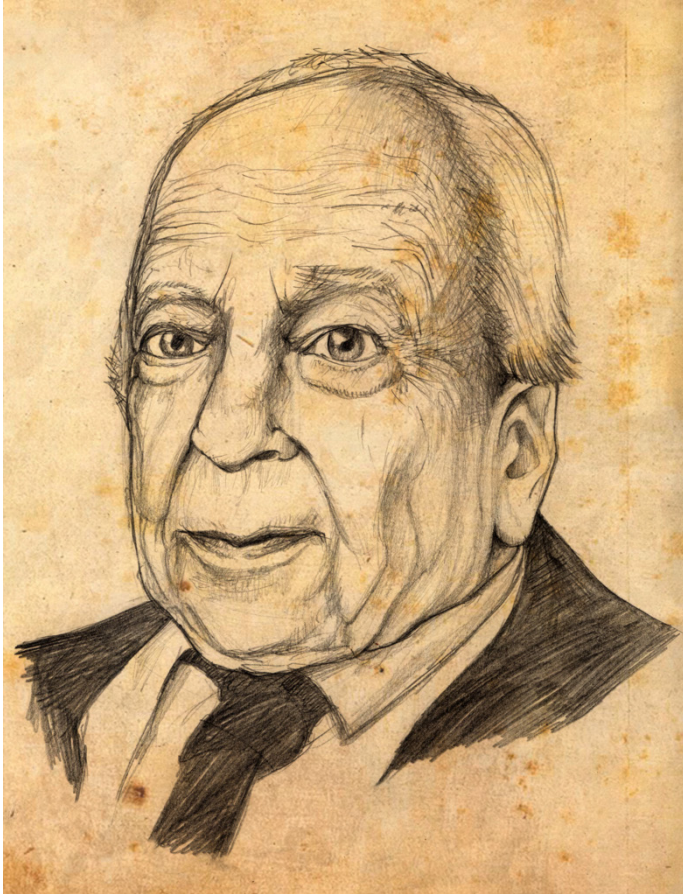
This series of three seminars will delve into some of the most important writings of German continental philosopher Hans Georg-Gadamer on ethics, aesthetics and language. Translated for the first time into English by Profs. Iyer and Vandevelde, these writings form the core of their latest published volume on Gadamer's writing. The seminars will critically explore Gadamer's ethical project and provide an overview of his aesthetic work, focussing especially on his writings on ancient ethics, including the moral philosophy of Aristotle and]\7 on practical philosophy. Gadamer's writings on art and language, specifically his examination of poetry, opera and painting among other art forms, and the topics of artistic language and translation will hold particular attention within this series.

Portrait of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002)

Political Philosophy Series

Panoptical Views on Politics *in collaboration with Asia Society India Centre*

Is Nationalism Necessary?

September 24th, 2021, 6:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Prof. Sunil Khilnani (Professor of Politics and History, Ashoka University)

Prof. Sunil Khilnani speaks during 'Is Nationalism Necessary?'

The third session of the lecture series 'Panoptical Views on Politics' was titled 'Is Nationalism Necessary'. The lecture was delivered by Prof. Sunil Khilnani (Prof. of Politics and History, Ashoka University). It was moderated by Prerna Singh (Mahatma Gandhi Associate Professor of Political Science and International Studies, Brown University).

In this lecture, Prof. Khilnani introduced the history and broad interpretation of nationalism, considered the insights as well as the limits of the academic understanding of nationalism, and raised the important question, 'what forms or definitions of nationalism might be justifiable under present conditions?'.

The discussion about the history of nationalism was opened by Prof. Khilnani by characterising nationalism as a 'modern' phenomenon. According to him, the concept began to take root between the 18th and 19th centuries, as an early critique of elitism in Europe. Referring to the works of the French revolutionary, Frere, he remarked that the early form of nationalism was a call to revolution for the French working class against the parasitic extraction by the elite. The Greek struggle that followed the French Revolution resulted in the spread of universal ideas such as liberty, equality and fraternity in all of Europe. Thus, the French Revolution was the sound horn of nationalism. However, the trend was met with currents of resistance in German scholarship. The early scholars of German Romanticism raised the alarm to preserve diverse ways of living in the face of 'abstract rationalism' espoused as the ideal of 'nationalism'.

Further, Prof. Khilnani traced three historical 'waves' of nationalism. According to his analysis, the first wave was experienced in Europe due to the breakdown of internal solidarity of the working class and a general discontent with the ideology of exploitation. This led to the formation of early nation-states in Europe. Following the Second World War, the second wave of nationalism was experienced as a result of the breakdown of colonial empires and the anti-colonial nationalist movements in Asia and Africa. Finally, the third wave of nationalism was experienced as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union, which birthed new nation-states in Northern Asia and Eastern Europe.

Providing academic insights into nationalism, and narrowing the discussion towards the Indian context, Prof. Khilnani offered Ernest Gellner's analysis of the nationalist mission by illustrating the power of nationalism as a tool in the hands of the aspiring elite to replace existing regimes of power. He referred to the works of Cambridge historian Anil Seal to illustrate the same in the Indian context. He also offered an alternative narrative of 'modular nationalism' from the works of Benedict Anderson, according to whom the rise of nationalism is the product of modern industrial and technological progress.

Steering the discussion towards the question of nationalism in India, Prof. Khilnani traced three trends of nationalist thinking in India. The first trend, which was a modular sort of nationalism, was espoused by thinkers like V.D. Sawarkar and M.S. Golwalkar. This nationalism emulated the German model of a single ethnic identity claiming a geographical space. The second trend was that

Prof. Sunil Khilnani and Dr. Prerna Singh in conversation during 'Is Nationalism Necessary?'

which was espoused by minority leaders such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Muhammad Ali Jinnah who were looking back at the plight of minority communities in those European nations that had a mixed population. Finally, the third trend was that of nationalism that was formulated by the Congress party. This trend made claims of internal consistency within the different social identities that were competing in India. The commonality between these trends seems to be the language of identity. It is the stark effort to delineate friend and foe, citizen and alien, and/or us and them.

The limits of nationalism as a concept lie exactly in this language of identity and the fluidity of the concept of what constitutes the 'us' or the 'we'. It is the possibility of redefining the meaning of the nation through seemingly innocent administrative adjustments in the constitution. Today, in the age of globalisation, the nature of the nationalist project is also changing, and new problems are emerging from it. The need for global cooperation to tackle challenges like climate change demands that we redefine our ideas of nationalism. However, it is important that the nationalist project continues, lest the more prosperous nations find inroads into the struggling nations to carry out exploitative commerce again. In conclusion, the answer to the question 'is nationalism necessary?' was answered affirmatively by Prof. Khilnani. However, he remarked, in its fluidity, the project of nationalism can neither be fully trusted nor controlled.

The discussion was followed by an exhaustive round of Q&A. Questions regarding the various trends of sub-nationalism, the struggle of different identities to assert themselves, and the current political scenario in India were discussed. **– R.J.**

The King is Dead: Islamism and the Escape from Sovereignty

October 29th, 2021, 6:30 - 8:00 PM IST | Dr. Faisal Devji (Professor of Indian History at the University of Oxford and Fellow of St. Antony's College)

It's a cliche that can only be forgiven in light of its invocation at the end of the second year of a global pandemic – we are living through unprecedented times. While there's no denying that the roots of turmoil in our local, national and global politics run deep, it's difficult to ignore the sense that it's only over the past few years that the language we took for granted and meanings we seem to have broadly agreed upon have come undone. We have witnessed the rise of illiberal democracies; seen religion not just inflect or intrude upon, but assume a central, majoritarian

weight in shaping policy and law; we have worried about whether the centre will hold. All manner of once abstract, perhaps even dry 'isms' now inhabit contested terrain. But a year in which the Taliban seeks to credibly perform the administrative and bureaucratic busywork of government is surely one in which conversations about Islamism, in particular, assume added urgency and significance.

'Islamism' is used inaccurately and often derogatorily to encompass whatever it is that people imagine,

and indeed, fear, when it comes to 'political' and 'politicised' Islam. It has been made to stand apart from fundamentalism, a term which evokes strains of thought rather than specific ideological projects.

Dr. Faisal Devji speaks during 'The King is Dead: Islamism and the Escape from Sovereignty'

Prof. Faisal Devji's lecture offered a subtle and sophisticated exploration of the multiple, deep contradictions inherent in Islamism. These tensions – the tension between religious and political authority being the most vivid among them – trace their origins to the latter half of the 19th century, to the emergence of 'Islam' and 'Muslim' as names and identifiers that are themselves intertwined with rupture – much of it wrought by colonialism, but some of it also the product of creative and entrepreneurial endeavours by the colonised.

Religion's claims to having distinct and singular authority rest on secular terms of engagement, on an acknowledgement that it lies apart from other aspects of life – particularly politics and economics. These claims represent a kind of erasure or negation of religion's own origins in pursuit of its ideological ambitions. In forcing a break with pre-colonial traditions, courtly norms and kingly authority, colonialism provided the impetus for Islam to embark on such a journey, to define itself in concrete terms as a way of being and doing – a way for Muslims to belong and to be identified as belonging. Islam and Hinduism were tacitly encouraged to grow into self-governing systems, self-perpetuating and influential but distinct from the colonial apparatus. Sharia law became the organising logic or 'essence' of Islam, and caste assumed the same significance in Hinduism – developments that were neither entirely organic nor inorganic. Colonised but free to proselytise, Islam grew both rapidly and immensely. But as pan-Islamic

movements made clear, a rejection of pre-colonial traditions around kingship meant that its claims to power could now be articulated only in European terms.

A pronounced remove from theology and an intrinsic reliance on Western frames of reference were evident even with the rise of Islamism, described by Prof. Devji as the last of the Cold War ideologies. It was conceptualised as a complete, coherent system in the vein of capitalism and communism, but doomed to a certain datedness, given the imminent demise of the ideological state. Tied as it is to fundamentalism and extremism in popular parlance, it's important to note that Islamism has a legacy of its own, one that was shaped by modernists such as Sir Syed Ahmed Khan as well as orthodox Islamists, with both groups invested in the idea of social transformation premised on an Islamic 'rationalisation' and 'systematisation' of laws and consciousness.

As successors to the modernists – chronologically if not entirely in spirit – Islamists had to grapple with the reality of both inherited and independently cultivated political ambitions in the context of newly emergent states which exercised their own claims to power and over the public imagination. Islamists such as Abul Al'a Maududi conceived of a society in which sovereignty was absolute and rested only with God; adherence to Sharia law was 'second nature,' guided by religious authorities; and the state was an effective administrative instrument and lacked ultimate authority. Politics, with its potential to undermine religion, provoked anxiety – democracy even more so. Islamism struggled to reconcile the temporality of politics with the archaism of Sharia law, countering allegations of hierarchy and inequity with a problematic logic of complementarity and segregation. Sovereignty, considered to rest with God and as such, 'above' the constitution, was rendered particularly vulnerable to competing claims by extra-constitutional actors.

The rejection of pre-colonial kingship traditions, the articulation of power in Western and even Christian terms, a deep suspicion of the state, the aspiration towards self-regulating societies that adhered to age-old laws in the face of present-day concerns – these are multiple and weighty contradictions, and Prof. Devji concluded that they held the seeds of Islamism's decline and demise. Islamism certainly exists, but it is a doomed project that is evolving in multiple directions even as we speak – into a neoliberal, marketplace Islam where consumption, commodification and

Dr. Ambreen Agha in conversation during 'The King is Dead: Islamism and the Escape from Sovereignty'

custom coexist with various degrees of ease and unease; into media-driven mobilisations, loose collectives that are outraged by transgressions such as 'insults' and 'blasphemy' that remain embedded in a Christian vocabulary, and of course, militancy – the spectre of Al Qaeda and Daesh. Islamism has ultimately come undone not because of an excess of theology, but because of a loss of theology, resulting in irretrievable incompatibilities with the state as an engine of modern life.

Dr. Ambreen Agha moderated the ensuing discussion and shared her observations about the relationships between power and the instrumentalisation of religion, wondering about the possibilities for a non-political, 'social' Islam. Prof. Devji responded by asserting that the non-political is already built into Islam – in being seen as 'second nature', Sharia law was considered administrative rather than political. Moreover, the rejection of sovereignty ultimately led to a non-sovereign and non-theological society in which the state was kept in check. Maududi went so far as to repudiate the nationalist movement, which he believed was essentially idolatrous in presuming the sovereignty of the people. Even the Taliban's ascendancy in Afghanistan demonstrates the waning political viability of Islamism – it is only ideological flexibility that allows them to contend with Daesh as an enemy, or assume the mantle of modern-day governance in ways that demonstrate a minimal compliance with global norms. A member of the audience remarked on the fact that an 'essence' of Hinduism could be identified only when Hinduism itself came to be experienced as an organising totality. The same, of course, can be said for Sharia and Islam – a reminder that what we so easily describe as 'ways of life' are partly invented.

As Daesh was described as delivering an almost nihilistic blow to Islamism by deploying violence towards other Muslims, it is perhaps fitting that a conversation that had wound its way through theology, colonialism, imperialism, the Cold War and militancy ended on a note that was personal, perhaps even romantic. Poetry, entrenched in Islamic life, represents an inner freedom that can be vibrant and fulfilling, part of an unbroken tradition whose inconsistencies speak of hope and beauty rather than decline. *– T.J.*

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Announcements

PUBLIC LECTURE SERIES IN ISLAMIC AESTHETICS 2022

THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE MAMLUKS

January 28th - March 17th, 2022 - Mainly Thursdays | 6:30 – 8:30 PM IST

Online Public Lecture Series | Platform: Zoom

Mosque - Madrasa of Sultan Hasan, Cairo

3 - Ports and Shores in An Age of Sultanates: Tracing the Structures of Western Indian Ocean Trade, 1250–1500.
Roxani Margariti
10th February 2022

4 - Splendour and Might: The World of Mamluk Manuscripts
Noha Abou Khatwa
17th February 2022

5 - Judging a Book by its Cover:
An Introduction to the Ornaments and Techniques used to Decorate Mamluk Bindings
Alison Ohta
24th February 2022

6 - Mamluk Metalwork: Styles and Statements
Doris Abouseif
3rd March 2022

7 - Glazed Tiles under the Mamluks, their Origins and Successors
Arthur Millner
10th March 2022

8 - Enamelled and Gilded Glass from Syria and Egypt
Melanie Gibson
17th March 2022

1 - Mamluk Cairo:
An Architectural Panorama
Doris Abouseif
28th January 2022

2 - Building the Sultanate:
Mamluk Architecture in Bilad al-Sham
Ellen Kenney
3rd February 2022

Fee structure: – Rs. 8,000

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The Great Temple of Bobaneshwar. Lithograph from a sketch by James Fergusson

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