Jnanapravaha

JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI

QUARTERLY

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2025

CONTENTS

Director's Note

A deeply gratifying flurry of programming and teaching marked the first quarter of this academic year. A fresh cohort of 36 students signed up for our landmark yearlong course on Indian Aesthetics, both for the diploma and certificate sections, now in its 19th year at its present location, with 8 previous years at University of Mumbai, Rachna Sansad, and The Prince of Wales Museum. The hybrid format enables the global participation of renowned scholar-specialists, as well as curious-minded audiences to interact with pedagogical fervour. In addition to the prescribed syllabus, efforts are constantly made to also add dimensions which are not addressed — as in Dr. Archana Venkatesan's recent lectures on the Tamil Alvar saint Andal. The highly charged sensual poetry of Kotai/Andal became the starting point to graph the transformation of a soul from yearning for her Beloved to becoming a Goddess herself.

Alongside this, the 12-part course on the Byzantine world has been charting facets of art, faith, and power. Specialists have been edifying participants with their unsurpassable insights on its political and theological beginnings as well as geographical expanse with regard to questions of identity, gender, materiality, monumentality, and alterity. Architecture, sculpture, texts, painting, and mosaics have been signifiers applied to unpack complexities of images, iconoclasm, dress, relics, and aesthetics of light in order to recover the legacies of this millennia-long empire.

The coming months are loaded with remarkable offerings, all pristine, as is our tradition. While the Byzantine era saw the primacy of the Christian doctrine, the Renaissance witnessed philosophical upheavals wherein classical thought, Christian theology, and emerging humanism collided in unprecedented ways. How does Shakespeare address and transform this intellectual chaos? How do his plays become a vibrant arena of philosophical enquiry? Through 4 sessions/8 lectures, scholars will not only put his plays in dialogue with thinkers such as Plato, Cicero, and Montaigne, but will also argue his invention of the modern selfhood of today.

Our programming also includes a lecture on the 'Archaeology of Warp, Weft and Felt' which will make a journey back in time to the beginnings of textile manufacturing until its culmination today, pausing at signposts of transition from hides to textiles, following the journey, the mechanics of loom design, fibres, and colours, to name a few concerns.

Furthermore, two terms, 'afterlife' and 'afterimage', will be used conceptually to

understand the temporality of the photograph and the unique power of photographic images to help grapple with grief and loss. The 2-part/4-lecture series will attend to the 'fugitive registers' of images and discover the presence of resistance, resilience, and refusal.

The great *chaitya* of Amaravati will be the exemplar to explore Buddhist art and Buddhism in ancient India. The surviving monument, inscriptions, narratives, and iconographies will be examined to situate the *stupa* and its remarkable visual culture in the larger Buddhist world of thought, practice, and patronage.

Under our rubric Community Engagement, 2 stalwarts will be honoured. A dialogue on Vivan Sundaram's last work, *Six Stations of a Life Pursued*, moderated by Geeta Kapur, with multiple scholars, will situate this work within the larger oeuvres of Vivan and other artists through the lens of art historical and social issues. *Picturing Life*, a unique cinematic experience that brings Sudhir Patwardhan's paintings to life by structuring his journey as a painter, oscillating between his social and personal concerns, will be screened and followed by a discussion.

In November, the phenomenon of the Mongol hordes, their sudden arrival set in motion by Genghis Khan, and the extraordinary disruptions caused by their world-scale ambitions will be the focus of a 3-session/6-lecture series. The establishment of the largest contiguous land empire in history, their statecraft, representation of kingship, artistic and cultural worlds, monumental architecture, and object stories will lead us to an understanding of how these nomadic people from the steppes also formed an empire with a legacy of Blue and White as a global brand.

Before we end this quarter, we will visit the artistic encounters and counter-narratives of the 'Black Mediterranean' which places the sea as the medial space for artistic interactions but adds the north-south longitudinal meridians. Through 3 sessions/6 lectures, it will include forgotten narratives such as the overlooked Afro-Mediterranean chronicles, and focus on long-entwined histories of the Mediterranean and Africa.

The upcoming quarter is thus replete with promise, being a tapestry of richness and variety! Please do join us when you can as we look forward to having you amidst us.

With my warmest wishes,

Rashmi Poddar Ph.D.
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

Students and scholars of the Indian Aesthetics (IA) course are increasingly comfortable in the hybrid mode in which online students can also address queries directly to each resource scholar, ensuring a collegial atmosphere and a personal approach during the Q&A which brings each session to a brilliant close. This year, 37 students from the Indian cities of Aurangabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, New Delhi, Mumbai, Mysore, Nagpur, Pune, Raipur, and Thane, and as far afield as Dubai and New Zealand have enrolled in the course. The widespread location of our students is a matter of great satisfaction. As always, fresh graduates and experienced learners come together in the Indian Aesthetics course, benefitting from each other's strengths. Twenty-four students have enrolled in the rigorous IA Diploma where each is already receiving individual attention and feedback.

Since last year, Dr. Jaya Kanoria has facilitated a virtual tour of Jnanapravaha's heritage space in Mumbai during the informal online interaction before the course begins. This glimpse of our beautifully restored and aesthetically appointed space has resulted in students from other cities occasionally travelling to Mumbai to be present physically in class. The lecture hall boasts state-of-the-art equipment, while the reading room is a repository for rare books relating to Indian art, architecture and aesthetics, philosophy, contemporary art, and critical theory. IA sessions this year continue to be lively, and the interaction during the Q&A sessions has revealed that the IA 2025–26 cohort is curious and thoughtful in addition to being accomplished both

educationally and professionally. Approaches are varied because of the diverse background of students, giving classes a wonderful and flavourful heterogeneity.

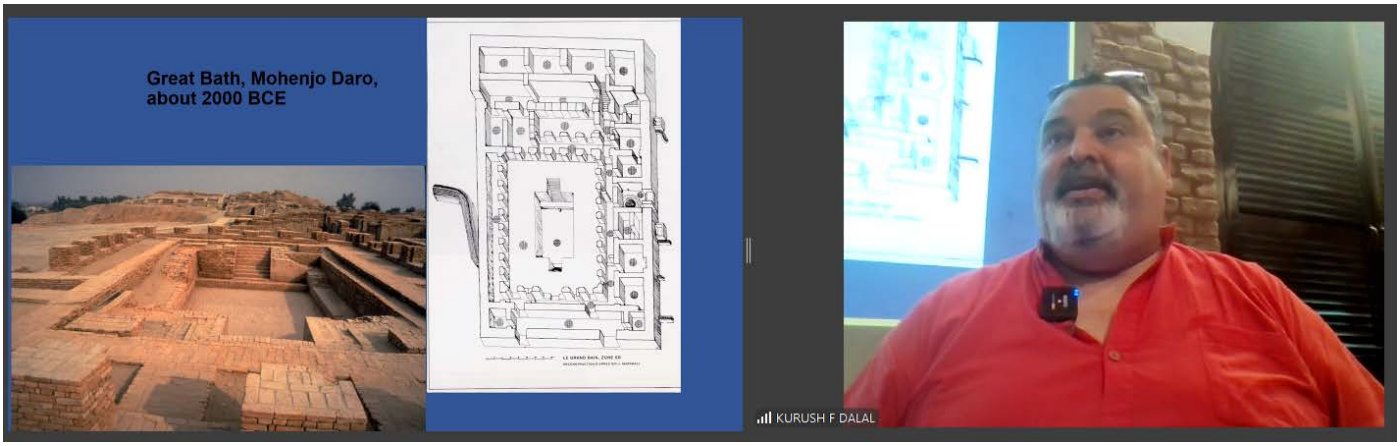
Since the last two years, the course has included a session by a contemporary Indian art practitioner, bringing in the artists Varunika Saraf in 2024 and Sumakshi Singh in 2025 to share their creative processes. Both these artists use embroidery, in addition to many other techniques including traditional and traditionally prepared materials on the one hand and sophisticated, technologically enabled methods on the other. A practice-centred view of contemporary art provides a wonderful segue into this important segment of Indian aesthetics without requiring a survey of a highly volatile, shifting field, which resists codification. The IA course continuously evolves to include current research and new subjects, and this academic year is no different: in January 2026 we will have a session by the internationally renowned Indian architect and educator Rahul Mehrotra in the Creative Processes section. We have several other fresh lectures in this year's iteration and have added five more international scholars to the faculty, further embellishing our impressive list of those who impart knowledge to our students. With this, what we perceived as a gap in the course a few years ago has been comprehensively filled; along with Dr. Crispin Branfoot's lecture on the South Indian temple which has been part of Indian Aesthetics for several years now, the newly inducted Dr. Archana Venkatesan and Dr. Kalyani Ramachandran also research South Indian aesthetics and material culture, which they will share with the class.

Classes began on 19th July 2025 and as usual mobilised the indigenous aesthetic theory of *Rasa* and Indian philosophical approaches, along with history, art history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature, and theology, using an interdisciplinary approach. This unique method to teach Indian Aesthetics was pioneered by Jnanapravaha's director Dr. Rashmi Poddar, and enables the IA course to smoothly string together 5,000 years of visual art from the subcontinent in a roughly chronological framework.

Dr. Poddar's foundational lectures used classical Indian aesthetics to explain the particular nature, form, content, and meaning of Indic art, which differs from art produced elsewhere. In her lectures, Dr. Poddar explained *Rasa* theory, first compiled by Bharata in his dramaturgical text, the *Natyashastra*. The theory became widely accepted and was elaborated by aestheticians and philosophers who finally arrived at a nine-fold scheme to classify the emotions generated in *rasikas* or the cultured and sensitive aficionados of the dramatic and poetic arts. Dr. Poddar showed in her rich, visually illustrated sessions that *Rasa* theory can be applied to visual art with extraordinary results, demonstrable in recent scholarship. Her sessions introduced IA students to the masterpieces of Indic sculpture and painting, and to the region's important artistic styles, creating interpretive frameworks for these works using the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, and the prominent philosophies of the region, especially *Advaita Vedanta* and *Samkhya*. Dr. Veena Londhe provided students a brief taste of Sanskrit poetics and an exposition of *Rasa* through the commentaries of several important philosophers, culminating in Abhinavagupta's 10th-century text, the *Rasasutra*, which introduced the ninth *rasa* called *shanta*.

Dr. Rashmi Poddar speaks during 'Classical Indian Aesthetics – Its Principles'

Since 2022, the IA module on the early art of the subcontinent brings into the course an understanding of Harappan culture, Satavahana numismatics, and Sunga terracotta through recent scholarly research. In a session that brought in the sweep of Harappan history, Dr. Kurush Dalal elaborated on the probable long-standing economic linkages between various cities in the region which are evidenced by material



Dr. Kurush Dalal speaks during 'The Harappan Civilisation: From the Beginnings of Agriculture to the Consolidation of Empire 7000 BC to 2000 BC - Mehrgarh to Rakhigarhi'

remains. Professor Naman Ahuja explored Sunga terracotta, as well as ivory and other materials from that period, showing that terracottas were likely 'mass produced'. He explained that such production was plausibly achieved through the creative combination of moulds, resulting in the manufacture of a huge number of terracotta artefacts in Sunga territory and many regions such as ancient China at the time. Dr. Shailendra Bhandare's lectures brought alive the political history and the artistic production of the Satavahana kings through the period's numismatics. Dr. Bhandare and Prof. Ahuja demonstrated that terracotta and numismatics, usually viewed as 'lesser arts', are as important to the reconstruction of history as the so called 'high' art of any period.

Dr. Archana Venkatesan's extraordinarily moving presentation of the poetry of the 9th-century Alvar poet Kotai's oeuvre and her apotheosis as the Goddess Andal held students spellbound. Even though patriarchal society did its utmost to deify Kotai, turning her into Andal, a form of the Goddess Bhu, her stunningly erotic poetry which lays bare her longing for physical union with Vishnu, slips away from this characterisation, remaining transgressive and utterly beautiful. The scholar showed how the unusual rituals and processions that are performed in Andal's worship to this day reenact her complete immersion in her longing for her chosen deity and her interactions with him. This new session will certainly animate later IA lectures on the Indian temple and Brahmanical iconography, bringing them alive for the class.

Dr. Viraj Shah's comprehensive sessions on Jainism included a thorough exposition of Jain philosophy, analysed Jain art, and included an exploration of the Jain caves of the Western Deccan, which the scholar has studied. She described and explained the inclusion of the worship of *yakshas* as well as popular Hindu deities such as Krishna into the Jain pantheon, which was used to draw more adherents into the Jain fold. She also described the advent of Jainism, related the stories of the important *tirthankaras* and tied the cardinal Jain conception of the hero as ascetic to the privileging of *vira rasa* or the heroic sentiment in the creed. According to this *kshatriya* conception, each *tirthankara* is viewed as a hero who has conquered the senses. The *tirthankara* Vardhamana is referred to as 'Mahavira' which means 'great hero' or the brave and courageous one.

In September, Dr. Jaya Kanoria's lectures on the basics of academic writing were held especially for IA Diploma students but were open to the entire class. One of the sessions was devoted to reading an academic text, mining it for elements of structure and style. This is useful for students, teaching them not only how to shape their academic content into a cogent argument or analysis but also how to read such texts to absorb their import most effectively.

From October onwards, the IA course will move into Buddhism and the art associated with the various world views that fall under this umbrella. The first quarter has launched the IA course in a manner that not only introduces but allows for a thorough engagement with the subject. **– *J.K.***

CRITICISM & THEORY

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

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

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

Conjuring Empire: Art, Faith and Power in the Byzantine World

PAST PROGRAMMES

Constantinople and the Identity of Byzantium

1. A Greek, Roman, and Christian Capital

2. A Theatre City

July 15th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Paul Magdalino (Emeritus Professor of Byzantine History at University of St. Andrews)

In the opening session of the lecture series, 'Conjuring Empire: Art, Faith and Power in the Byzantine World', eminent scholar Paul Magdalino explored two aspects of the Byzantine empire. The first considered Constantinople's identity as the New Rome, and the second, Constantinople as a city that was as much a participant as it was a grand stage, in which power and piety played a role in shaping world history.

What was it to be a Byzantine and what it was *like* to be a Byzantine? The Byzantine identity and its lived experience are situated firmly in the city of Constantinople — a city that has, and continues to, fascinate, intrigue, and amaze historians, students, and scholars. The three aspects to its identity are: Roman political and social traditions, Greek culture, and its Christian faith.

Even as we look back over centuries and refer to the inhabitants of Constantinople as Byzantines, we must remember, they called their state 'Romania' and themselves 'Romans'. To them, Constantinople was Second Rome and then New Rome.

And truly, Rome it was. Emperor Constantine (believed to have been divinely guided by the sign of a cross in the sky) founded the city on the threshold of Asia, yet made it every bit Roman. It became home for privileged aristocracy, and the city's layout, institutions, and monuments echoed Rome. The Hippodrome, the Forum, the Senate, and the Milion (Golden Milestone), are a few examples that firmly established Constantinople's Roman identity.

Forum of Constantine (*Byzantium 1200*)

Milion (*Byzantium 1200*)

While the city was Roman, its foundations were unmistakeably Greek. Built upon the town of Byzantion, the Greek language, its schools of rhetoric and philosophy, and the continued presence of pagan culture became an important facet of Constantinople's identity.

Emperor Constantine's acceptance of Christianity and making it the faith of the empire was a significant moment in world history. Yet, in the early decades there was much ambiguity. Constantine's biographer, Eusebius, describes a city where Christian shrines and pagan statues adorned the streets; where the emperor identified himself with the Sun God and also Christ's representative on Earth. In years to come, the Christian identity of Constantinople would be affirmed with the construction of Hagia Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles.

Located at what could be imaginatively called the

Prof. Paul Magdalino speaks during 'Constantinople and the Identity of Byzantium'

'centre of the world', the spotlight was always on Constantinople. In the second part of the lecture, Professor Magdalino explored the metaphor of Constantinople as a theatre city, an image first expressed in the fourteenth-century oration of Theodore Metochites. In his eyes, the city was a stage for spectacle as well as a leading actor on the world stage.

Emperor Constantine added to the existing Greek stadium and amphitheatre the Hippodrome (modelled after the Circus Maximus in Rome). Situated adjacent to the imperial palace, it represented the coming together of entertainment and imperial ritual. Theatre flourished outside the Hippodrome as well. The city often transformed into one vast stage or a network of interconnected ones. While ceremonial processions paraded imperial authority, the church developed its own theatre of piety and worship with what can be described as dramatised devotion. Here, sermons, liturgies, saintly feats, miracles, etc., became finely tuned performances. John Chrysostom, despite denouncing the theatre as pagan, frequently compared the congregations of Antioch and Constantinople in theatrical terms.

In private spaces, the culture of performance took the form of the *theatron* — literary gatherings where authors read aloud their compositions. As Professor Magdalino argues, the *theatron* intellectually brought together the ancient tradition of theatre with the drama of everyday urban life. If it wasn't for the disastrous events of the fourth crusade in 1203, the art form could well have reached greater heights.

For over a millennium, Constantinople not only played the role of the New Rome, where Roman tradition, Greek legacy, and Christian fervour came together, but it was also the stage where it was played out for the world to see. ***– A.S.***

Thinking Materially: Image, Text, and Matter in Early Byzantium

July 22nd, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Sean Leatherbury (Assistant Professor in the School of Art History and Cultural Policy at University College Dublin)

What does it mean to think materially? In the second lecture of our ongoing series on the Byzantine world, Sean Leatherbury set this question at the heart of his lecture on art in early Byzantium. To cite the American art historian Michael Ann Holly, materiality is "the meeting of materials and imagination". It is "more than a medium. A medium is that which carries a visual message and together — structure and image — they result in the thickness, the sensuous materiality of a work of art…Yet in its physical vibrancy, this special thing [materiality] possesses a certain kind of agency". If we truly understand how deeply every human object made across time is a meeting between materials and the imagination of its makers, it can transform our reading of both the mundane as well as works considered to be high art.

Beginning with a close reading of the understanding of materiality in Jewish and early Christian societies, Professor Leatherbury took us through some of the theological debates of the time. We considered early questions on the perceptibility of God, the tensions between the humanity and divinity of Christ, and the

debates on idolatry, through statues and icons in the first part of the lecture. In the Late-Antique Mediterranean, sculpture, especially large public sculptures, followed the style and forms of ancient Greece and later imperial Rome. However, with the ascendance of Christianity, public sculptures of emperors and pagan gods became increasingly rare, apart from the notable examples like Emperor Constantine's colossus sculpture in Rome and the remains of the column of Constantine in Constantinople. Christian statues were made, however, although very few examples survive to the present day. Sculpture instead moved into a more private realm, with wealthy patrons commissioning sculptures on their fountains, sarcophagi and statues of Christian saints at a much smaller scale.

One of the most enduring artforms of the Byzantine world has been the icon. In a brief outline on the importance of the icon in the early Christian world, Professor Leatherbury emphasised how the icon existed in a complicated space between a holy image and an idol. The destruction of icons and the bitter debates in the 8th-century period of iconoclasm is a testament to the complexity of images of the divine in a period also marked by the emergence of Islam to the east of the empire.

In the second part of his lecture, Professor Leatherbury focussed on floor mosaics in the early Byzantine world, a subject he has worked on in detail. While Byzantine wall mosaics have long been admired across time and have become almost a shorthand in describing the art of this empire, floor mosaics too have a very nuanced and interesting history. Emerging around the 1st century BCE in the Roman empire, mosaics were first made for floors, and only later were they adapted for walls. Through some stunning examples of floor mosaics from across the late Roman and Byzantine worlds, Professor Leatherbury highlighted the extent of planning, design and labour involved in the production of mosaics. Floor mosaics often had largely secular themes, with scenes of hunts, daily life, leisure, and domestic scenes, even if the mosaics were in religious sites like synagogues and churches, alongside palaces and private villas. Interestingly, Professor Leatherbury also mentioned that even when floors were made with large slabs of marble with no additional decoration, the stone itself was arranged so its rippling patterns mimicked ocean waves.

The addition of text to floor mosaics was also an interesting aspect of Late-Antique design. These inscriptions often detailed the donations and dedications of the patrons of churches and synagogues. Beautifully integrated within the larger designs of the mosaics, texts were as much meant to be seen as to be read. Here, we also examined the way that text was treated in the Late-Antique world. To cite Servius's *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid*, 'Virgil was not inept in speaking of a picture being 'read', since the Greek γράψαι (graph.sai) is used of both writing and drawing'. Text therefore was not meant to be separate from the visual at all, but an integral part of a public showcase of devotion, skill, patronage, and beauty.

Professor Leatherbury's session allowed for our students to get an introduction to critical aspects of the art of the Byzantine world, with sculpture, iconoclasm and mosaics being discussed in much greater detail in the following sessions of the series. – ***A.T.***

Prof. Sean Leatherbury speaks during 'Thinking Materially: Image, Text, and Matter in Early Byzantium'

The Aesthetics of Light in Byzantine Churches

July 29th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Jelena Bogdanović (Associate Professor at Vanderbilt University, USA)

Prof. Jelena Bogdanović speaks during 'The Aesthetics of Light in Byzantine Churches'

Professor Jelena Bogdanovic's central provocation is this — the experience of space is not material, but atmospheric. To marshal her thesis, the case study of the Hagia Sophia in present-day Istanbul and the Studenica Monastery in present-day Serbia were discussed.

The Hagia Sophia or 'Holy Wisdom', built and re-built between the 4th–6th centuries CE, its final form commissioned by Emperor Justinian and designed by Isidorus of Miletus and Anthemius of Tralles, is a central architectural marvel of the Byzantine empire.

Bogdanovic reframes the space, not just as one where you worship god, but one where you experience god. This requires a re-framing of the language of architecture, where in addition to purple porphyry and its Proconnesian marble, we also look at the sun and sky as part of the architecture and built environment.

The golden mosaics and the dome are not just material, but they suffuse the space as though inhabited by the divine. The marble on the floor, too, is not just material, but when lit by the sun, approximates the effect of the sea. This makes us humans, standing in this luminous maelstrom of light, "pearls being birthed in the waters of the Hagia Sophia". When you enter the space you "feel the upward pull while simultaneously perceiving earthbound descent".

To turn the study of architecture from its materiality — what it is — towards its affect — what it evokes — is to see its volume as measured in luminosity of light and reverberation of sound. This, Bogdanovic notes, is grace, inscribing the metaphysical into the perceptual. She seals this argument with a quote from the 20th-century American archaeologist Thomas Whittemore, "The Hagia Sophia is a liturgical instrument tuned by light."

The massive dome, "perforated like cheese", allows light to pour in differently, at different points of the day and year. Every minute, the space is remade. This circular movement of light, a performance, is called *'kallichoros'* in Greek, or the beautiful *choros*, where *'choros'* is both a stage and action — dance and song — that is unfolding in it.

The Hagia Sophia is a precedent-setter, not a precedent-follower, for through its architecture, we now begin to look at light and sound as essential to this new form of architecture — the pagan temples before this, Bogdanovic notes, were dark, and the Byzantines wanted the opposite, a church so plump with light, that even on Christmas, when the day is shortest, it gets the maximum exposure of light. Over time, the churches became smaller, perhaps, to retain the sense of sound.

To then see the Hagia Sophia as it is today, with speakers blaring and floors carpeted — removing the effect of the marble and absorbing the reverberation of sound — is to see how the architecture has changed, even if the built structure has remained the same.

The Studenica, too, is studied with this framework in mind. Professor Bogdanovic was part of a team of experts from various fields — astronomers, architects, civil engineers, physicists, and urban planners — to digitise the church in order to study its design principles, how light was used inside the church, being enough to be able to read during night masses, where "light harmonised church services and articulated a synesthetic experience of spiritual beauty and grace". **– *P.P.***

Iconoclasm in Byzantium and the Shaping of Theories of the Image

August 8th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Paroma Chatterjee (Professor of History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

When does an image become sacred? How does one worship it? Does such an image merely represent likeness to God, or does it have God's presence in it? What is the relation of the image to the prototype?

These were the questions of the great iconoclastic debate that swept the Byzantine empire in the 8th and 9th centuries. More than just theological hairsplitting, these investigations had political, philosophical, and cultural implications, and were at the heart of how the Byzantines related and engaged with the divine.

In her lecture, 'Iconoclasm in Byzantium and the Shaping of Theories of the Image', Professor Paroma Chatterjee explored the trajectory of the debates, the arguments of the iconoclasts and the iconophiles, and presented examples of how, subsequently, the lines between the two groups appeared to blur.

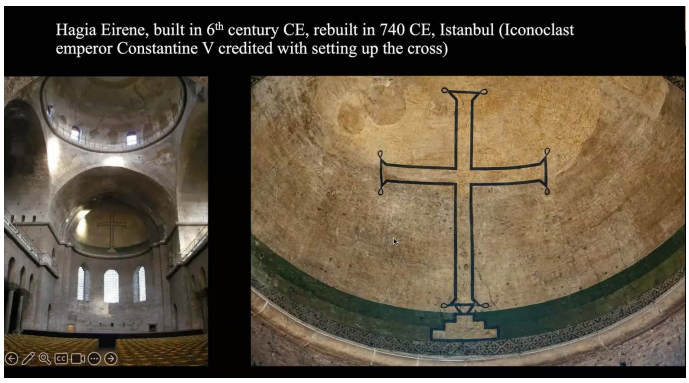
The iconophiles, led by the Basil of Caesarea, maintained that "honour shown to the image passes to the prototype", while John of Damascus distinguished between *latreia* (adoration, due only to God) and *proskynesis* (veneration, which could be given to icons). He used the idea of kinship between a father a son, (rather aptly perhaps), to explain the relationship between an icon and its prototype: a son resembles, but is not identical with his father.

Patriarch Nikephoros of Constantinople declared: "In painting there is nothing of presence." For him, an icon was only a likeness that deflected all worship and devotion towards the prototype but was distinct from it.

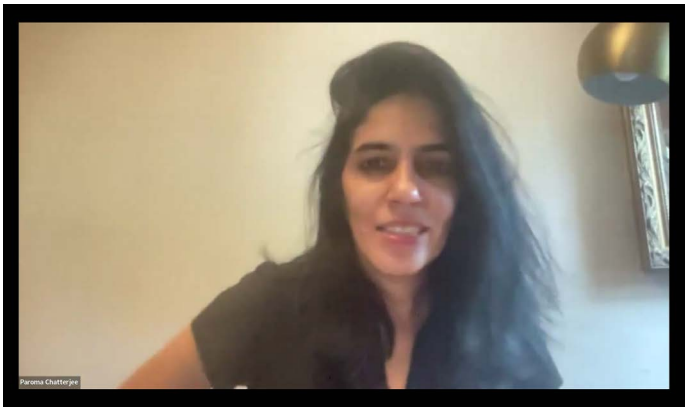
A staunch iconophile, Theodore of Stoudios took Nikephoros's views further. He stated that precisely because Christ had taken human form, images of his likeness represented the human aspect of Christ, and this could not be equated with an image of the divine Christ.

The heart of the iconoclast position was put forth in the Council of Hieria in 754 CE, and their view presented a conundrum for the iconophiles. The council said an image of Christ as human was incomplete because the painter had "circumscribed the uncircumscribable" and omitted Christ's divine aspect. But an image of Christ as human-and-divine was impossible because divinity could not be depicted. The painter was caught in a quicksand of heresy.

There was, however, one true icon of Christ, the council agreed, and that was the Eucharist — "… the bread is deified by the act of consecration." The Eucharist was the only medium where matter became presence, and therefore was sufficient. Apart from the Eucharist, the Holy Cross (as seen in the Hagia Eirene) was acceptable to the iconoclasts as it evoked memory without depicting Christ's body. Either as a tacit admission of merit in some of the iconophiles' points, or perhaps as an act of conciliation, the council prohibited the destruction of existing icons like vestments decorated with icons and church vessels, but barred the creation of new ones.



Professor Chatterjee also analysed the Chludov Psalter, a definitive image of the iconoclasm debate, created after the triumph of the iconophiles. This is an extraordinary example of how, over time, the acts of the iconophiles diluted their theological position. The image appears to equate damage and destruction to an icon of Christ with actual violence against Christ himself. So while theology denied *presence* in an image and sanctioned the use of icons and images, everyday practice often revealed contradictions, and Byzantines continued to consider icons as if they contained *presence*.



Prof. Paroma Chatterjee speaks during 'Iconoclasm in Byzantium and the Shaping of Theories of the Image'

Despite the seeming victory for the iconophiles, the debate did not entirely disappear from Byzantine history. In the 11th century, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, in dire need of war funds, melted down sacred vessels and icons. The infuriated Bishop Leo of Chalcedon condemned this act. He creatively interpreted the stance of Theodore and Nikephoros, and argued that while the portrait and the material were separate, the portrait of Christ made the vessels sacred and holy, and therefore one cannot destroy the material.

From the struggle between the iconoclasts and iconophiles emerged art that transcended itself. As the mosaics of Nea Moni exemplify, words and images come together, and instead of bringing Christ down to earth, they lift the mind towards him. **– *A.S.***

Sculpture in Byzantium: Concepts and Contexts

August 12th, 2025, 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Prof. Paroma Chatterjee (Professor of History of Art at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

Professor Paroma Chatterjee began the lecture with two images — *Laocoon and His Sons* in the Vatican (3rd century BCE–1st century CE) and Michaelangelo's *David* in the Academia in Florence (16th century). Between the sculptural excellence of the Roman empire and the Renaissance, a gap of 1,400 years almost, what brewed?

This era, the Byzantine empire, called the 'Middle Ages', is often thought of as a cultural backwater, in the shadow of the greater golden ages that bookmark it.

Chatterjee wants to first contextualise this dismissal, before dealing with its veracity. The first part of her lecture explored the historical evidence regarding sculptural objects in the Byzantine empire.

When Constantinople was founded in the 4th century, statues were brought in from other parts of the Roman empire — this was radical, for as Chatterjee notes, it was one of the most massive acts of statue transfer in recorded Western history. A statue of Helios could now be re-interpreted as one of Constantine. Another change was that pagan statues were being taken out of temples and being kept in public spaces — they were being desecrated. Zeus and Athena were now placed alongside statues of poets, animals, and characters from mythical stories. This, too, was radical — a "radical decontextualisation". Suddenly, there was a flexibility to interpret statues which might, for centuries, have been unmoored from its original context — be it a pagan temple or a Roman city.

The 3rd–4th centuries were called 'the last gap of statues', for no new statues were being made after that. Perhaps the second commandment's anxiety

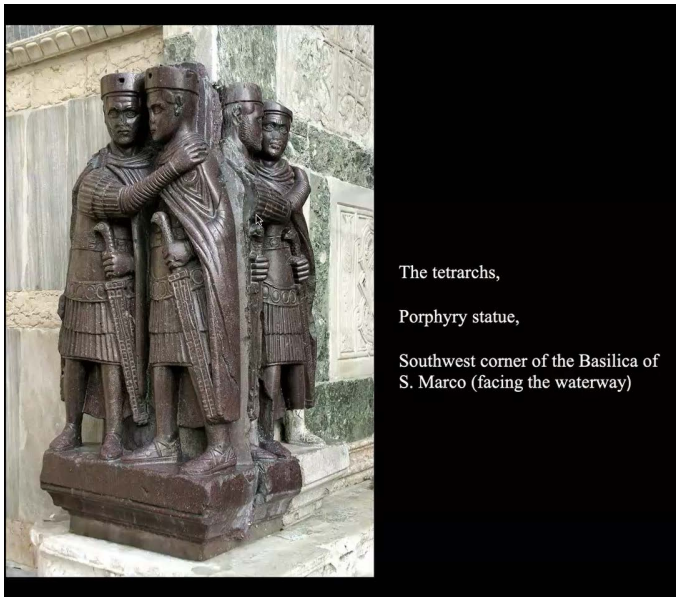
about idols seeped into the public consciousness. Or perhaps the empire's priorities shifted to mosaics, panels, metals, and tile-work. The last definitive epigraphic record of the creation of imperial statues was in the 7th century. And then, only after Michael VIII recaptured Constantinople from the Crusaders, does he mark it with an imperial statue.

While these statues were not touched by the debates around iconoclasm, for they were not religious icons, they still embodied stories which caused saints to chase away spirits from pre-Christian statues and women yearning to have sex with these statues.

The second part of the lecture focussed on two sites in Constantinople — the Hippodrome and the Forum of Constantine. Constantine deliberately made his Forum circular, instead of a square, to stand apart. His Hippodrome — literally, horse running — had statues studded into its spine, so the horses could run rounds around them. There were obelisks from Egypt and the Serpent column from Delphi, which was also used as a fountain spouting not just water, but also wine and milk.

The Quadriga, four bronze horses, looted from the Hippodrome of Constantinople, façade of the Basilica of St. Mark (now in the Museum of St. Mark).

It is important to note that the Hippodrome was



The tetrarchs,

Porphyry statue,

Southwest corner of the Basilica of S. Marco (facing the waterway)

the only place where ordinary people could meet their emperor. By around the 9th–10th centuries, the races had stopped, and the space was used instead for imperial weddings, executions, or for showcasing war booty.

The difficulty of studying Byzantine sculptures, according to Chatterjee, is the lack of a certain kind of clear evidence. Statues stood till about 1204, with the Fourth Crusade, when Venice sacked Constantinople — for they were Orthodox and not Catholic Christians. In the ensuing plunder, most of these statues were either melted, taken away, or destroyed. This was then used to fund Venice's campaign to capture the Holy Lands. (The Pope even apologised for this in 2004, its millennium anniversary.)

Between 1204 and 1261, the empire was chopped up, its booty spread out, such that even today, you see more of Byzantium in Venice than you do in Istanbul. This produced a strange circuit, for when Constantinople was built, statues from the Roman empire were pulled into the city, and now that it was sundered, the statues were carted back, a diffusion, or perhaps, a return? – ***P.P.***

Announcements

Jnanapravaha

CRITICISM AND THEORY

"WHAT A PIECE OF WORK IS MAN": SHAKESPEARE AND THE STAGING OF PHILOSOPHY

October 8th – November 4th, 2025 | Mainly Tuesdays | Lecture: 6:30 – 8:30 pm IST

FEE: Rs. 5,000 | Online Platform: Zoom | Register: www.jp-india.org

Procession of Characters from Shakespeare's Plays by an unknown 19th-century artist

This four-part lecture series examines how William Shakespeare's works engage with philosophical ideas from the classical period alongside the intellectual currents of his own time. The Renaissance was a period of profound transformation in thought, marked by the revival of classical philosophy, the rise of humanism, and the questioning of traditional beliefs about authority, morality, free will, power and the human condition. Through close readings of his key plays, this series will uncover how Shakespeare grappled with these ideas, weaving them into his characters, plots, and themes in ways that continue to resonate today.

08th October 2025 - **Prof. Paul Kottman**
How the Classics made Shakespeare

14th October 2025 - **Prof. Paul Kottman**
Shakespeare's Othello, Love and Antigone

28th October 2025 - **Prof. Emma Smith**
Wit, Wisdom and Virtue in Shakespeare's Philosophy

04th November 2025 - **Prof. Ewan Fernie**
Call him… Shake-scene

Jnanapravaha

INDIAN AESTHETICS

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WARP, WEFT AND FELT

KURUSH DALAL

October 9th, 2025 | Tea: 6:00 PM, Lecture: 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Free Public Lecture

Textile Fragment, 15th–16th centuries

Clothes maketh the man, a saying that goes back to Homer is proof enough of their importance. But whence came clothes? When did they transition from hides to textiles? What journey did these textiles take? What went into their manufacture, their design, the making of looms, etc? What were the sources of their fibres and their colours? To understand the answers to these questions, we have little choice but to turn towards archaeology and its allied disciplines. Come with Jnanapravaha and Dr. Dalal on a journey back in time to the beginnings of textile manufacture and the culmination of their adventure today.

Kurush F. Dalal has a B.A. in Ancient Indian History and History from the University of Mumbai, an M.A. in Archaeology as well as a Ph.D. on the early Iron Age in Rajasthan, both from Deccan College, Pune University. Subsequently he has excavated the sites of Sanjan, Chandore, and Mandad: the last site has revealed a hitherto unknown Indo-Roman Port site with ancient antecedents. Dr. Dalal also actively works on Memorial Stones and Ass-curse Stones in India and dabbles in Numismatics, Defense Archaeology, Architecture, Ethnoarchaeology and allied disciplines. He is the Co-Director of the Salcette Explorations Project. He has published extensively and taught widely. Dr. Dalal inherited a catering business and has been researching food all his life. In the last decade, he has lectured on Food and Archaeology, and Culinary Anthropology, and has run The Studying Food Workshop since 2019. As a culinary museum consultant, and an archaeological museum consultant he is currently working on a corporate multi-museum project. He is now Chief Education Officer (CEdO) at Gyaan Factory.

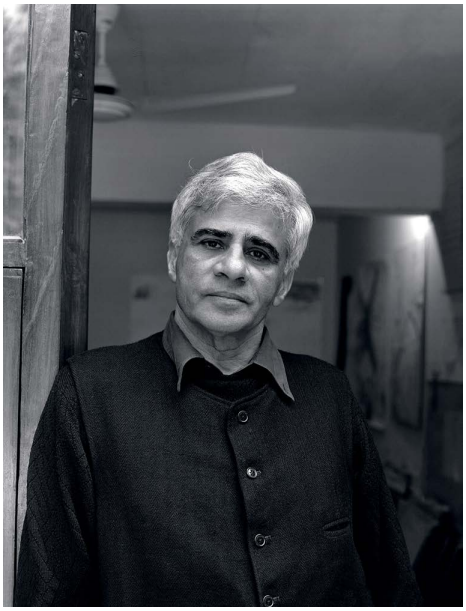
Jnanapravaha

Chemould Prescott Road

WOUND AS TESTIMONY AND AS LOCUS FOR RESISTANCE

A DIALOGUE ON VIVAN SUNDARAM'S LAST WORK: A PHOTOGRAPHY-BASED INSTALLATION TITLED 'SIX STATIONS OF A LIFE PURSUED'

October 10th, 2025 | Tea: 5:30 PM, Introduction & Discussion: 6:00 PM IST | Free In-Person dialogue at JPM



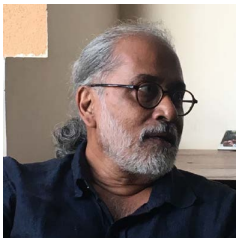
Vivan Sundaram

The dialogue will consider how an artist may offer bodily scrutiny, and translate pain and its endurance into a public declaration. This asks for an ethical exchange with the viewer. The wound may be framed by a poetics of pathos, or it may draw out a further narrative of testimony and resistance.

Moderator: *Geeta Kapur*

Panelists

Anuradha Kapur



Ashish Rajadhyaksha

Nikhil Chopra

Ranjit Hoskote

Sudhir Patwardhan

Jnanapravaha

CRITICISM & THEORY

AFTERLIVES // AFTERIMAGES

TINA M. CAMPT

October 16th & 17th, 2025 | Lecture: 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Registration Fee: Rs. 2,000/-, Students*: Rs. 1,000/-

Online Public Lecture on Zoom | Register: www.jp-india.org

This seminar series is part of the Annual Mona Ahmed Lecture Series

This two-part lecture engages two terms at the core of Campt's current writing: afterlife and afterimage. They are concepts that unsettle how we understand the temporality of the photograph. They are also concepts that photographers activate in creative and compelling ways in relation to the unique power of photographic images to help us grapple with grief and loss. Building on her commitment to attend to the 'fugitive registers' of images, and finding within them moments of resistance, resilience, and refusal often overlooked in traditional historical or visual analysis, each lecture engages the work of artists who use photographs as a bridge between the living and the departed in ways the mourn the ongoing presence rather than absence of lost loved ones and community members.

Tina M. Campt is Roger S. Berlind '52 Professor of Humanities in the Department of Art and Archeology and Director of Atelier at the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton University. She is a black feminist theorist of visual culture and contemporary art, and lead convener of the Princeton Collaboratorium for Radical Aesthetics and the Practicing Refusal Collective. Campt has published five books including *A Black Gaze* (2021); *Listening to Images* (2017); *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe* (2012); and *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender and Memory in the Third Reich* (2004). She received the 2020 Photography Catalogue of the Year Award from Paris Photo and Aperture Foundation for the co-edited collection, *Imagining Everyday Life: Engagements with Vernacular Photography* and the 2024 Photographic Studies Award from the Royal Anthropological Institute for distinguished contributions to the study of anthropology and photography.

Supported by:
Dayanita Singh

Jnanapravaha

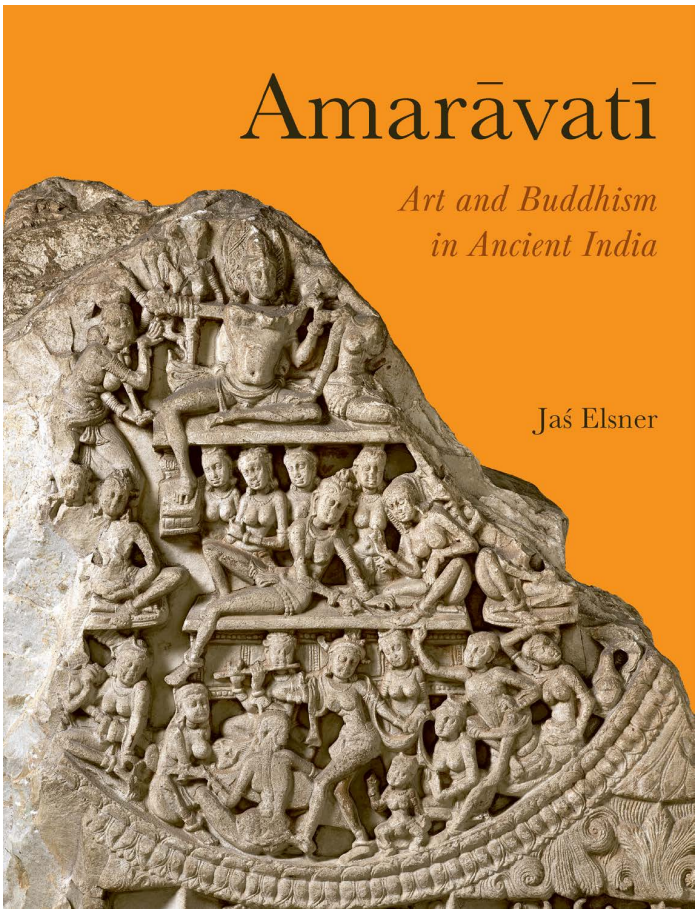
BUDDHIST AESTHETICS

THE BUDDHIST ART OF THE AMARAVATI STUPA

JAŚ ELSNER

October 30th & 31st, 2025 | Lecture: 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Registration Fee: Rs. 2,000/-, Students*: Rs. 1,000/-

Online Public Lecture on Zoom | Register: www.jp-india.org



The great *chaitya* of Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh, built between the third century BCE and the third century CE was the first Buddhist *stupa* discovered in modern times. This seminar series will use its surviving remains (perhaps 10% of its sculptures, but comprising more than 300 blocks) to examine different aspects of the *stupa* and its remarkable visual culture to explore art and Buddhism in ancient India.

Session I: The Monument: A Phenomenology of its Reconstruction
Session II: The Inscriptions: Class, Patronage and Dana
Session III: Narrative and Buddhist Meanings
Session IV: Art and the Iconographies of Devotion

Amaravati: Art and Buddhism in Ancient India. Book cover. Image by Jaś Elsner

Jaś Elsner is Humfry Payne Senior Research Fellow at Corpus Christi College Oxford and Professor of Late Antique Art at Oxford. He is also Visiting Professor of Art and Religion at the University of Chicago and an external member of the Kusthistorisches Institut in Florence. He has been Senior Research Keeper at the British Museum in the past as well as lecturer at the Courtauld Institute of Art. His work is on art and religion across Eurasia, with a special interest in pilgrimage and the textual description of art. His most recent book is *Amaravati: Art and Buddhism in Ancient India* (2024).

Jnanapravaha

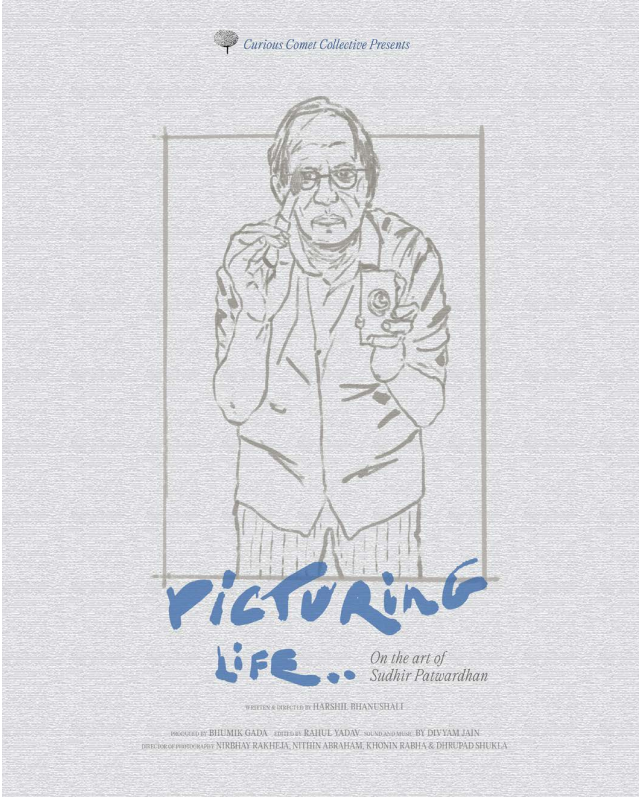
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PICTURING LIFE...ON THE ART OF SUDHIR PATWARDHAN

HARSHIL BHANUSHALI

November 6th, 2025 | Tea: 6:00 PM | Screening & Discussion: 6:30 PM IST

Register: www.jp-india.org



Picturing Life is a distinctive cinematic experience that animates the work of renowned painter Sudhir Patwardhan. Centered on his artistic journey in Mumbai, the film delves into the social and personal themes that shape his practice. Through a thoughtful narrative, it offers insight into the city's influence on his art and the stories behind his evocative imagery. The programme includes a screening of the film, followed by a conversation with filmmaker Harshil Bhanushali and artist Sudhir Patwardhan, offering the audience an opportunity to engage directly with the creators and the ideas behind the work.

Harshil Bhanushali (b. 1990, Mumbai) is an independent filmmaker working at the intersection of avant-garde cinema and artist documentaries. Trained in journalism and film direction, his work explores landscapes, migration, and identity in flux, often reflecting decaying emotions and architecture. *Picturing Life* won Best Sound Design at the 16th International Documentary and Short Film Festival of Kerala (IDSFFK) and has been screened across India. His short Leaving Home received 2nd Prize at Wild Viewing and later screened at the Ljubljana Biennale (2024) and Badnaam Film Festival (2025). His latest, *Ruptured Lines*, on artist Francis Newton Souza was selected for IDSFFK 2025 this year.

Jnanapravaha

ISLAMIC AESTHETICS

MONGOL CONNECTIONS: ART, AESTHETICS, AND TECHNOLOGIES

SUSSAN BABAIE

November 10th, 11th & 12th, 2025 | Tea: 6:00 PM | Lecture: 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST
In-Person with Live Streaming on ZOOM | Registration Fee: Rs. 3,000/-, Students*: Rs. 1,500/-

The Courtauld Bag, Mosul, Iraq (Ilkhanid dynasty, 1256–1353) 1300–30, Brass, hammered, chased and inlaid with silver and gold. The Courtauld, London (Samuel Courtauld Trust) © The Courtauld

These lectures consider the extraordinary disruptions caused by the sudden arrival of the Mongol hordes which was especially devastating to the Muslim world, for the Mongols put an end to the caliphate in Baghdad. The world-scale ambitions of the Mongols, set in motion by the chief of all Mongol tribes Temüjin, known as Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan) (r. 1206-27), led to the establishment of the largest contiguous land empire in history. Focussing on the Ilkhanate in today's Iran and Iraq (1256-1335), we consider the artistic and cultural world that emerged from encounters between the nomadic steppe peoples and those of the settled populations with whom they formed independent polities and produced spectacular arts.

Session I: From the Steppe to the Palace: Introduction to the Mongols in Islamic West Asia
Session II: Mongol World View, Statecraft and Perso-Islamic representations of Kingship: The World History of Rahid al-Din and *The Shahnama* (Book of Kings)
Session III: Conceptualising Bling! From Cloth of Gold to Horse Trappings in Gold: Court Ceremonies and Costumes
Session IV: Tented Luxury, Mobile Palaces, and Monumental Architecture
Session V: Object Stories: The Courtauld Bag and the Role of the Khatuns (Mongol Royal Women)
Session VI: Mongol Legacy: Blue and White and the First Global Brand

Sussan Babaie is Professor of the Arts of Iran and Islam at The Courtauld, University of London. A graphic designer by training (B.A., Tehran University), she earned her Ph.D. in Art History from IFA, New York University. Among her publications is *Isfahan and Its Palaces* (2008). She is currently working collaboratively on several projects focussing on the arts across trans-Asian networks: co-editor and author of *Cultural History of Asian Art*, six-volume series (Bloomsbury); co-curator of the Royal Academy of Art exhibition on Arts of the Great Mongol State (Spring 2027); and lead scholar on *Mongol Connections*, a travelling seminar supported by Connecting Art Histories grant from Getty.

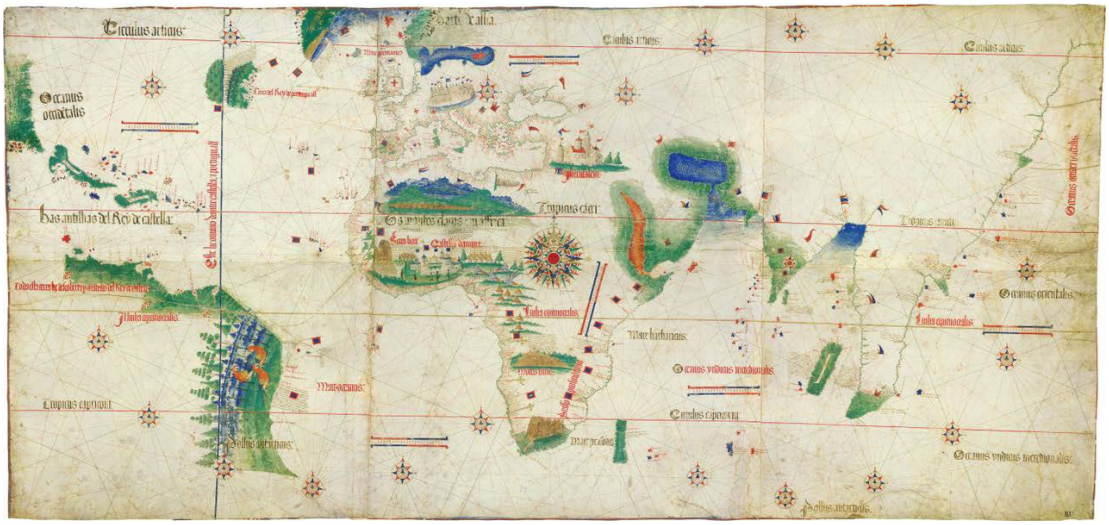
Jnanapravaha

AESTHETICS, CRITICISM & THEORY

BLACK MEDITERRANEAN: ARTISTIC ENCOUNTERS AND COUNTER-NARRATIVES

AVINOAM SHALEM

December 2nd, 3rd, & 4th, 2025 | Lecture: 6:30 - 8:30 PM IST | Online Public Lecture on ZOOM
Registration Fee: Rs. 3,000/-, Students*: Rs. 1,500/-



Cantino Planisphere, 1502, ink and pigment on vellum, 102 x 218 cm (Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena)

This three-part lecture series explores the outcomes of the Getty-supported project Black Mediterranean: Artistic Encounters and Counter-narratives, a collaboration between Avinoam Shalem (Columbia University) and Alina Payne (Harvard University/Villa I Tatti). The project reexamines Mediterranean art history by incorporating Africa into the narrative, challenging traditional East-West frameworks. By introducing a North-South perspective, it highlights overlooked Afro-Mediterranean artistic exchanges and critiques historiographies shaped by racial subordination. The series includes a critical introduction and two case studies that illuminate key intersections between African and Mediterranean histories, advocating for a more inclusive, critical humanism in the study of art and empire.

Session I: Between Black and Brown Africa; For a Critical Re-Writing of Mediterranean Histories
Session II: The Habsburgs in Tunis (1535-1574) and the New Mediterranean Order
Session III: The Red Corridor and the Suez Canal: Histories of Global Commercial Desires

Avinoam Shalem is the Riggio Professor of the Arts of Islam at the Columbia University in New York. He served as director of the American Academy in Rome from 2020 to 2021. He directs at present the project *Black Mediterranean/ Mediterraneo Nero - Artistic Encounters and Counter-narratives/ Incontri artistici e controarrazioni*, as part of the Getty Foundation's Connecting Art Histories initiative (together with Alina Payne, Villa I Tatti, Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence).

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

BENEFACTORS

Jamnalal Bajaj Foundation
Vineeta & Arvind Kanoria
Dipak & Rohitashwa Poddar
Saroj Poddar, Adventz Group Of Companies
Madan & Usha Sethi
Sohni & Dipak Tanna

PATRONS

Vinod Doshi, Echjay Industries (CSR) Foundation
Dhruv Khaitan, Trustee, Kumudini Devi Khaitan Samvedna Trust
Dilip Piramal, VIP Industries Ltd.
Jai & Sugandha Hiremath, Hikal Ltd.
Harish & Bina Shah Foundation
Jaya & Devapriya Kanoria

PARTNERS

Shekhar Bajaj, Bajaj Electricals Ltd.
Minakshi & Shishir Bajaj
Avantika & Puneet Dalmia, Avanee Foundation
Deccan Heritage Foundation
Poddar Foundation
Rochna & Tarang Jain, Varroc Foundation
Priyam & Gayatri Jhaveri
Ajay & Vandana Kanoria, Asiatic Oxygen Ltd.
Anurag Kanoria
Deepak & Smita Parekh, HDFC Ltd.
Maithili Parekh & Shashank Singh
Aditya Ruia
Shamina Talyarkhan
Bahram & Arti Vakil
Dayanita Singh

FRIENDS

Lolita Shivdasani

Jnanapravaha is a registered Trust. Contributions qualify for 80G benefits. We are eligible for CSR contributions, as specified in the Companies Act (2013), and have been awarded FCRA clearance from the Government of India. For further information, please contact our support team at support@jp-india.org.

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

*****

Contributors to the Quarterly:

AS - Arun Shankar
AT - Adira Thekkuveettil
JK –Jaya Kanoria
PP - Prathyush Parasuraman

Text Editor: Suchita Parikh-Mundul

Design and Layout: Sharon Rodrigues

*****

Queens Mansion, 3rd Floor, G. Talwatkar Marg,
Fort, Mumbai - 400001. India.
www.jp-india.com
Facebook: JnanapravahaAtMumbai | Twitter: @Jnanapravaha_M | Instagram: Jnanapravaha_Mumbai