



Jnanaprayaha

JPM QUARTERLY Apr - Jun '19



Prof. Arjun Appadurai speaks during 'The Innovation Trap And Contemporary Capitalism'

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JPM Quarterly

It is with deep gratification for an extraordinary quarter that I write this note – a quarter that witnessed the incomparable scholarship of renowned international scholars who shared their current research with an unstinting generosity of spirit. We began with the 5th iteration of Islamic Aesthetics (IsIA) 2019 which addressed the contours of 15th-century Timurid, Ottoman and Persianate worlds through architecture, manuscripts, calligraphy and décor, as well as modalities of sovereignty, visual identity, eclecticism and trans-regionalism.

The sublime sphere of Chola bronzes came alive through a painstaking and meticulous inter-disciplinary approach that combined academic rigour with eloquent poetry. The realm of Buddhist Aesthetics was examined through both the stupa of Amaravati, situating it in the larger Andhra territory, and the majestic monuments and objects of Western Himalayan Art which illustrated iconographic issues and the reading of monuments as a conceptual whole.

Issues that confront the conservation, restoration and preservation of heritage in war-torn zones, a book that celebrates the work and life of iconic Indian artist Gulammohammed Sheikh, a Theoretical Foundations module on The Emergence of Capitalism, a writing course titled JPM Write-Argument, and a semester-long ongoing course on Southeast Asian Art and Architecture, more about which will be carried in the next Quarterly, are all testimonies to the varied subjects we have engaged with.

What has left us astounded is the audience that not only flies in from Europe, the East and parts of India to attend a series of lectures, but makes a day-long bus journey to hear a scholar they study. Forty-five students (numbers had to be vastly trimmed because

of space constraints) came from Pune to hear Prof. Arjun Appadurai speak on The Innovation Trap and Contemporary Capitalism, a subject he has been steeped in this past decade.

We will be wrapping up this academic year by the end of April to prepare afresh for the new one beginning July 2019, with anticipation, as there is much in store. A big thank you to all our students who continue to believe in us, our resource scholars for their unquestioned largesse of thought, and our benefactors, patrons, partners and friends for their fullness of support.

With my warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rashmi Poddar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R' and 'P'.

Rashmi Poddar PhD.

Director

Aesthetics

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include (1) an academic year-long 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 and 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; and (6) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.



Detail of Scene of a Rāma Darbāra' in a Sekhavatī, Haveli, Sekhavatī, Northern Rajasthan, c. 1850

Indian Aesthetics

At Jnanapravaha, early January brings the Islamic Aesthetics course, the content of which greatly extends and expands the Islamic module of the Indian Aesthetics course. This year the Islamic Aesthetics course drew out architectural connections between Timurid Iran, Anatolia, and India in the 15th century. Apart from the Persianate world, the architecture and décor in the 15th-century Delhi Sultanate were discussed by Prof. Yves Porter. From the third week of January, the Indian Aesthetics course launched into the poetics of Indian painting with Roda Ahluwalia's lectures on Mughal, Pahari and Deccani painting. Her richly illustrated lectures offered a feast for the eyes and the mind. Persianate antecedents and inspiration ensured fineness, sensitivity and delicacy, while indigenous styles added strong colour and vibrancy to Mughal paintings. Mughal painting's finest examples emerged from the ateliers of Akbar and Jehangir, both exceptional patrons, while the style became more static in the Shah Jahani period. The scholar spoke of Pahari and Rajput painting as drawn from the earlier Mughal style, not only sharing artists and showing evidence of artistic training in the Mughal court, but also evolving their own trajectory with time and new patronage. Using art history, biography, a close visual analysis, and categories such as portraiture and naturalism, the scholar offered a comprehensive analysis of these skillfully rendered

paintings. The lyrical beauty of the Pahari genre was juxtaposed with and connected to political reality and identity.



Dr. Leela Wood speaks during 'Ajanta Murals and Chitrasutra of the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana'

Dr. Leela Wood's lectures on Ajanta painting connected the style of the murals to the *Chitrasutra of the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana*, a treatise which elaborates on the rules of painting. The scholar pointed out that such manuals usually emerged from practice and were thus more descriptive of contemporary methods than rigidly prescriptive. Dr. Wood's extraordinary

photographs of the exquisite paintings in the Ajanta caves, allied to her deep research and sophisticated analysis helped students understand pictorial conventions, styles and modes of expression employed in the murals. The spatially complex visual narratives of Jataka stories at Ajanta, especially in Cave 17, have been the subject of the scholar's painstaking research. She demonstrated with examples that some parts of the murals were rendered carefully and slowly, while other parts display rapid execution. Loose-leafed Jain manuscripts, Deccani manuscripts such as *Kitab-i-Nauras* executed under the patronage of Ibrahim Adil Shah, and painted folios of the *Chandayana*, a Sufi Romance culled from

folklore and codified by Mulla Da'ud in the 14th century, were used to give students a deeper understanding of the tradition of painted manuscripts other than Mughal, Pahari and Rajput.

Dr. Harsha Dehejia's exploration of Krishna *shringara* was underpinned by an explanation of *advaita* philosophy which is the core of the *Bhagavata Purana*, a text that emerged from several streams of devotion which flowed in the Indian subcontinent prior to it. The *Bhakti* tradition, the turn towards *dvaita* philosophy in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* and its aesthetics as a complementary position to the angle of faith and religious thought, were laid out by the scholar.



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

Dr. Dehejia examined Krishna *shringara* through poetry, paintings and practices, comparing the *rasika* who enjoys Krishna *shringara* aesthetically, with the devotee or *bhakta*, who submits completely to the deity. He also elaborated on the Pushti *marga* practices initiated by Vallabhacharya and still seen in Nathadwara, practices in Pandharpur which venerate Vitthala, and the worship of Krishna, Balarama and Subhadra at Jagganatha Puri. In this way, his lectures engaged with the philosophy, the ambiguities and the ground reality of the *Bhakti* tradition before immersing students in the poetics of miniature paintings, *picchwais*, and popular art connected with it.



Dr. Himanshu Burte speaks during 'The Spaces of Postcolonial Modernities'

Dr. Pheroza Godrej discussed printmaking and early archaeology in the colonial period, in which Ferguson and Curzon played a seminal role by discovering, classifying and preserving India's archaeological and sculptural heritage. Dr. Jaya Kanoria introduced students to the aesthetics of Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh, framing them in the context of nationalism and *swaraj*. The Indian Aesthetics course then immersed students in the architecture of the colonial and modern period in two sessions by Dr. Himanshu Burte. Here too, colonisation and exposure to the West played an important role in shaping aesthetics. Dr. Burte's philosophical and analytical understanding of the architecture that emerged in the India of the 19th and 20th centuries illuminated both theoretical and practical aspects, using the ideas of Henri Lefebvre as a framing narrative. Examples, informed both by emulation and resistance, were used to show the emergence of colonial modernity, nationalism and the creation and use of everyday space. Tactics such as appropriation created '(im)pure modernities' during the 'self-actualisation' of India. At this time, the building practices of architects which shaped the nation were informed by the philosophy and ideas of Gandhi and Tagore. Dr. Kurush Dalal brought March 2019 to a close with his discussion of *gadhegals* or ass-curse stones which bear inscriptions of land grants. The earthy quality of the images on these stones indicate that they were meant to be read by the common man.

This quarter looks ahead to a walk-through of an auction of the Nandalal Bose archives at Pundole's to be conducted by Rob Dean, a session

on Orientalism by Rohit Goel, and a final session on the colonial market hall by Dr. Pushkar Sohoni.
- J.K.

Past Programmes:

The Thief Who Stole My Heart: The Material Life of Chola Bronzes from South India, c. 855–1280

January 31st, February 1st & 2nd, 2019, 6:30 pm
Vidya Dehejia (Professor of Indian and South Asian Art, Columbia University)



Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi as Uma, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

Prof. Vidya Dehejia dwelt on the work of unnamed artists in Chola India who for over four centuries created simultaneously sacred and sensuous bronze masterpieces of Shiva, invoked by poets as the ‘thief who stole my heart’. She viewed the images through material, political and social lenses, examining them in conjunction with trade, inscriptions and worship. The artists of Tamil country sculpted God in human image, creating highly adorned, luminous sculptures. Worship of the idealised divine body came from a belief that God could be attained through its appreciation. Between 600 and 800 CE, Nayanmar and Alvar saints composed and sang ecstatic hymns to Shiva, giving him a local habitation, and describing portable images carried in procession. Artists translated the saints’ rapturous engagement into perfect form, a sign of spiritual beauty.

In mid-9th century South India, the upstart Vijayalaya Chola appropriated the Chola name belonging to a former dynasty and took the city of Thanjavur by storm, commissioning an image of the fierce Durga/Uma, destroyer of the demon Nishumbha, of pivotal importance to Indian kingship. By 1225, Vijayalaya’s successors held sway over South India, the Maldives, northern Sri Lanka, and made naval forays into Sumatra, where the Srivijaya dynasty ruled, in an effort to break their stranglehold on Chinese trade. The densely populated Tamil country had numerous modestly sized temples, built early in the Chola reign, with inscription-covered walls. The inscriptions relate to economic, religious, civic, local, judicial, political and historical subjects, and record gifts to the temple. Agricultural prosperity enabled temple-

building despite continuous warfare.



Dancing Shiva, ca. 990, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution

The Pallavas, who ruled before the Cholas, created large ceremonial images of wood, and small bronzes for personal devotion. Around 855 CE, copper became common in image creation. The Cholas were cultured, refined and invested in the worship of Shiva, building temples and

sponsoring unique bronze processional images. Early images reveal a flattened form, reminiscent of wooden sculpture. An alloy with around 90 percent copper was used, creating very heavy, solid images that developed a green patina if exposed to high humidity. Exquisite wax models were melted while creating bronze images, which could be closely copied but not reproduced. Curiously, there is no substantial local source of copper that could have been profitably mined. Large quantities of copper may have come to South India from Aden and Sri Lanka.

Between 855 and 955 CE, Aditya Chola and his son Parantaka built temples on the banks of the River Kaveri, in which exclusively portable bronze processional images first emerged. Despite political instability, skilled artists produced stately bronzes of unprecedented originality and rare elegance. Forms of Shiva revealing religious intensity and artistic intentionality, including the popular Tripuravijaya (Victor of the three cities), a thanksgiving for the wars won by the Cholas, were depicted. In Tamil India, the emphasis shifted to these novel images from the immovable sanctum image of the stone *linga*, which continued to be worshipped. Portable deities went on festival and 'social' outings, becoming crucial to worship and playing a fundamental role in the ritual and social life of citizens. Later, texts defined this mode of worship.

Stylistically distinct traits emerged. A coastal workshop at Tiruvangadi produced images of slender and sinuous proportions, tall in appearance, with sloping shoulders and oval faces. Some of these solid metal images are

completely stable but have an exaggerated *tribhanga*, showing the artists' stylistic confidence and skill in wax modelling and metal casting. Several haunting masterpieces in bronze (including Shiva in the form of Ardhanari, and the ascetic Begging Lord) originated in the 11th century. Inscriptions and lists record donations of gifts and treasures to temples, including sumptuous jewellery in gold, pearls and other precious materials which was considered necessary to further adorn the sculpture. Such gifts given made 'in the protection of priests' who were the custodians of the bronzes. The capital/central workshop produced images with a shorter, compact torso, broader shoulders and squarer faces.

Patrons were not only kings, but also included the king's intimate circles, and women, including early Chola queens. Seven small, well-proportioned temples reveal the involvement of Aditya Chola, with records of gifts made by his family. The earlier poet saints sang of these ancient hallowed shrines which have no foundational inscriptions, perhaps because they already existed as wooden shrines before they were rebuilt in stone. Inscriptions give details of the worship of bronzes and celebrations related to them. Important Buddhist images reveal close similarities with Shiva iconography, proving that artists worked for diverse patrons, and raise questions about the possibility of transporting weighty images by ship along the coast, or over land.

Elegant and probably idealised representations of the beloved, culturally influential Queen Sembiyan commemorate the personage who was

responsible for introducing the Dancing Shiva into the repertoire of Chola bronzes, perhaps because her husband gave up his kingship and abandoned her to go in search of Shiva, his beautiful 'dancing lord'. This unique queen functioned successfully in a male-dominated society. Sembiyan rebuilt in stone several older brick temples, recording all gifts formerly made, and inserting a Dancing Shiva image in the southern niche. Modelled on representations of Uma, Sembiyan's image was carried in procession with bronzes of deities and saints in acknowledgement of many generous acts such as sponsoring a bronze workshop, which gave rise to bronzes with distinctive characteristics.

From the time of Queen Sembiyan, the victorious Goddess Durga appeared in temples. Before Shiva worship received royal impetus, Kali was popular in the Kaveri delta. Older goddess temples did not receive royal support though they were exempted from land grants made by Chola kings for Shiva temples. The concept of 'the Sacred Fortress of Love' resulted in new temples being built as a separate shrine dedicated to Uma. Older temples constructed a bedroom adjacent to the Shiva shrine where rituals were conducted, especially the final late-night *puja*. Images of Uma as *bhogashakti* (pleasure-force) were placed on the thresholds of Shiva sanctums.

The Gulf of Mannar and the South China Sea have pearl oyster beds. The Chola obsession with Sri Lanka and access to the South China Sea might have stemmed from their desire for pearl jewellery and coral. Additionally, Sri Lankan ports were stops on the trade route between Aden and China. The resultant taxes and high prices

commanded by goods were a lucrative prize worth fighting for. The Cholas attacked Sri Lanka repeatedly. There are records, images and ruins of temples, including Shiva temples, in Pollonaruwa in North-Central Sri Lanka. The bronzes here are intriguing and stylistically different, pointing to successful and not-so-successful borrowing and adaptation from Hindu iconography.

The Cholas developed an often hostile and complex power relationship with the powerful Srivijaya kings. While they fought over trade rights,

they also appeased each other with gifts. The Srivijaya monarch was able to build a Buddhist Vihara at Nagapattinam, though the Cholas repeatedly raided Srivijaya territory without lasting success. Striking bronze tableaux of eight heroic forms of Shiva (only two of which can be located today) may have been created because the Cholas wished to commission exemplary dynastic prototypes in the hope of victory.

Despite natural calamities which brought misfortune to 13th century Chola Nadu, bronze



Dr. Vidya Dehejia speaks during 'The Thief Who Stole My Heart: The Material Life of Chola Bronzes from South India, c. 855–1280

images continued to be made in a changed style. Contemporary taste demanded a regal, precise, less intimate and more sharply defined style. Inscriptions document patronage that came from lay people and merchants. By 1275, the Cholas could no longer support temples. Inscriptions record a gift of land to support a festival from the Pandya king of Madurai. In 1310, general Malik Kafur of the Delhi Sultanate marched southwards. His raid to fill the Sultan's coffers explains the enigma of buried and missing bronzes as well as jewellery. Fearing desecration, temples buried sacred bronzes. Malik Kafur's armies sifted the jewellery and carried away immense wealth, ignoring the bronzes, some of which may have suffered incidental damage. A second army followed Malik Kafur's, and the Delhi Sultanate established its own governor in Madurai, who soon declared himself its Sultan. The buried bronzes could not be retrieved.

In the 15th century, the Hindu rulers of Vijayanagar took over the Chola temple lands and commissioned new bronzes, which, however majestic, lack the panache of their Chola counterparts. Some Chola bronzes were restored to temples and re-consecrated. Tiruvangadi bronzes were discovered as four buried hoards in the mid-20th century. Coveted by collectors today, Chola bronzes continue to lead a chequered existence. Many have been relegated to sealed safehouses and are no longer seen in temples or celebrations, depriving devotees and art lovers of the opportunity to admire Shiva's beauty. - J.K.

Forthcoming Programmes:

Master, Mentor, and Disciple: The Painter in Mughal South Asia

April 4th & 5th, 2019, 6:30 pm

Yael Rice (Assistant Professor of the History of Art and Asian Languages and Civilizations, Amherst College)



Detail from a *Gulshan Album* folio, c. 1600, Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, *Libri picturati A 117, Jahangir Album, f. 21r.*

This seminar will consider the complex roles of the painter at the Mughal court from the sixteenth into the seventeenth centuries. It will begin with the very notion of the painter as it was articulated in pre-Mughal textual and visual sources, and then will shift course to examine the nature of the

Mughal painter as a mentor, a collaborator, and, finally, a master of esoteric insight in the manuscript workshops of Akbar and his son Jahangir.

Day 1

- Chains of Tradition: The Idea of the Artist in the Islamic World
- Communities of Practice: The Mughal Workshop as a Whole

Day 2

- Agents of Insight: Portraiture and the Limners of Form
- Masters of the Unseen World: Depicting the Emperor's Dreams

Connected Worlds: The Rashtrakutas and their Coinage

April 16th, 2019, 6:30 pm

Shailendra Bhandare (Assistant Keeper, South Asian and Far-eastern Numismatics and Paper Money Collections, Ashmolean Museum)

The Rashtrakutas emerged as the pre-eminent power in 8th – 10th centuries and dominated the so-called “Age of the Three Empires” in Early Medieval India. They influenced the political scene, were patrons to great temples like Ellora and facilitated a new wave of trade and commerce with the World of Islam which now commanded the regions across the Arabian Sea.

Given historical wisdom dictates there were no Rashtrakuta coins! This view was articulated by Marxist historians like R.S.Sharma. However, in recent times this widely held belief has come under

very close scrutiny. Coins that can be attributed to the Rashtrakutas have come to light - they throw a very different and welcome light not only on prevalent theories of how the Early Medieval period in India should be viewed and studied, but also provide an interesting and textured context of India's connections with the wider world through maritime and commercial links. The lecture will unravel some such closely held notions with the help of data which has not been published elsewhere in its appropriate context.



Islamic Aesthetics

Past Programmes:

In the Triangle of Samarkand, Constantinople, and the Deccan: Modalities of Sovereignty in the 15th Century

January 4th & 5th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Ilker Evrim Binbaş (Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of Bonn)



Over the course of four lectures, this seminar series addressed the notion of how political ideas and events coalesce and interact when there is no commonly agreed upon constitutional paradigm to glue a society together. Prof. Ilker Evrim Binbaş examined these notions of politics and sovereignty – along with their varied structures and limitations – within the context of the Timurid, Turkman and Ottoman empires of the 15th century. In doing so, his analysis combined a rhetoric on kingship, and ideas of governance in specific political contexts, as he discussed the wide range of political and constitutional paradigms that emerged.

Binbaş listed two issues which were central to his lectures, and which were in tandem with his current research. The first was his concern regarding the ‘peculiarities of history’, where he noted the tendency of historiographical study to view the 15th century as a transitional period between the two imperial periods that came before and after it. Namely, the Mongols, and the great empires of the early modern period: the Ottomans, Safavids and Mughals. This has resulted in the 15th century being viewed as either pre or post something, an occurrence the prof. hopes to suspend through his own study of the period as an independent entity rather than a continuity of other empires. The second issue is that of sovereignty, for the study of which he went beyond his specialty in Central Asia and Iran, to include the Mughals,

Ottomans and the Deccan Plateau, for this seminar.



Prof. Ilker Evrim Binbaş speaks during 'In the Triangle of Samarkand, Constantinople, and the Deccan: Modalities of Sovereignty in the 15th Century'

Binbaş began with a background of Timur, the last of the Chinggisids (descendants of Genghis Khan), and the founder of the Timurid Empire, which lasted until 1857, and stretched across modern-day Uzbekistan, Armenia, Kurdistan, and even northern Iran. (In fact, the Mughal dynasty in northern India was founded by one of Timur's descendants, Babar.)

He explicated how the dominant political

paradigm of the 15th century prescribed legitimacy, which Timur secured through a fictional genealogical tree that purported an overlap with the descendants of Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol empire. This genealogy claimed Timur was a distant cousin of the conqueror, making him a Chinggisid, and allowing him the legitimate lineage he required to fit the profile of a ruler. The inscription on his tombstone in the Gur-e-Amir mausoleum, which is part of the necropolis found in the heart of Samarkand, is evidence of this.

Timur further concretised his legitimacy by citing his Chinggis sovereign name before his own on his coins and seal. However, although Timur was the ruler, neither he nor his Chinggis nominal sovereign held sole power. It was the Timurid family who collectively held sovereignty. Interestingly, although the status of male family members was equal, their legitimacy was determined by the lineage of their mothers and wives. For instance, of Timur's four principal sons, he favoured his son Jehangir, as this son's mother (Timur's wife) was a free woman rather than an enslaved concubine. Another example of lineage-based hierarchy is Timur's favourite grandson Mohammed Sultan, who was the son of Jehangir, and also had a Chinggis wife.

From the problematic questions this period's legitimacy and sovereignty poses, Binbaş turned attention to the art and politics of the Timurids. Using the horoscope of Timur's grandson Iskandar Mirza, who was titled the Lord of Auspicious Conjunctions, he illustrated how the stars were perfectly aligned in this ruler's astrological birth chart. Binbaş also drew parallels between the

symbols of stars and planets, and the models of sovereignty and absolute power, with their positive and negative attributes.

It is believed that after Timur's death, a meeting took place to decide the structural future of politics. Three options were listed: the first, to adopt the Caliph i.e. nominal sovereignty; the second, to reassert Chinggisid rule; and third, to preserve the Timurid structure. The last option was chosen, and Shah Rukh (Iskandar's uncle) acceded the post.

It was against his uncle Shah Rukh that Iskandar lost battle and his life. However, his writings still exist and have been immensely helpful in reconstructing his politics. Iskandar was a unique figure in the Timurid family, and was deeply involved in intellectual debates aimed at articulating a new constitutional paradigm. He modelled himself as the new sovereign, with both political and spiritual power. He viewed himself as the source of politics and law because he was born at a time when the planets were most favourable. He could also interpret the letters of the Quran and therefore, Iskandar extrapolated, could solve the problems of the world. Both these factors translated to spiritual power. Iskandar died in battle soon after he formulated this idea of spiritual and political leader.

During Shah Rukh's reign, the coins he minted used the term 'Caliphate', which may sound standard in the Islamic context, but is an uncommon occurrence. The term refers to a political model where the Caliph embodies justice, and his community must adhere to his rule.

Using the examples of several political treatises, Binbaş went on to illustrate the varied models of

the Caliphate, as interpreted by various Muslim sects. Interestingly, the theoretical method for choosing a Caliph was through election by religious scholars of a community, as they were believed to know what is best. However, in practice, often a singular scholar's vote was considered sufficient to secure election.

Binbaş also raised the question of Shah Rukh's improbable victory in the battle that followed Timur's death. Earlier explanations suggest he was able to capture the throne while his rivals fought each other. But a more recent theory suggests he drew contracts with Timur's military commanders, who then led him to victory with their support in battle. Binbaş believes these commanders agreed to contracts as they may have outlined an equal share of power between Shah Rukh and them.

Through these and other historical details, Binbaş brought the political scene of the 15th-century Timurid period to life. In fact, each of the politically-charged lectures culminated in a question-and-answer session that further added new facets to the subject. The last lecture concluded the seminar series with overarching theories, summations and illuminating anecdotes from Binbaş's research, leaving the audience brimming with new insights to take forward with them in their Islamic Aesthetics course. - *S.P.M.*

From International Timurid to Ottoman: Aesthetics of Architectural Landscapes extending between Central Asia and Anatolia in the 15th-16th Centuries

January 7th, 8th and 9th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Gülru Necipoğlu (Aga Khan Professor and Director, Harvard University)

Prof. Necipoğlu traced the emergence of the Timurid-Turkmen architectural idiom in 15th century Iran and Central Asia by contextualising iconic monuments in their urban, aesthetic, socio-cultural, and political settings, describing transregional exchanges with India, Mamluk Egypt and Europe, as well as indigenous architectural traditions, materiality, and ornamental aesthetics. Her multi-layered approach seemed reminiscent of the “thick description” endorsed by Geertz.

The Mongol conquest of Anatolia following Timur’s invasion of India caused the breakdown of 15th-century empires and polities, uniting areas from China, Central Asia and India, though conquered regions did not merely mimic Central Asian and Iranian models. They were integrated into local building traditions, creating divergent and distinctive architectural cultures. Iran and Central Asia’s brick and tilework traditions were translated into stone in Anatolia and India, creating a hybrid aesthetic form. Interactions between the arts of the book and architectural ornament are apparent in monuments, plan-types, patterns and ornamental designs on paper, revealing overlooked parallels and offering insights into architecture and ornament; for instance, *muqarnas* are three-dimensional representations of stellate designs.

The international Timurid mode circulated via

architectural workshops, designers and design scrolls. Its staple products were architectural ornaments, ceramic tilework and calligraphic inscriptions in painted and carved plaster. Important precursors are domed building-types which developed in Central Asia and Iran in the late Seljuq period, a time of influential artistic and architectural efflorescence. The Seljuq ruler Sultan Sanjar’s monumental tomb – in tilework-accentuated brick, square in plan with a cross in the middle, a double shell dome and four corner units – became a major plan-type in mausoleums and pavilions. Carved stucco work, stellate designs and teardrop motifs are a sign of Mongol style also seen in India. The Ilkhanid ruler Oljaitu’s tomb shows awareness of earlier models such as Sultan Sanjar’s tomb. Ilkhanid interiors had stucco work painted in designs reminiscent of a manuscript page, with blue, gold and white tiles and painting. The Ottomans were aware of Iranian brick monuments highlighted by blue and white tilework. Iranian and Central Asian monuments display cursive calligraphy superimposed with a minuscule Kufic script, also seen in Ottoman examples. Mongol architecture shows an increase in tile-covered brick structures; a Yazd monument redecorated in the Timurid-Turkmen period reveals more tilework and complex designs, which stemmed from the availability of paper that enabled design transfer to huge geographies.

Timur brought artisans, architects, and ideas from conquered lands to his capitals. His interest in gigantism created an additive, sometimes ill-proportioned architecture which did not last. Outer domes were placed on tall drums at a great



distance from inner domes, also seen in the Mamluk stone architecture of Cairo. Timurid monuments displayed huge calligraphy and wallpaper-like ornament in tile, with painter-calligraphers closely involved in architecture, creating an aesthetic in which all media were integrated. The translation, transformation and selective dissemination of the international Timurid-Turkmen architectural idiom involved more a change in surface decoration than of building style or plan-type and is apparent in the Ottoman capitals of Bursa, Edirne and Istanbul.

In the early Ottoman period at Bursa, indigenous building techniques alternating stone and brick with hemispherical domes were similar to Byzantine architecture and used the same workshops. Bayezid I's mosque has additive multiple domed squares with heavy piers and an

oculus in the highest dome with a fountain below, the memory of a courtyard condensed into a closed space. Mehmet I's 'green mosque', an additive Ottoman T-type convent-style, funerary mosque complex is an example of the international Timurid-Turkmen mode in its decorations and yet the great size of the tomb has inscriptions which speak against the Timurid oppressor. Murad II, who abdicated and then returned to the throne by deposing his son Mehmet II, has an unusual tomb, which testifies to his Sufi tendencies, originally open to the sky and rainwater and lacking in ornamentation. Persian poetic inscriptions gave way to Arabic Koranic inscriptions as the state became more powerful, centralised and orthodox.

T-shaped multifunctional complexes expanded the cities of Bursa and Edirne linearly. Such *khanqah* or *zawiya*, popular especially in Anatolia,

with a section for travellers and Sufi orders, were not mosques, for each had its own function. Hierarchy ensured that after the early 16th century, T-type buildings were built by governors and *viziers*, and not by sultans. The Ottomans expanded towards Europe from Edirne, a city with low red brick house roofs, minarets and lead domes. The additive mosque built by Murad II, the first with a single, large, lead-covered dome, had a triple gallery, four minarets, heavy piers, Timurid-type multi-layered calligraphy and a courtyard, combining Ottoman, Timurid, Damascene and Mamluk models, moving away from the multi-domed models of Bursa. Behind it is the old nine-dome mosque, inviting comparison. Monuments with stone walls and brick domes in Edirne display colossal calligraphy – like that of an album page – on heavy piers and tilework in blue, white and turquoise, unlike Bursa.

Constantinople, the conquest of which united the territory, lay between the older coexistent capitals of Bursa and Edirne. Timurid-Turkmen, Roman-Byzantine and contemporary Italian renaissance references came together in Ottoman Istanbul's palaces and royal mosque complexes, since Mehmet II, who conquered and then repopulated the city, aspired to conquer Rome and was interested in creating a new aesthetic. Following Ottoman tradition, he converted, with minimal changes, the Hagia Sophia (the biggest church) into a Friday mosque. The hippodrome was used by the Ottomans, but the Byzantine palace was used as a quarry for the Topkapi palace. This abandonment is common, as palaces relate to dynasties.



Prof. Gülru Necipoğlu speaks during 'From International Timurid to Ottoman: Aesthetics of Architectural Landscapes extending between Central Asia and Anatolia in the 15th-16th Centuries'

Contemporary Italian maps show the pyramidal structure of the horizontally-oriented Topkapi palace, with the main buildings on the hilltop, many tent-like shore pavilions and a surrounding garden with multiple pavilions. One of these, the well-preserved, relatively monumental Cinili Kosk (tiled kiosk), is in Timurid style with gilded lapis lazuli tiles, blue and white mosaic and tile work, and multi-layered calligraphy. Textual sources describe three garden palaces built by Mehmet II. Cinili

Kosk, a *hasht bihisht* building-type also seen in Tabriz and transformed in Moghul tombs, was juxtaposed with two vanished palaces made in the Persian and Ottoman manner, evidence of a global architecture. The spectacular treasury-library with attached bath, an Italianate building with round arches and inbuilt niches has a panoramic view of the landscape, emphasising Mehmet II as the ruler of two continents and two seas. His tiny audience hall is very unlike Timurid examples.

Mehmet II's was a more secluded image of kingship which the scholar attributed to the embarrassment of being deposed by his father early in his reign. His symmetrical mosque complex attempted to surpass his father's by emulating the plan of a courtyard with three entrances but expanding the space by adding a half-dome and two smaller domes. Supported by colossal columns used for the first time, the much higher dome with a zone of half domes below it and a tympanum with windows, is modelled on the Hagia Sophia. A separate *imaret* was built to house travellers and Sufis. From this time, each sultan and his queen were buried in tombs attached to mosque complexes built on hills, dominating the cityscape and creating the unique silhouette of Istanbul. The radical Mehmet II confiscated lands which had been given to *dervishes*, which were later returned by his son Bayezid II, who built linear, T-shaped mosques at Amasya, Edirne and Istanbul, fulfilling his obligation to Halveti Sufis who supported his royal aspirations.

The Iznik tile-decorated Suleymaniye mosque with four minarets built by the state architect Sinan, in ashlar stone masonry, a reinterpretation of the

Hagia Sophia on a smaller scale, was planned in layers to preserve its view from the opposite shore. Political and social changes determined the distinctive cosmopolitan aesthetic that emerged in Istanbul in the late 15th century and culminated in the age of Sinan in the 16th century. - J.K.

Architecture & Decor in 15th century Delhi Sultanate

January 10th & 11th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Yves Porter (Teaches Islamic Art, Aix Marseille Université)



In this lecture, Prof. Porter dealt with key aspects pertaining to the period of the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate:

- Methodological constraints in historiography,
- Political consolidation and fragmentation,
- Contextualising the forts, palaces, mosques and tombs within the political narrative, and,
- Architectural typologies of monumental tomb complexes, and decorative elements of architecture, especially tiles.

Speaking of the historiographical constraints in

methodology, Prof. Porter underlined the scarcity of surviving documentary sources – only one firman of Mohd. Tughlak survives. The primary sources, therefore, have been Ahmed Sirhindi (Tarikh I Mubarak Shahi), Ferishta (the Tarikh), Tarikh-i-Daudi, Malfuzat-i-Timuri and Baburnama. The Catalan Atlas of 1375 was also cited as a source of how the Indian subcontinent was viewed by a European cartographer.

The other important historical sources listed were coins and architecture. The architecture of the period is a significant contributor, and requires study in co-relation with political narratives and art forms, including those found in books.

Most of these sources are elite, while the economic life of lower classes is unknown, though it has been indicated that taxation, trade and agriculture were sound.

Prof. Porter also outlined the political fragmentation that occurred through successive generations after Firuz Shah's death, when multiple princes simultaneously contested in parallel centres of royal power in Delhi. It was after Timur's invasion that political equations were reset within and with the Sultanate, leading to Khizr Khan Sayyid taking control of the throne a few years later. However, the 'khutba' was still read in the name of 'Noble Tartarian'.

During these times of political strife, multiple cities – Lal Kot, Siri, Jahanpanah (connecting Lal Kot and Siri), Firuzabad – and Jahannuma (an unidentified palace conjectured to be on northern ridge) served as simultaneous political bases under the sultans or their contenders.

Despite this political activity, there is no clear

evidence of palatial buildings originating in the Sayyid and Lodi periods, indicating the likely use of older buildings, wooden structures or tents. The wooden pillars of Hazar Satoon, (at Bijai Mandal) are indicative of this. The palace area shared the same wall connecting the Begumpur Masjid indicating their pre-determined alignment as part of an integrated complex comprising of monumental architecture of a royal palace area and the mosque.

Although Firuzabad had extensive palace areas, these have now been lost to modern-day 'development'. The larger city originally extended from Wazirbad to Suraj Kund. Khizrabad and Mubarakabad are lost in entirety. Alam Shah Sayyid built a few buildings in Badaun, where he lived after being permanently exiled. Overall, the physical remnants of this phase are meagre compared to contemporary sultanates in Bengal or Mandu where palatial architecture is significant.

There were frequent wars against Gujarat, Malwa, Bengal, Jaunpur and Kashmir, which had gained independence during this time. Despite the political turmoil, coins from the reign of Mohammed Shah increased in weight, indicating prosperity.

The rise of powerful nobility cliques saw an undermining of the sultans' authority during this time as well. Several monumental tombs of unidentified nobility survive – and of these, only four tombs are of kings belonging to the two dynasties in question.

Although evidence of 14th-century chinaware marked for the 'special kitchen' was discovered in Firuzabad, the actual layout and functional buildings that constituted the palace have not been

identified.

Interestingly, most famous mosques were built by nobility, not royalty. In fact, mosques were significantly outnumbered by tombs. Of the royal tombs that survive, some house several members of the deceased's family, as Ghiyasuddin Tughlak's tomb in Tughlakabad, and Feroz Shah Tughlak's tomb in Hauz Khas. Tombs of Mubarak Shah, Mohammed Shah, Bahlul Lodi and Sikandar Lodi also survive, allowing a detailed study of their typology. Of these, Mubarak Shah's tomb complex is the largest surviving one belonging to the Sayyid dynasty.

Tombs had multifarious functions – many were complexes with madrasas, gardens, *baolis* and wall-mosques. Octagonal-type tombs were based on the 3 x 3 principle, which is more Indian than Timurid, and a likely derivation from the *mandala* or *navratana* concept in India. The first octagonal tomb was Khan-i-Jahan-Tilangani's, in 1369. Mubarak Shah and Mohammed Shah's tombs are elegant octagonal domed structures in garden complexes.

Bahlul Lodi's tomb is inside a *basti* and of a very different type – a *baradari* type of nine squares, with five domes decorated with stucco. Other such square or rectangular tombs are those for Dariya Khan, Chaurasi Gumbad and Bibi Zarina.

Tohfewala Gumbad was likely the Khalji Friday mosque. Bagh-i-Alam-ka-Gumbad has a walled mosque. Moth-ki-Masjid was built by Miyan Bhuwa, and Nili Masjid by Fateh Khan's wet nurse. The nine-domed structural type of Begumpuri Masjid is of indigenous origin. Tinburj Masjid was the biggest Lodi mosque, though its minarets are

incomplete.



Prof. Yves Porter speaks during 'Architecture & Décor in 15th century Delhi Sultanate'

After examining the architectural typography of the period, Prof. Porter turned attention to its decorative elements. Several buildings used glazed tiles as ornamentation, the oldest one being the Idgah at Rapri (UP) dated 1312 CE. The oldest structure in Delhi, Begumpuri Masjid, uses moulded turquoise tiles with a lotus motif.

Nili Masjid is an exquisite blue-tiled building, the tiles being of unusual technique because there is

no trace of slip. Moth-ki-Masjid has monochrome blue tiles. Chote Khan-ka-Gumbad uses blue and green tiles, while Sikandar Lodi's tomb uses tiles of green, blue, and yellow for its *chhatris*. It has a painted ceiling, with calligraphy that requires further study. Shishe-Gumbad is decorated in cobalt, white, and turquoise glazed tiles emblazoned with vegetal motifs. Jamali-Kamali has blue and white tiles, while its interiors represent the stylistic transition to Mughal style.

The lotus flower motif and the *shamsa* motif were often used during this period, the motif drawing inspiration from art in books, as calligraphy does in architecture, extensively in the latter part of this period. However, the six-point star motif used in Feroz Shah's tomb was not a Mughal introduction.

It has been found that these tiles were indigenous and not Persian, as glazed ceramics had pre-Islamic existence in India in several states. Excavations near Qutb Minar have even yielded ruins of green glazed tiles. Tiles made in Punjab were different from those used in Delhi, solidifying the fact that glazed ceramics were well established.

At the lecture's conclusion, Prof. Porter stated that art is not a medium of cultural domination but has its independent development, though related to its political and cultural context; he urged that there is a need to establish more dialogue on art. He cited the example of Mohd. Bin Sam's ring, inscribed in Sanskrit text as an example of an art form placed in its socio-political context yet being atypical.

The series ended with the speaker urging that

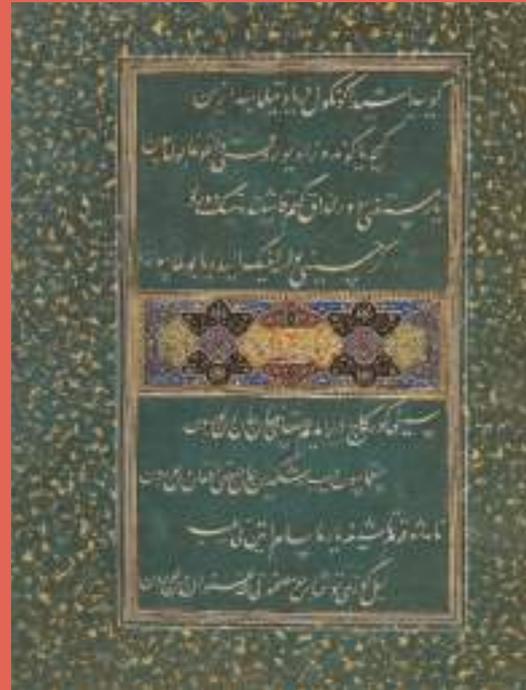
the remaining material evidence enabling reconstruction of the past needs to be preserved.

- R.V.

After Timur: Calligraphy and the Arts of the Book in the Persianate World between 1400 and 1550

January 12th & 14th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Simon Rettig (*Assistant Curator of the Arts of the Islamic World, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution*)



*Folio from a Divan of Sultan Husayn Mirza
Attributed to Sultan-'Ali Mashhadi (d. 1520)
Afghanistan, Herat, Timurid period, ca. 1490
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper Freer Gallery
of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, F1929.66*

Simon Rettig's seminar series focused on Persian manuscripts from the 15th century, the Golden Age of their production in Iran and beyond. Rettig's lectures offered a broad understanding of their production, patronage, and circulation

throughout the Persian-speaking sphere that extended from present-day Istanbul to Delhi. His seminars outlined the general characteristics of manuscripts produced in Iran, followed by considerations of specific issues surrounding calligraphic scripts, illuminations, and illustrations. By drawing connections between formal and aesthetic qualities and functions of the manuscript to the overarching cultural and political climate of the time, Rettig offered a sensitive approach towards studying Islamic art.

In the early 15th century, the main centres for book production in Greater Iran were Isfahan and Shiraz. Rettig explained how Timurid prince Baysunghur transformed Herat into a centre for book production. When he invaded Tabriz in the 1410s, Baysunghur emulated the regnant Sultan Ahmed Jalayir's model of the *kitabkhane* or centralised atelier for the production of books. Baysunghur brought master craftsmen from Tabriz to Herat and consolidated the idea of the prince as a patron and commissioner of art, which became the norm for Timurid rulers.

It is also under the Timurids that commercial production of books expanded, prompting advancements in codicological characteristics, scripts, types of illumination, and paintings. Techniques ranging from dyeing paper, using lacquer in binding, and experimenting with gold, lapis lazuli, and cobalt, were explored to construct books as beautifully as possible. Works commissioned by princes could be identified by their use of expensive material and sophisticated designs. Books also contained colophons that detailed their patronage. Although painters did not

typically sign their work as a gesture of humility, there was a rise in discrete signatures as seen in Behzad's illustration of Yusuf and Zuleikha, enabling artists to be identified.

Rettig further highlighted how the *kitabkhane* maintained records of their activities in albums, which also contained samples of paintings, illuminations, and calligraphic script that could be imitated to maintain and further techniques and imagery through the decades. These albums travelled, following conquests, through gifts, or by foreign patronage, and became foundational in the development of art forms across the Ottoman Empire as well as in Mughal India. Effectively, royal and commercial production of the books in Iranian centres led to the dissemination of Persian poetry, illustration, and iconography throughout Central and South Asia.

In his second seminar, Rettig delved into the "development, diffusion, and reception of Nasta'liq calligraphy used in Persian manuscripts. In Iran, a new calligraphic script emerged at the end of the 14th century, when Mir Ali Tabrizi invented the Nasta'liq, which became synonymous with the sophistication of Persian art. By 1450, the script had spread across the Persianate world.

Particularly in the 16th century, Rettig described how the political and religious antagonism between the Safavids and Ottomans reflected in the shift in perception of the visual quality of the scripts in the two regions. Through the comparison of two major works from the 16th century, *Gulestan-e-hunar* or the *Rose Garden of Art* composed by the Safavid Quazi Ahmed, and the *Epic Deeds of Artists* by the Ottoman Mustafa Ali, Rettig elaborated how

distinctly the Safavids and Ottomans considered the genealogy of the script with regard to master calligraphers, Mir Ali Tabrizi and the Khwarazmi brothers.

Rettig further discussed how the calligrapher Shah Mahmud Nishapuri's copy of the Qur'an in Nasta'liq was gifted to the Ottoman ruler, Murad III in 1574 by the Safavids. This was a bold gesture, considering that Nasta'liq was not a codified Qur'anic script, and furthermore, because this Shia version of the Qur'an had been gifted to a Sunni ruler. While the copy was hidden away in the treasury of the Topkapi Palace, the Ottoman

response was to inscribe large vases with Sunni verses written in Nasta'liq, depriving the script of its primary function which was to copy Persian poetry. Thus, Rettig argued that while the diffusion of the script portrayed, ostensibly, a sense of unity within the region, its reception and usage pointed towards rising ideological tensions.

Rettig's third seminar considered the 'animated' illumination in Persian Belleteristic manuscripts. Most illuminations, particularly in the Qur'an, were used as verse markers or marginal devices, featuring geometric or vegetal patterns, understood as non-figurative. That being said,



Dr. Simon Rettig speaks during 'After Timur: Calligraphy and the Arts of the Book in the Persianate World between 1400 and 1550'

Rettig listed a number of works during the Timurid period, where figures were inserted into the illuminations in Persian manuscripts. These included human or animal-headed terminals known as the *waq-waq*, as well as supernatural creatures and angels.

Where geometric patterns remained within the realm of the ordinary, Rettig stressed that “the representation of something that is real but apprehended and transformed in such a way that it appears imaginary” conjured the marvellous and otherworldly. These anthropomorphic and fantastic figures served to inspire imaginative and mystical ideas that went beyond the material world. These figures, however, did not replace illustration. Rettig established how animated imagery within the illuminations simultaneously retained a decorative function, while conjuring the higher reality of spiritual imagination to complement the content within the manuscript.

In his final seminar, Rettig discussed the crucial relationship between illustration and text in Persian manuscripts. He focused on the early 15th-century manuscript, *Khosrow-e-Shirin* by Nizami, from the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art, to explore various layers of meaning generated by the organisation of images and text zonally, through the use of headings or literal descriptions, and also through a consideration of imaginative or metaphorical verses of text. Rettig emphasised how it is imperative to consider the text and illustration in conjunction to each other rather than independently, to understand the contents of the manuscript. Through the 16th century, with the rise in regional sectarianism, several existing images

or texts in manuscripts were obliterated or edited based on Islamic affiliations, transforming the meanings constructed by the pages.

Taking into consideration the large volume of archived manuscripts that have not yet been carefully studied, Rettig concluded that a magnitude of research is yet to be conducted to understand the contents of manuscripts, as well as their afterlives. - P.S.

The Global *Muṣḥaf*: Visual Identity, Trans-Regionalism, and Eclecticism in Manuscripts of the Qur’an after 1400

January 15th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Simon Rettig (Assistant Curator of the Arts of the Islamic World, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)

In this lecture, organised by the Deccan Heritage Foundation, Simon Rettig proposed a codicological investigation as a means to highlight general characteristics of the Qur’an, to discuss regional specificities in the production of Qur’anic manuscripts, and to deliberate the appearance of syncretism within them as a result of trans-regional exchange, particularly in the 15th century. Rettig’s lecture tackled questions concerning technical advancement, collecting practices, and idiosyncrasies with regard to the Qur’an to also consider India’s place within the pre-modern Islamic world.

Qur’anic texts were decorated with illuminated headings or verse markers that enabled readers to locate their place within the text. Calligraphy developed as a visual embodiment of the word of

god, and six different scripts were codified for Qur'anic purposes. Through examples of a monumental Qur'an commissioned by Timur, and a smaller copy by his nephew, Baysunghur, Rettig demonstrated how the size and decoration of the book varied depending on its ownership and intended usage. Rettig contended that the 15th century was the first time we see a sense of globalism in the Islamic world through exchanges between the Mediterranean and India, and Qur'anic manuscripts perfectly embody such interactions.

Centres for Qur'anic production within the Timurid, Mamluk, and Ottoman regions had their own decorative particularities, while retaining formal aspects of the text. The regions influenced each other throughout the 15th century, and an increase in international trade and diplomacy also prompted intercultural and technical exchange. This is evidenced, for instance, in Qur'anic manuscripts from Timurid Iran that used mulberry bark paper, gifted by the Ming dynasty in China.

To consider where India stood in the context of Qur'anic production in relation to the Timurids, Mamluks, and Ottomans, Rettig highlighted the 1398 Gwalior Qur'an, the region's oldest-dated Qur'anic manuscript. This extensively illuminated copy amalgamates Iranian, Mamluk Egyptian, as well as purely Indian motifs. Rettig explained how Bihari script as well as Indian motifs were incorporated deliberately to cater to the taste of the local clientele. The manuscript contains a seal of Sultan Bayazid II, which also establishes a connection with Ottoman society. This connection is reinforced by the Ottoman-style binding used for

this script that seems to have been done in Istanbul. Rettig further elaborated upon how members of the Akkoyunlu Dynasty from Western Iran also travelled to India, influencing the illuminations in the local productions of the Qur'an. While Indian Sultans and patrons wanted Qur'ans that appealed to their own tastes, they also commissioned manuscripts that were stylistically on the same level as productions for Ottoman, Mamluk, and Timurid Sultans. Consequently, it could be concluded that India was not on the peripheries of the Islamic world but an integral part of it through its global exchanges and local productions.

Rettig finally highlighted the need for further research surrounding the production of Qur'ans and other Islamic manuscripts in India, to learn more about local centres, styles, patronage, as well as cultural exchange in order to situate the region's relation to the rest of the Islamic world more comprehensively. - P.S.



*Opening folio from a Qur'an
Egypt, Cairo, Mamluk period, ca. 1480–90
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul,
TIEM 533, fol. 1b*

Southeast Asian Aesthetics

Forthcoming Programmes:

Khmer Temple: Architecture and Icons

April 9th, 10th, 11th & 12th, 2019, 6:00 pm

Olivier Cunin (Associate Researcher of the Research Center in Architecture and Engineering of the National Architecture School of Nancy (ENSAN))

The set of four lectures is an overview and analysis of art, architecture, and iconography of some of Cambodia's most important temples. The series begins with a lecture focused on the development of the Khmer temple from the 8th to the 13th centuries, which incorporated Indian architectural treatises, but created original compositions such as 'Mountain temple' or Mount Meru in Khmer architecture. The second lecture

discusses Prasat Thom and Banteay Srei, the two emblematic Shaiva temples of the 10th century. The lecture highlights the salient features that Khmer architects excelled in, differing from the Indic models. The third lecture explores the role of Bayon-style Mahayana Buddhist temples (built during the end of the 12th and 13th centuries) in Angkorian history. Based on recent scientific research, it highlights the major features and the relative chronology of Bayon-style temples. The final lecture moves to the early 13th-century Mahayana Buddhist state temple, the Bayon, built by Jayavarman VII, and analyses its unique architecture of face towers, the divine population of the temple as well as the later Shaiva and Theravada adaptations of the temple as evident in its decoration and architecture.



Interpreting Premodern Javanese Art and Iconography in the Light of Texts

April 18th & 19th, 2019, 6:00 pm

*Andrea Acri (Assistant Professor of Tantric Studies
École Pratique des Hautes Études, PSL University)*

The series will discuss the issue of matching the extant archaeological and art historical vestiges of Central and East Java with Old Javanese texts. The first talk will focus on the problem of the system of directional deities depicted at Candi Shiva, Prambanan, and its textual prototypes; the

second talk will present visual evidence from premodern Central and East Javanese art as well as the modern Balinese art of the horrific and demonic elements that may be linked to the cremation-ground culture characterising some tantric traditions in both India and Southeast Asia.



Prambanan Shiva Temple relief

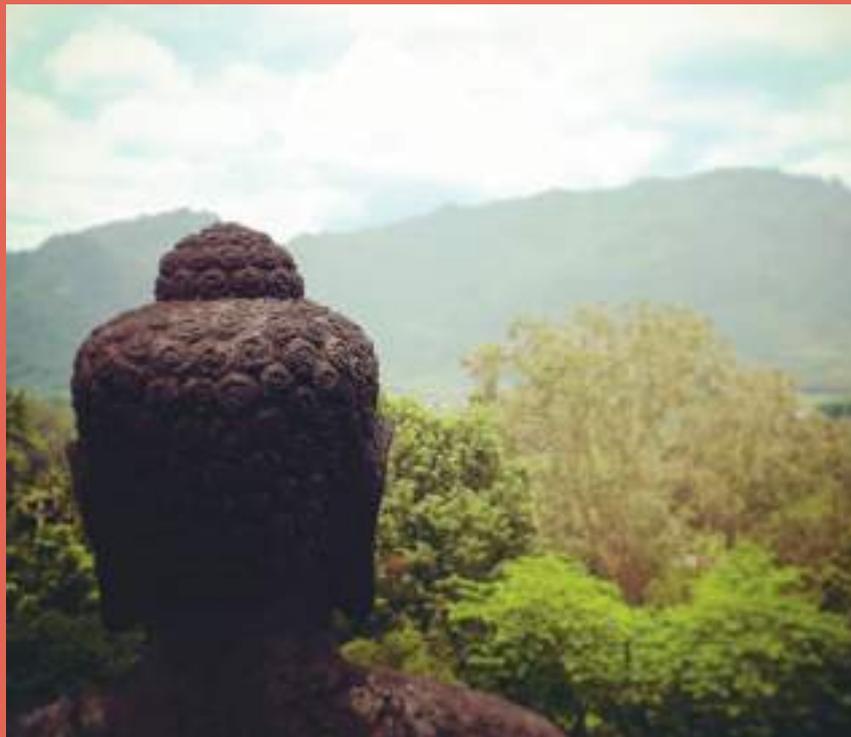
The Art and Archaeology of Hindu and Buddhist Southeast Asia

April 23rd, 24th, 25th & 26th, 2019, 6:00 pm

Stephen Murphy (Senior Curator for Southeast Asia, Asian Civilisations Museum)

This series is an exploration of the art, architecture, archaeology and history of some of Southeast Asia's most prominent cultures. It begins with two lectures specifically focusing on Thailand and its reception of early Buddhist and Hindu concepts. In doing so, these lectures provide two case studies of how Southeast Asian cultures of the first millennium CE adopted and adapted Hindu and Buddhist concepts to suit their own needs and practices. At the same time, they will illustrate how

the arrival of these Indic religions acted as catalysts that transformed the societies they encountered. The third lecture explores the crucial role of maritime trade and connectivity in the transmission of Hindu and Buddhist concepts throughout the region. It does so by discussing some of the major ports and maritime kingdoms of Southeast Asia and their pivotal roles in the history of Buddhism in particular. The final lecture moves forward in time to discuss the Buddhist kingdoms that arose in the second millennium CE in Mainland Southeast Asia. Building on the cultures that came before them, they developed into some of the region's most powerful and effervescent societies.



Buddha from Borobudur, 9th century, Java, Indonesia

Buddhist Aesthetics

Past Programmes:

Buddhism in Southern Andhra: The Evidence of Amaravati

February 11th and 12th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Richard Blurton (Retired Curator, British Museum)

On the first day of the seminar, Amaravati was studied as a major site of Indian Buddhism, while the second day saw the focus widen, viewing Amaravati through a more international lens, across its chronology. Many of the sculptures used to illustrate the presentation were based on the British Museum's collection of Amaravati sculptures.

The ancient site of Amaravati — the first Buddhist monument to be investigated in any detail by the Europeans in the 18th century — is situated on the banks of the River Krishna, in today's Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. There was a major fortified settlement near the Amaravati stupa known as Dharanikota, whose rulers were the patrons of the stupa. However, inscriptions at the stupa refer to it as a Mahachaitya or Great Shrine and not as a stupa.

Though Amaravati is considered one of the greatest monuments of antiquity, little is known about it today. In historical times, Amaravati was accessible from the sea, through the River Krishna, and remnants of ancient wooden wharves along the river edge suggest the importance of the town

and its openness to trade. It is this trade which created the wealth to build and sustain the stupa and the community of monks who would have lived onsite.



Dr. Richard Blurton speaks during 'Buddhism in Southern Andhra: The Evidence of Amaravati'

The shrine at Amaravati was at least 60 metres in diameter, with its solid dome set on a circular drum or platform. The stupa was topped with a *harmika* or a square rail feature. A railing ran around the base of the stupa, enclosing a *pradakshina* or circumambulatory path. Entry to

this path was through four gateways, one at each of the cardinal points, and each gateway was topped by four lion figures and were considered the guardians of the gateways.

The stupa exterior could have been decorated with stucco figures or even painted, but that is all speculative, as the upper portion of the stupa has not survived. What survives in museums today is almost exclusively the lower part of the dome, the drum below, the railing and gateways. Blurton used the sculptures from the British Museum's collection to reconstruct the lower part of the stupa and show us what pilgrims would have seen when they visited Amaravati Mahachaitya.

The outer part of the fence or railing might have been the first thing that the pilgrims saw on approaching the Mahachaitya. Auspicious imagery on the outer side of the railing, in the form of lotus blossoms as well as dwarves playing music or dancing, would welcome the pilgrims. They would enter the stupa through any of the four gateways and come across five pillars placed on an *ayanaka* platform. The pilgrims would then proceed in a clockwise direction to do a *pradakshina* of the stupa. The *pradakshina* path was such that the relic (which has not survived today), even though it is not visible, was kept on the auspicious right.

Visible on the left side of the pilgrim's view would then be the inner side of the stone railing. This was filled with narratives from the Jataka tales as well as scenes from the life of the Buddha. From the sculptures that survive in Amaravati, it is clear that the narrative element was of paramount importance in reminding the devotee of the past lives of the Buddha through various rebirths. On

the right side of the *pradakshina* path would be the base of the drum, with its surface covered in large slabs of stone depicting the stupa. The depictions of the stupa, many of which were donations with inscriptions, vary in style from early non-elaborate and unadorned versions to later elaborate ones. Similarly, the Buddha is shown in an aniconic form in early representations while later representations show the iconic form. This change in representation of the Buddha at a site like Amaravati, which has existed for centuries and has seen many changes, helps us document the change in how the Buddha was understood, experienced and represented.

The chronology of the stupa at Amaravati is unclear and uncertain, though its scale and size suggest it took several centuries to be built. The stupa was also constantly repaired with new slabs and sculptures. At one end of the timeline are sculptures that date to the 2nd century BCE and at the other end are sculptures from around 8th century CE, indicating at least a 1,000 years of history. Between the 3rd and 4th centuries CE was when the site saw peak activity and was also when it was at its richest and most vibrant, after which it went into gradual decline.

The chronology that is accepted today is based on the work of Akiro Shimata, who looked at the only architectural element to have survived — the railings or the *vedika*, and identified four different iterations of the railings that includes the undecorated granite of the 3rd century BCE and the densely sculpted narrative railings of the 3rd century CE which show the Buddha in corporeal form.



Though the Amaravati stupa has ceased to be a place of worship for over a millennium, it is still referred to in other places. The name Amaravati itself is not mentioned – what is mentioned is Dharanikota. Amaravati also survives in Tibetan tradition as the place where the Buddha revealed the Kalachakra tantra. Amaravati also finds mention in written texts and illustrations in manuscripts from Eastern India, where two Buddhist sites in Southern India are mentioned — Amaravati and Kanchipuram. The Thai tradition too makes a reference to Amaravati at Sukhotai, where a 15th century-CE inscription mentions a local monk who travelled to Amaravati seeking information on the imagery of Jataka tales.

Modern day examples come from a group of forest monks living in the forests of Buckinghamshire in England, who follow the Thai tradition, which has been influenced by the Amaravati tradition. Closer home, the name

‘Amaravati’ has taken on new dimension, with the bifurcation of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, and being declared the new capital of the latter state.

There is a lot of speculation around Amaravati Mahachaitya, including regarding onsite religious practices. At one of the smaller mounds of the site, it was found that there was an older Iron Age burial site underneath. A stupa is a monument to death, with an innate connection to burial and death rituals. And yet, there are no records of pilgrims at Amaravati Mahachaitya or of what they did there. A stupa of this size and importance would have had a substantial liturgical calendar, all of which is lost today.

It is hoped that findings of the studies on the Buddhist site of Kanaganahalli in neighbouring Karnataka, which are being conducted by the Archaeological Society of India, will be able to shed light on the Amaravati Mahachaitya as well. - S.G.

Western Himalayan Art and Its Key Monuments

March 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th, 2018, 3:30 - 6:00 pm

Christian Luczanits (David L. Snellgrove Senior Lecturer, London University)

The detailed write up about this seminar series will be featured in our next Quarterly (Jul - Sep 2019).



Deities of the Vajradhātu Mandala in the Apsa of the Assembly Hall of Sumda Chung, Ladakh; ca. 1200 CE; photo C. Luczanits 2009

Criticism & Theory

JPM's Criticism and Theory offerings include (1) an academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Critical Theory, Aesthetics, and Practice, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an academic year-long Postgraduate/Certificate course in Theoretical Foundations; (3) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (4) occasional academic conferences and workshop in these fields.



Installation view: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2014. Photo: David M. Heald

Critical Theory, Aesthetics, & Practice

After a break in November, during which students produced their first essays, CTAP resumed in December with a lecture by Academic Director Rohit Goel, on structuralism, semiotics and linguistics. Through a discussion of *Mythologies*, a seminal text by Roland Barthes, Goel explained not only the significance of Saussure's transhistorical theory of language but also how 'myth' as a form becomes historically specific. If every aspect of modern life can be mythologised in capitalist societies, Barthes provides an effective system of demythologising by unpacking the first and second order signification in a series of vignettes on popular myths. By the end of the lecture, students were able to point to everyday examples from their own environment and explain the signifier, signified and signification of each.

For the session on poststructuralism, Prof. Iyer, from IIT Bombay, returned to teach Michel Foucault's rarely discussed theses on the importance of artists such as Edouard Manet, Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky and Rene Magritte, who ruptured and transformed our understanding of Western art. This exceptional lecture began with an introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, before delving deep into *Manet and the Object of Painting* and *This is Not a Pipe*, simultaneously providing the students a graph of how early and middle Foucault differs from the later.

Before the close of 2018, CTAP had the privilege of welcoming Sandhini Poddar, Prof. Robert Meister (UC Santa Cruz) and Prof. Faisal Devji (University of Oxford) for a series of public seminars. Poddar, an eminent curator, spoke intimately about the life and work of Zarina Hashmi, while Prof. Meister, author of the groundbreaking text *After Evil* and the soon-to-be released *Historical Justice in the Age of Finance*, lectured on both of these timely tomes. His two-day seminar was followed by two days with Prof. Devji, who addressed the subject 'Liberalism and its Indian Afterlife' in four parts: 'Intimacy and Interest in Indian Political Thought', 'Gandhi Against the Human Race', 'Godless Secularism: Europe, India and Religion' and 'Ambedkar's Politics: Democracy Without Nationalism'.

Rethinking the Anthropocene, a lecture by Rohit Goel that dealt with Jason Moore's Capitalocene I and II, followed these challenging seminars. Moore's two articles on the nature and origins of the ecological crisis we face today provide an alternative to the history of the 'anthropocene' popular in our current discourse. As Moore writes: "Against the Anthropocene's shallow historicisation, I argue for the Capitalocene, understood as a system of power, profit and re/production in the web of life."

Practitioners actively working in the field of contemporary art delivered the final suite of

lectures for CTAP. In January, Nida Ghouse – curator and writer – joined us for four lectures. The first class, titled ‘From Museum Objects to Forensic Evidence’, dealt with the work of Forensic Architecture and took students through key texts by Michael Taussig, Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, which introduced the judicial history of forensics, and raised questions about the relationship between death, museums and art. Ghouse followed this with a riveting public talk on her most recent curatorial engagement at the Haus Der Kulteren Der Welt in Berlin, the exhibition ‘Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War’ co-curated with Anselm Franke, Paz Guevara and Antonia Majaca (a detailed report on this can also be found in this section). Ghouse also generously shared her own ongoing research and projects: ‘Audio Matters’ addressed not only the early history of sound production in India but also her exciting collaboration with Umashankar and the Earchaeologists, which continues the work that pioneering acoustician Umashankar Manthravadi began in the 1990s, into the “acoustic properties of Hindu theatres/temples and Kerala”; ‘From the Clouds to the Resistance’ introduced us to the filmmakers Daniele Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, and gave us a brief visual catalogue of shots panning to the sky that Ghouse has been collecting in order to argue for a particular relationship that these moments in filmmaking have to our understanding of resistance.

Along with Ghouse, CTAP was also fortunate to welcome back Ranjit Hoskote for a four-hour talk on ‘The Art World and its Institutions’, which mapped out the relationships between artists,



Ranjit Hoskote speaks during ‘The Art World and its Institutions I + II’

studios, galleries, museums, auction houses, residency spaces, scholars, and a range of other historical and modern models through which artists and artwork circulate. An interactive class with the architect and scholar Himanshu Barte on ‘The Challenge of Critical Practice’ provided a much-needed moment for introspection and reflection on how to embody or live with ‘criticality’ in our daily lives, and the self-reflexive ways in which theory and practice can merge. Shilpa Gupta, one of

India's most prominent contemporary artists, provided students with an intimate view of her process in a moving presentation. Taking them into her experience at the JJ School of Art, and moving systematically through her oeuvre, she engaged the students in lengthy discussions about the inspiration, making and distribution of her art.



Shilpa Gupta speaks during 'Walking on/off the Line'

In the final two weeks of the course, before the break for second essays and dissertation writing, Alisha Sett presented an overview of the transdisciplinary exhibition 'The Boat is Leaking. The Captain Lied' that brought together Alexander Kluge, Thomas Demand and Anna Viebrock under the curatorial oversight of Udo Kittelman at the Prada Fondazione during La Biennale de Venezia in 2017. She also shared her own research in 'A Short History of Indian Photography: Before and After Raghubir Singh', speaking not only about the

evolution of documentary photography in the subcontinent but also situating Singh as a key figure working with myth and icon.

Our closing classes with Padmini Chettur, the renowned contemporary dancer, provided a truly fitting end to the year. Her exemplary pedagogy integrated critical thinking about the evolution of her own relationship with dance, the reasons and pathways for moving from a decade with Chandralekha into an independent practice, with the space to think back to many of the key questions raised by the course in the past year. The retrospective lectures titled 'The Rigorous Practice of Freedom' took students carefully through her career with punctuating remarks about the ways in which critics have (mis)understood her complex practice.

It has been an extraordinarily fulfilling year for CTAP, with a highly participative group of students engaging with an eclectic and energising group of scholars, artists and curators, allowing us to cover a difficult range of theoretical, art historical and contemporary frameworks in aesthetics, critical theory and contemporary practice. As the students move into the next phase of independent writing and research, the lecture schedule comes to an end. We anticipate an equally dynamic programme for the coming year. - A.S.

Past Programmes:

Historical Justice in the Age of Finance

December 14th & 15th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Robert Meister (Professor of Social and Political Thought, University of California)

Traditional Marxist analyses address capitalist industrialisation based on who owns the means of production, but the financialisation of capital poses an intractable problem for Marxist theory. Capitalism's turn to modern finance (and its self-imposed constraints) meant that it was no longer possible to directly seize, nationalise, or collectivise the cumulative benefits of past injustice held in financial form, as such a seizure would make the capital markets themselves 'illiquid'. In other words, reduce the value of wealth accumulated in financial assets to zero, technically leaving no wealth to seize, and thereby making a revolution against it inconceivable. The root of this problem is that a financial asset differs from a machine which has a 'use value' apart from its 'exchange value', and so you can seize a machine and use it for production. Financial assets are neither cash nor fixed capital (such as producer goods or raw material), as their only use value is to be convertible into cash i.e. to be 'liquid'. A financial asset is thus something that is (potentially) cash without being cash, and its use value is the degree of its liquidity, i.e. how easily it can be converted into cash.

Prof. Meister's seminars were based on his forthcoming book *Historical Justice in the Age of Finance*, which repurposes the hegemonic

language of global finance, which most of us find inaccessible, for the democratic pursuit of 'historical justice'. Meister sees historical justice as the elimination of the benefits of past injustice that persist and compound, especially under capitalism's mechanisms of valourising itself. Further, he argues that reducing the continuing effects of past evil is not something that society can't afford but what it *does afford* whenever it pays the price of preserving liquidity of capital assets, and it is precisely at these moments that beneficiaries of cumulative injustice try to argue that historical justice is no longer affordable and must be set aside in favour of austerity politics.



Prof. Robert Meister speaks during 'Historical Justice in the Age of Finance'

Meister analyses capitalist financialisation focusing on who controls the means of value preservation and accumulation, and claims that financial capitalism's inability to conceive of historical justice except as something that lies

beyond it functions as an implicit as well as explicit link between capital markets and state power. He then responds to the unanswered democratic/political question of who pays this price (or premium) and who gets paid, by suggesting that beneficiaries are the financial and security industries, which protect capitalist markets from anti-capitalist hacks, for a premium. When capital markets wish to quell justice, they threaten us with a lack of confidence in their own future liquidity, as they did in the financial crisis of 2008-9.

The historical question of justice is reflected as a liquidity premium that attaches to the fear that a certain financial asset (or the capital markets as a whole) will become illiquid. Therefore, capital market illiquidity can wipe out the present benefits of past injustice and thus would be an event, not of distributive justice as discussed by liberal philosophers, but of historical justice. At the time of the economic crisis of 2008-9, the American GDP was 13 trillion dollars, while the total credit market debt (what could be pledged as collateral for other financial securities) was 76 trillion. Economists booked the value of the liability that the government assumed — when it pledged to bail out the financial market — at 9 trillion dollars. An amount, which in the US, is enough to provide free education through university, free healthcare, and a guaranteed basic universal income. In other words, an amount approximately 80% of the GDP that could have been nationalised. The important point is that a revolutionary event of capital disaccumulation would have been unthinkable in the absence of a revolution, and a revolution in the name of historical justice would have been

unthinkable because there would have been no wealth to seize, as threatening to seize it would have made it illiquid and thus disappear. If the triumph of finance makes revolutionary justice inconceivable, then in effect historical justice ceases to be an option; its present value is zero.

Meister turns this argument on its head to claim that historical justice as capital market illiquidity is a 'real' option that distinguishes meaningful democracy from being merely a technology for manufacturing consent to present inequality and accumulation of past injustice. For him, historical justice is an option that can be valued very precisely using the very theory of options that allows us to price claims that cannot yet be exercised (in both the colloquial and the financial sense). An alternative to austerity, options theory is about how something unknowable can be priced by making it equivalent to something knowable. The premium for maintaining the liquidity of accumulated worth is identical to the premium in a democracy for rolling over the option of revolutionary justice. And so, the liquidity premium is exactly the value that can be extracted in a democracy for preserving a revolutionary option that can't be exercised and which, to capital markets, looks simply an event of illiquidity. Capitalism calculates and extracts the value of the liquidity premium all the time, and this value can be increased by political action in just the way, in the mid-20th century, the welfare state in Europe and the US extracted from country to country, 30 to 50 percent of GDP, because the fear of general strike was perceived to be possible even though no actual events increased its probability. The

welfare state was the premium extracted by rolling over the option of a general strike.

Illiquidity is possible (while it may not be very probable) and we can *make it* seem more possible – more imaginable, easier to ‘pre-visualise’ – even though it may not lead to the actual occurrence of an illiquidity event. À la the exaggerated fear of the general strike, exaggerated fears of illiquidity can be harvested as a macroeconomic derivative whose premium would rise in value *exponentially* as political turbulence increases. The value (liquidity premium) can be extracted to enrich the state for purposes of historical justice or can be extracted by alternatives to the state to directly seize the premium of capital markets that have to sell themselves short in times of political and economic turbulence. Meister’s book argues that by treating historical justice as an option, it has present value in financialised capitalism, and that its value can be increased and partly appropriated to now fund movements by ‘justice-seeking subjects’ at the expense of beneficiaries of past injustice.

To follow through Meister’s argument in actual political praxis, we need to think counterintuitively about how finance changes our understanding of capitalism. A conceptual shift is needed to think of finance as an engine for generating liquidity alongside production that generates value. We are no longer talking about production in a market, but the discipline of payments within markets. In finance, you frequently get money by selling something you don’t own (short selling), or you borrow something to get money from it, or you can buy something by borrowing money that you don’t

have (leverage). That said, under capitalism, participation in financial markets is not democratic, you *still* need capital — the market mode of production underlies the financial system — but you can collateralise a future commodity to borrow money you don’t have (i.e. the commodity is collateral before it is capital), therefore the capitalist can borrow money to eventually acquire the means of production in a system where he didn’t already have it. The definitive feature of capitalism is that you cannot collateralise or pledge your future labour to get money *now*; this is the distinction between ‘free labour’ from indentured or slave labour. The role of capital is to quantify and legalise the distinction between those who can get money by shorting or leveraging and those who must *work* to earn it.

Then, the goal is to create a space again for thinking about historical justice by reconnecting it to the problem of making capital accumulation acceptable as a social fact. The point of Meister’s previous book, *After Evil*, is that cumulative gains of past injustice continue in the present, but without being seen to perpetuate that past evil (or bad history) and thus without having to be justified. He positions *Historical Justice in the Age of Finance* as a sequel, and says that his ‘wild talk’ about revolution, subversion, and sabotage is ‘a way to open up the question of access to the structured character of vehicles of wealth preservation and what makes them liquid or not, and how to politicise and harvest the premium extracted by capital markets for keeping them liquid’. We need to find devices to make past injustices *liquid* and thus give them a present value; an alternative to

the post-Cold War humanitarian consensus that attempted to take the option of historical justice off the table by imposing a moral agreement that the past is evil.

Today, liquidity is the choke point of the financial system, in the way that, during industrial capitalism, it was shutting down coal production or transport, the real point of which was dis-accumulation of wealth held in form of producer goods. Capitalism's ability to think its own end as an event of illiquidity can be instrumentalised to price the present value of not dis-accumulating the cumulative benefits of past injustice. Financial markets exist to manufacture alternatives to illiquidity in much the way democratic politics exists to manufacture alternatives to roll over the option of revolution, that is, the former price the option of illiquidity and the latter set a value on alternatives to revolution. And both of them make capital market illiquidity and political instability seem impossible, even though both are matters of a policy that is historically contingent and unnatural. The financial asset pricing formula is a measure of the intrinsic uncertainty of how long and to what degree capital markets can be assured of continuing, while democratic politics is a way of creating the political risk that capital markets price in order to assume them away. *The truth that underlies both is that illiquidity and revolution are not impossible and the uncertainty about both is the political unconscious of capitalism and thus its 'real' according to its own theory.* Uncertainty, about liquidity and revolution, is the source of cumulative financial value, as well as of vulnerability to its underlying, original injustice.

As Meister puts it, "Today, the macroeconomic liquidity premium that preserves the value of wealth accumulated in financial form is identical to the political premium that democracy can extract at the same moment for rolling over, for renewing historical justice as the option for dis-accumulating the benefits of past injustice that are held in financial form without destroying their value." - R.N.

Liberalism and its Indian Afterlife

December 19th & 20th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Faisal Devji (Professor of Indian History, Oxford University)



Prof. Faisal Devji structured his two-day seminar on 'Liberalism and its Indian Afterlife' around four fundamental concepts of liberal thought: political interest, humanism, secularism, and democracy.

Beginning with the term 'interest' itself, which has a complex genealogy with no easy or direct translation in Indian vernacular languages, Devji

reminded us of key questions asked by colonial thinkers: Can someone bound to the interests of their caste or community adequately represent the political interests of society at large or rise above their own material interests? If Indians were willing to die (or kill) for their religion, caste or others forms of identity, how could they ever rule their own society? If they could not rise above their excessive attachments, how could they turn themselves into a nation? How does a society not based upon class relations (one too recessive for a social contract) – since these are the relations that allow for the emergence of contractual relations upon which democracy is built – vote?

The answers were used to justify the colonists continuing control. The political leaders of India were faced with these questions as well, both in philosophy and practice, as the prospect for entering a new postcolonial world order loomed large. Linking them on the basis of their arguments with regards to interest, Devji revealed the intellectual affinity between none other than Jinnah and Savarkar on the one hand, and Gandhi and Iqbal on the other.

Devji explicated passages from *The Essentials of Hindutva* to reveal Savarkar's core conundrum – the deep familiarity between religious communities in India, especially Hindus and Muslims, who have been historically intertwined for too long for Hindus to ever be able to make any claims at purity. How could Hindus then be made into an interest group? Jinnah's solution was to think of the Hindu-Muslim divide in terms of a classical property dispute between brothers: only with 'fair' arbitration by the courts, could brothers

at the brink of enmity find amity when faced with a potent inheritance. Without the creation of a social contract, the basis of which was private property, and in which political majorities and minorities were not fixed, Jinnah believed that India – and later, post-partition Pakistan – could not stabilise.

Gandhi saw this as Jinnah's naïve idealism. Without a deeply rooted sense of self-interest, Gandhi believed that we could not have been colonised, and for him, political interest in the manner in which we understand it in India, emerges precisely because of the colonial state's ability to set itself up as a neutral third party. By becoming the only unbiased body for adjudication, the colonisers force everyone else to function as interest groups. Gandhi and Iqbal's views echo each other as they are focused on the millions of Indian peasants, a majority that was almost entirely alienated from the money economy, and for whom the notion of universal private property was unimaginable. They are concerned with how these masses will be represented in the new state and see that it is only the educated urban Indian who demands democracy. Therefore, Iqbal's desire to focus on the visible and invisible points of contact between communities pitches against itself the colonial ideal of dictating or demanding rights on the basis of interest.

Devji opened the section on humanism by tracing its birth in the Christian sanctity of life, following its secular conception through the work of Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt, into the postcolonial rise of humanitarianism and the development industry in the so-called Third World. This was his preface to a discussion of Gandhi's

unique criticism of the hubris of universality contained within this Western history of humanism, and Gandhi's complex understanding of violence and non-violence in relationship to an understanding of humanity.

The following day Prof. Devji began his third section by challenging the popular notion of Nehruvian India as the most secular period of Indian nationalism. He argued that the making of a national culture took place through a fulsome engagement with religion, and that secularism in the newly independent nation did not seem to require the kind of separation or disengagement with religion that liberal society seems to demand today. Neither legal nor vernacular secularism required that the relationship with religion be overly circumscribed or for a *laxman rekha* between religion and the state. While in the legal sphere, the state was to keep a principled distance from all religions, allowing for equal treatment (Bhargava), the common spectacle of politicians visiting both temples and churches, or mosques, showed that engagement with religion has always been an accepted phenomenon in India.

This set us up for the crux of Devji's seminar, which revealed how the discourse around the 'return of religion and the crisis of secularism' has been falsely pictured by most of the media and society today. The crisis of secularism, Devji argued, is truly about the loss of religion's theological essence. The rise of Islam, upon which the 'return of religion' is predicated, is a symptom of this desire. It is because secularism is understood as the separation between what can be called religion and what is usually referred to as

the state, embedding the necessity for a strict dividing line, that it is put into crisis by the vanishing of religion as it has been classically understood.



Prof. Faisal Devji speaks during 'Liberalism and its Indian Afterlife'

Devji returned to Iqbal to show us how this was already something that he was attempting to understand in the 1920s. For Iqbal, if the world of the spirit was made private and the material world made public, then there would be no room for non-instrumental behavior, ethics or ideals, in civil society. Iqbal in fact argued that India had never been structured in this manner, with a clean compartmentalising of the private and the public. According to Devji, Iqbal therefore suggests a temporal division as a thought experiment and uses Shia and Sunni Islam to argue that if we are waiting for perfection as we wait for the *imam*, then the present state of imperfection can be

understood as a site of freedom.

Devji rounded out this section with several contemporary examples from France and other parts of Western Europe where the collapse of the 'empire of faith' has led to a desire for a more muscular Catholicism, ironically modelled on an understanding of Islam as a religion of strength. Regardless of Islam's global rise, it too faces a structural crisis with no central control over its evolution. Ultimately, therefore it is the attenuation of the metaphysical that defines the crisis of secularism today.

For his final section, Devji turned to Ambedkar and to his understanding of interest – the very place we began, and showed us how, over the course of decades of thinking on the subject, Ambedkar went back and forth on the issue of whether or not Dalits must be structured as an interest group. Because they lacked ownership of property, education, or self-consciousness as a coherent interest group, he argued in 1919 that their interests were in fact the greatest of all – if the very persona of Dalits has been confiscated then their interests are the interests of humanity. However, by the time the constitution has been written, Ambedkar is at the vanguard of ensuring reservations and Devji argued that it was this legal instantiation, more than any preceding event, which made Dalits into an enduring interest group. Ambedkar was well aware that this important and necessary step was also a precarious moment because it meant that the Dalit identity had to be formed around something temporary – marginalisation, discrimination, backwardness. Thus, Devji said, Ambedkar eventually embraced

Buddhism as the religion that could be owned by Dalits, which would give them the sense of cohesion and ownership over the *longue durée* that other interest groups in India such as Christians and Muslims had always had. Devji proved this by taking us step by step through Ambedkar's re-reading of ancient Indian history, his re-structuring of the Buddhist narrative as competitively set against both Hinduism and Islam, and why he eventually also had to argue against communism (as the only other true challenge to the universality offered by Buddhism). - A.S.

Two Sides of the same Coin: Thoughts on Destruction and Preservation of 'Cultural Heritage' in the Middle East

February 8th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Mirjam Brusius (Research Fellow in Colonial and Global History, German Historical Institute London)

What is cultural heritage? What has been historically deemed of value, why and for whom? What counts as preservation? What objects should be preserved, and how? Who decides?

These questions beg attention in the context of a burgeoning decolonisation process that seeks to challenge the hitherto preserved status quo of the archaeological discipline and the museum – themselves imperial institutions – as chief arbitrator, source of knowledge, and rightful owner of tangible heritage deemed of global value.

In so doing, they also raise questions about the idea of progress, and the continuing valorisation of security (and restoration) of 'shared heritage' against perceived threat in the non-West or a site



American Colony, Palmyra. Workmen moving massive capital. Syria Tadmur, photograph, 1920 [approximately to 1933], Photo Dept, photographer, Library of Congress

outside the metropole museum, thus also feeding into a linear and continuous progression of the civilising mantra of knowledge as power, as well as its mission of salvation of that which is under threat from itself.

Moreover, the selection of sites of destruction, as well as the prioritisation of preservation of certain sites to the neglect of others, is often a result of politics in the processes of empire - or nation building, identity formation, and regime validation. Thus, recent events in the Middle East – of ISIS targeting specific sites which often tend to be recognised as valuable by Europe – can be

read as a response to Western imperialism. In this context, questions posed by Dr. Mirjam Brusius take on an immediate importance, and enable a rethinking of the possibilities of theorising, claiming, and participating in cultural heritage.

Brusius's primary argument is that preservation and destruction are historical phenomena that are not mutually exclusive but connected in crucial ways. In particular, destruction itself is a double-edged sword in that the perception of endangered tangible heritage – for example, the loss of a building – can enhance its cultural significance. Thus, the process by which heritage becomes

heritage is open to debate, often premised as it is on the desire to save from threat elsewhere, rather similar in an uncanny way to the current humanitarian discourse of the right to protect.



Dr. Mirjam Brusius speaks during 'Two Sides of the same Coin: Thoughts on Destruction and Preservation of 'Cultural Heritage' in the Middle East'

Through five steps from museum narratives through art and politics, storage, and looting, Brusius forces a questioning of the dominant narrative that 'heritage' is always original or authentic; refers to tangible objects and artefacts; and must always be excavated, saved, and displayed. For instance, she looks at various practices such as burial in the ground as a way of both storage and safety, and pushes its limits to ask whether we must stop digging altogether since the unseen object may be safest then, thus also challenging the idea of progress.

And, through a narration of the recreation of a

statue destroyed by ISIS in Iraq, made by an Iraqi American artist who used 10,500 empty date syrup cans, and which was unveiled in Trafalgar Square, Brusius asks whether cultural heritage can be replaced and whether it should be. More significantly, she highlights that while the heritage community mourn the loss of cultural heritage and can perhaps even recreate it through 3D printing, neither was the loss of people mourned and nor is it possible to 3D print the people who lost their lives. She argues in favour of a notion of a heritage constituting not only buildings but also memories and connections to a place. It is important, therefore, as part of theorising and understanding the notion of heritage, to turn towards personal and individual as well as communitarian engagements with heritage, and confront the uncomfortable aspects of Europe's histories in order to decolonise the process of understanding heritage, as well as its preservation and destruction. - R.S.

The Innovation Trap and Contemporary Capitalism

March 18th, 2019, 6:30 pm

Arjun Appadurai (Paulette Goddard Professor of Media, Culture and Communication, New York University and Professor of Anthropology and Globalization at The Hertie School of Governance (Berlin))

Prof. Appadurai started his talk with some framing remarks on the direction of his own career, which, over the past 30 to 40 years, has largely dealt with cultural issues of meaning, language, and signification, drawing him to anthropology. But

at the same time, he has always had a broad interest in the economy i.e. issues of wealth, inequality, technology, resource allocation, etc. Appadurai thus situates himself (and the present talk based on his upcoming book, *Failure*) at the borders of the fields of anthropology and economics, to emphasise that modernisation, development, and urbanisation cannot simply be discussed as cultural phenomena but involve massive economic implications and suppositions.

Also crucial to the talk was the finalisation of capitalism, its paradigmatic and most recent shock being the mega-event of the 2007-8 collapse of the US (as well as the UK and European) economy. Basically, financial capitalism is not simply about making money from money but rather the monetisation of risk. For instance, with a mortgage one pays interest in lieu of the principal, but a financial instrument can be created to monetise the risk of failure of the mortgage itself. And this monetisation of risk can continue endlessly — which is precisely the logic of the derivative, and of the derivatives market, which uses such instruments of infinite complexity, with more being invented every day.

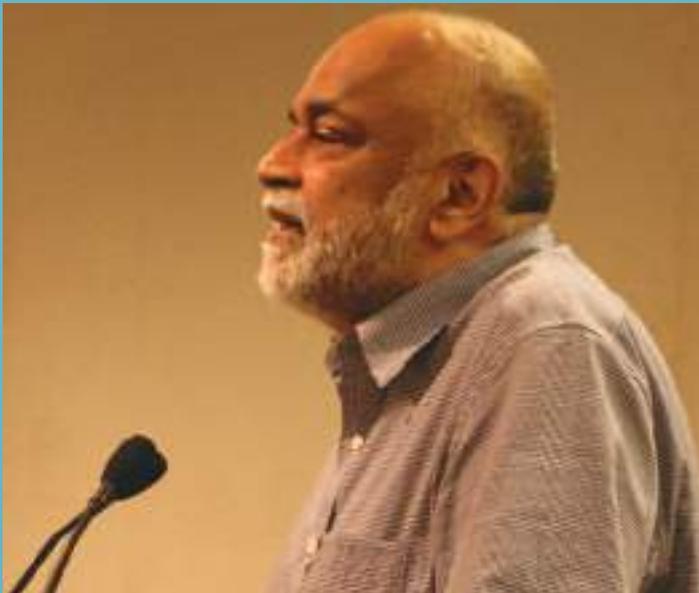
Appadurai identifies derivatives to be structured like promissory contracts, basically, linguistic phenomena such as: ‘If this happens, I will do this; if that happens, you will do that’. In addition, the contract is wrapped around ‘a bet about future value in the present’. And although every derivative contract has a ‘time term’, nobody waits for it to end, and instead, derivatives are constantly resold, bundled and aggregated on a massive scale. Appadurai characterised derivatives “as heavy

load-bearing promises, which form chains that are repeatedly sold, finally accumulating into ‘a mountain resting on a very obscure base’. This ‘mountain’ in the case of the US collapse was the real value of the housing market, i.e. “the mountain that collapsed was a chain of promises predicated on the indefinite rise of value in the housing market, which became the foundation of countless derivative risks”. Therefore, ‘risk’ becomes the privileged commodity in financialised capitalism.

Appadurai’s upcoming book (co-authored with Neta Alexander) addresses failure with a specific focus on the economies of Wall Street (finance) and Silicon Valley (digital). The book argues that “new digital platforms, tools, and affordance in technologies have sped-up obsolescence and upgrading, and thus created a new relationship between risk, innovation, failure – and futurity”. While this relationship appears to expand possible social futures, in reality, it threatens to shrink them. The paradox is that although entrepreneurial disruptions in the digital era seem to profit from the virtues of new modes of sociality – their popularity and success – they actually appear to rely on the failure or induced obsolescence of prior modes of sociality. The process of the gig economy signals a new chapter in the “commodification of sociality”, and its earlier history can be found in advertising, technology and related modernist modes of mass consumption. Within the new economy of apps and digital platforms, failure plays a crucial role in isolating us from one another, creating feelings of self-blame and animosity, which paradoxically, make users ever more desperate to find and adopt services or apps that promise to make their lives

more convenient or to recreate a new sense of collective identity.

Appadurai consistently refers to Joseph Schumpeter, a 20th-century economist who touched on the most important issues of corporate capitalism, and who, like Max Weber, believed that capitalism is as much a cultural form as it is the arrangement of technology and production. Like Marx, Schumpeter argued that capitalism was powered by its own ceaseless compulsion for its self-reinvention, and predicted its collapse by the end of the 20th century, resulting from the logic of ‘creative destruction’ corrupted by corporate managerialism; a prediction which was spectacularly wrong’, but Schumpeter’s insights about the logic of industrial capitalism, for Appadurai, remain ‘highly relevant’.



Prof. Arjun Appadurai speaks during ‘The Innovation Trap And Contemporary Capitalism’

The most important Schumpeterian idea of ‘creative destruction’ is essentially that the race among competitive capitalist firms for greater profits leads them to seek new technologies, which leads to the ‘creative destruction’ of old technology — a general abandonment of earlier methods of labour utilisation, production, marketing, pricing and distribution – by the new. And when the innovation is sufficiently radical, it results in “wholesale destruction of previous forms of work, society, and control”. Today, creative destruction typically comes from entrepreneurial innovations financed by canny investors, which, if they succeed as profit-making strategies, lead a certain firm to a temporary market monopoly, forcing all others to imitate or replicate their innovation.

At this stage, Appadurai turned to Silicon Valley to generally explore the validity of Schumpeterian pessimism about capitalism. The Valley has gained a justifiable reputation for monopolising the best minds, technologies, and assets to push the envelope in regards to digital innovation; but interestingly, for Appadurai, its giants (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft, etc.) play no direct part in one of its “biggest, most dissociative and wealth producing” revolutions in the past three decades. Namely in the domain of mobile applications (apps) which allow users to purchase a wide range of goods and services from their smartphones, with a high degree of speed, reliability and convenience. In the US alone, the app economy can be measured in the combined valorisation of more than 100 start-ups and more than a billion dollars in revenues, which are projected to rise up to 850 billion by 2020.

Leading publications (*Forbes*, *The New York Times*) tout gig economy apps such as Uber, Airbnb and TaskRabbit as a possible solution to unemployment. But many authors have demonstrated that this could not be further from the truth. Since 2013, there has been extensive press coverage of class-action suits against Uber and Lyft, with a resultant backlash against the gig economy which has been described as a technological intensification of inequality to create monopolies that aggregate and co-opt the efforts and resources of many users who are pitted against one another within the platforms.

Within the gig economy, the consumer pays for a service rather than for a particular employee, producing a growing sense of depersonalisation and randomness. Instead of making millions of people part-time entrepreneurs overnight, mobile apps offer transitory, impersonal encounters that are almost immediately quantified by the consumer: ‘Thanks for using Uber. How many stars will you give XYZ?’ Further, the apps depend on constant surveillance (close monitoring of Uber drivers) and exploitation of temporary workers, called ‘partners’ or ‘suppliers’, in order to avoid providing them social benefits such as health insurance or job security.

As opposed to websites, apps offer a unique experience and ontology, being personalised, password protected and easy to access. That they shape users’ daily habits on an unprecedented level, is apparent from the presence of organisational apps that promise to increase productivity and those that block other distracting apps (social media, games, etc.), while tracking

device-usage for those who wish to control their smartphone addiction.

The truly radical aspect of this economy is that it makes the consumer a tester-in contradistinction to traditional market research or big data analyses — wherein constant user feedback is used to refine the app on an almost continuous basis. And despite the fact that these endless apps will quickly become obsolete, there is no such thing as an *absolute failure*; instead, each failure simply drives the next improvement. There is always a rapid need to ‘upgrade’ and to be sure, not just on the level of the app but also the user who *has to* learn something new and become a better source of feedback that will drive the app’s next iteration.

A large part of the app economy is involved with self-monitoring, with a lot of behaviour that is reminiscent of machine gambling — a severe, serious and highly-profitable form of addiction. There are a lot of interesting and complex social features to what Natasha Schüll calls the ‘Machine Zone’, an endlessly repetitive sphere where time, space and social identity are suspended — and a deep addiction sets in. - *R.N.*

Forthcoming Programmes:

Modernity and South Asia

July 18h, 19th, & 20th, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Natasha Easton (Lecturer in History of Art, University College London)

Details to follow

Theoretical Foundations



Past Programmes:

Module III. The Emergence of Capitalism in Early Modern Europe

March 5th, 6th, 12th, 13th, 19th, 20th, April 2nd, 3rd, 8th, and 9th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Rohit Goel (Academic Director, Jnanapravaha)

The detailed report about this module will be featured in our next Quarterly (Jul - Sep 2019).

Community Engagement

JPM's Community Engagement offerings include (1) JPM Write, a six-week Certificate course in writing style and (2) occasional public lectures and performances in Creative Processes, Curatorial Processes, and Iconic Images as well as book launches, concerts, film screenings, and panel discussions on topics of interest to Mumbai's and India's general public.



Past Programmes:

JPM Write: Argument

January 19th, 21st, 28th, February 4th, 9th, 16th, 18th, 23rd, 25th and March 2nd, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Rohit Goel (Academic Director, Jnanpravaha)

The detailed write-up about this module will be featured in our next Quarterly (Jul - Sep 2019).

At Home in the World : The Art and Life of GULAMMOHAMMED SHEIKH

Book Release by Gieve Patel and Sudhir Patwardhan

Translating the World into Being

Illustrated lecture by Chaitanya Sambrani

March 30th, 2019, 6:30 pm

The detailed write-up about this book launch and lecture will be featured in our next Quarterly (Jul - Sep 2019).



*Gulammohammed Sheikh, Gandhi and Gama, 2014, triptych, acrylic on canvas, H: 288 x W: 624 cm.
Coll: Christiane Leister, Switzerland*

Creative Processes

Past Programmes:

Zarina: Floating on the Dark Sea

December 18th, 2018, 6:30 pm

Sandhini Poddar (London-based Art Historian)



Photo Credit: David Heald, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

“Memory is the only lasting possession we have. I have made my life the subject of my work using the images of home, the places I have visited and the stars I have looked up to. I just want a reminder that I didn’t imagine my experiences.”

- Zarina Hashmi

The praxis of Zarina Hashmi, printmaker and sculptor, seems as bound to paper as our bodies are bound to skin. After a series of major exhibitions over the last decade – retrospectives that brought together five decades of her art – she

has secured her place in the pantheon of modern artists, having pushed the boundaries of this medium far beyond the delicate drawings and sketches with which it is normally associated. The intimate, often painful themes within her oeuvre – exile, partition, home – have revealed themselves through minute pin pricks, the gouging of woodblocks, the piercing of needles, the sewing of white thread on white page, the curlicues of nastaliq, and of course the ink-black borderlines marking the edges of old homes, new countries, and bombed cities. The unique textual and sculptural terrain that Zarina has traversed, between 1961 and the present, was revealed in Sandhini’s Poddar’s expansive lecture on the evolution of her practice.

Before Zarina embarked on her global adventure – Bangkok, Tokyo, Paris, finally settling in New York – she was a student of mathematics at Aligarh Muslim University where her father was a prof. of medieval history. Playing in the fragrant gardens of the *zenana* and between the hallowed shelves of her father’s personal library at Aligarh House, Zarina’s childhood was spent amongst those who revered language, whether scholarly or poetic. It was also during this time, between 1935 and 1957, that journeys to Fatehpur Sikri, Mughal gardens and tombs were undertaken, from whence was born a love of geometry and patterns.

Zarina has commented that she left India not as a child, but as an adult, with a strong sense of the

country and the culture to which she belonged. The architectonics of war – that reappear in her oeuvre, especially in works such as *Home is a Foreign Place* and *These Cities Blotted into the Wilderness (Ghalib After Adrienne Rich)* – had been imbibed already through the echoes of partition that resounded across India. As she travelled with her husband (a diplomat) and became an ardent student of printmaking, she discovered feminism in Paris, and slowly entered its vanguard in New York, her practice imbibing and reflecting the ‘politics of place’. Speaking at length about artistic influences on Zarina’s life (and thus her work) – influences as varied as Krishna Reddy, Ana Mendieta, Constantin Brancusi and Marcel Duchamp – Poddar rounded out the narrative by giving us a glimpse of the artist’s way forward in *The Ten Thousand Things (2011-2014)*, a ‘la boîte-en-valise’-inspired archive that puts the many Zarinas we have seen under glass together.



Sandhini Poddar speaks during ‘Zarina: Floating on the Dark Sea’

Poddar brought the artist’s persona alive as she took us into Zarina’s New York studio – a space that the artist has inhabited for over three decades – and spoke not only of Zarina’s museum shows but of the long journey she herself has undertaken as a curator for major Western institutions, like the Guggenheim, to have non-Western artists, particularly South Asian artists, canonised. Discussing the rarely-revealed dynamics of museum acquisitions, retrospectives and the difficult battle for gallery representation that even someone as profound as Zarina has faced, Poddar provided deep insight into her own path as someone working consistently to give their artists their due, not only in the present but changing forever past and future understandings of modern art history. - A.S.

The Rigorous Practice of Freedom

February 26th & 27th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm
Padmini Chettur (Contemporary Dancer, India)

“Any real *body* must have extension in four directions: it must have Length, Breadth, Thickness, and – Duration. There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, *Time*.”

- H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (pg. 3)

This dimension of *time* becomes a crucial key to enter the liminal world of contemporary artist Padmini Chettur, whose approach to dance remains unparalleled – her unique montage of science, rigour, and precision continues to expand

the discourse of what a body can become. And in this performative act of ceaseless *becoming*, you may trace a rare idea of freedom contrived by the artist. She deconstructs the limits that define what dance is to ultimately distill this experience to its skeletal core. Chettur almost turns into an archaeologist, unearthing her practice during this seminar that traces the roots of her journey to the terrain it occupies today. As she negotiates with time, the crux of each work is revealed in the *process* of its making; the infinite deliberate details that propel every microscopic movement in space.

Chettur's beginnings in dance are grounded in traditional Bharatnatyam, which she trained in for ten years. The discipline of this form to be enacted "precisely in time" was deeply internalised by Chettur and persists in her later works. She then retreated from this pedagogy into the new revolutionary ideas of Chandralekha, an icon who sought to rediscover Bharatnatyam as a form that could respond to a contemporary existence. The piece *Sharira* (2003) became Chettur's last performance under the choreography of Chandralekha, with whom she worked for almost a decade. In *Sharira*, as the title suggests, the *body* itself becomes the vehicle of meaning – dramatically subverting the 'pure' classical idiom of a dancer's fluid movements and facial expressions aimed to entice and entertain a viewer. This mask is removed, the ornaments are now absent. What remains are raw movements on stage, brimming with power.

The *body* morphed into the anchor of Chettur's probe when she left Chandralekha to investigate her own identity; a process that involved an almost

scientific un-learning of the manner in which her body was conditioned over the years. Each detail was dismantled, from the curve of her spine to the tip of her finger. Chettur's rigour compelled this persistent deconstruction of her body as a form, to unlayer a visual lexicon of her own. This *process* manifests in her work, *3 solos* (2003), where the tension within a body that is rooted but tries to move, almost echoes a temporal conflict between the past and present. As the body resists itself, the surrounding space is no longer external, but enters into the dynamic of each gesture.

Chettur further explores the physicality of space in her next work, *Paper Doll* (2005), comprised of five connected dancers that resemble a chain of origami paper dolls. In this hypnotic web, it is the pulsating interstitial space between the dancers



that enraptures a viewer. The bond holding each dancer is fragile, paper-like. It could tear apart at any moment, and connect again; creating a tangible tension constantly negotiated by the dancers – if one pulls, then the other must give way.

In *PUSHED* (2006), Chettur's dancers enter and exit the stage seamlessly, in contrast to *Paper Doll*, wherein each dancer stays within the square space until the end. The *space* thus shifts registers, charged with the sound by composer Maarten Visser. His acoustic exudes a distinct texture, a cryptic physicality weaving into tense moments that fold and unfold in the dance. Chettur seeks to push boundaries that hold emotions in this piece, a *process* that took her almost a year of practice. Every month, the artist and her dancers would analyse a particular emotion, through their own writings or texts they liked to read – to find a *physical* description of it. This evolved into a series of specific movements for each emotion, but the distinctions between the emotions slowly started to melt, the borders dissolved. Chettur thus astutely threads an in-between emotive *space* in transition.

This space mutates further with Chettur's *Beautiful Thing 1* (2009), which focused on *rupture* in the structure of time. This surreal yet minimal work emerges with four dancers, two on each side of the stage. The dancers on the left begin their movements at a tempo of 220, while simultaneously the dancers on the right perform precisely the same sequence but at a slower tempo of 30. The dancers on the left gradually slow down, unnoticed, until they arrive at the exact movement and speed of the dancers on the right,

who remain at their initial tempo of 30. Chettur describes the dancers as “discreet segments of a unique mathematical equation”. This meticulously crafted moment wherein two streams of speed intersect shifts the sensation of *time* as Chettur stretches its limit through an algorithm. The ruptures in repetition hold the tension that drives the force of the work.



Padmini Chettur speaks during 'The Rigorous Practice of Freedom'

On the other hand, Chettur's next work, *Beautiful Thing 2* (2011) is a solo she performs herself, forming a distilled experience – she revisits her core, that is, her *body*. The body is defined by Chettur as the “only real archivist” in the history of dance, as the archive in dance is ultimately a history of the body. It thus morphs into a repository of *time*; the learned gestures of history are retained in a search for points of departure. These parallels come to mind whilst viewing Chettur's *Beautiful Thing 2*, as her body bends the space around it, and in certain parts, dissolves itself completely into this space. Here she creates an interstice, exploring “the ability to be open within the bound”, for her meaning of *freedom* is rooted in the precarious but relentless human body. - S.B.

Curatorial Processes

Past Programmes:

Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War

January 24th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Nida Ghouse (Curator and Writer, India)



Doug Ashford, *Bunker 2*, 2017

Nida Ghouse contrives a colossal labyrinth navigating the entangled webs of artistic discourse and autonomy in modernity through *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War*, an exhibition she curated with Anselm Franke, Paz Guevara and Antonia Majaca at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin in 2017. This show comprised works by contemporary artists that dismantle the logic of binaries, historical artworks that negotiated this terrain in their time, and archival material that connect art to a hierarchy of conflicted institutional

structures. It explored the many meanings of modernism deployed during the struggle for cultural hegemony, dissolving boundaries built between realism and the *abstract* to ultimately probe the idea of *freedom* claimed by the latter. Because if you look close enough, freedom – in the way you imagine it – doesn't exist.

This story begins during the Cold War – the first time in all of history when humanity possessed the technological capability to exterminate itself in a nuclear arms race. When the stakes of conflict threaten survival, perhaps all means could be justified. After the Second World War, capitalist America battled the socialist Soviet Union – Ghouse carefully dissects these ideologies armed with their cultural mechanisms, unearthing a semantic combat that was covert yet deeply insidious. She conjures this history of power that not only parallels but erodes the history of art using the prototype of Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). This was an organisation founded in West Berlin in 1950, which subsidised and funded countless cultural programmes from Latin America to Africa and Southeast Asia, advancing a lexicon of modernism (abstract expressionism) as the 'universal' individualistic language for literature, art and music. This intellectual community defined themselves as 'anti-totalitarian'; their manifesto was to protect the autonomy and individual freedom of artists all over the world. This protection automatically implied an offensive on liberty from

the Soviet Union, which was dubbed a tyrannical reign with representational and realistic art that served only state propaganda.

The avant-garde of the CCF embraced abstract expressionism to break free from the burden of representation, simultaneously enforcing the idea of art distilled from reality. Capitalist America proclaimed these notions towards a liberal society, market, and art; whilst the socialist Soviet Union became authoritarian, and thus, a threat to the *idea* of freedom. However, by 1967, it was revealed that the CCF was bankrolled by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), America's espionage arm; a scandal that confirmed the CCF was enlisted in shoring up an anti-Communist consensus in the service of U.S. hegemony during the cultural Cold War. An institution that protected autonomy in art was intrinsically fuelled by propaganda. This disclosure destroyed the CCF's reputation by exposing its fundamental contradiction: the moral ambiguity to advocate freedom through means that are not transparent. Intellectuals and artists became a strategic target, and modernism was a weapon in the rapidly developing arsenal of 'peaceful techniques' to win the Cold War. Ghouse then brings this historical moment to the present with an unnerving question: "Can the canon of Western modernism be 'globalised' retroactively, without confronting the ideological structures and institutional narratives that supported and exported it?"

Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War profoundly shatters the pervasive illusion of art isolated from ideology. Ghouse traces this semantic battle enforced during the Cold War into

a longer history of the *freedom* discourse. She illustrates this convoluted phenomenon through *The Four Freedoms*, a series of oil paintings by American artist Norman Rockwell made in 1943, which refer to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's iconic address declaring freedom as a fundamental right that must be defended by the military. These paintings were a part of a sponsored touring exhibition that raised over 130 million dollars – this cry for freedom thus essentially financed a war. But the crux of Ghouse's endeavour is not to expose these contradictions; rather, she *employs* them to comprehend larger questions – what does it *mean* for art to be free? And if freedom is a construct, then who gets to decide what it will look like?

In order to dismantle the aesthetic form of liberty, Ghouse further ruptures this discourse by juxtaposing *Escaping Liberty: Western Hegemony*, *Black Fugitivity*, an essay by Barnor Hesse along with *Free, White and 21*, a video work by artist Howardena Pindell, to unravel the provenance of what constitutes cultural freedom, and who may obtain it. In her video, Pindell speaks of the racial discrimination she endured at each stage of her life; experiences that don't exist in the lives of the dominant white society; experiences which are then consequently trivialised or erased. Pindell dons the mask and identity of an old white woman, and then tells her African-American self: "You won't exist until we validate you". In a similar vein, Hesse writes on the necessity of a colonial-racial foreclosure – an 'unspeakability' that must be maintained – for the dominant theory of liberty to operate. Simply put, to imagine the current

hegemonic idea of freedom, you need to erase certain instrumental histories of the periphery. Because if you don't forget them, they will contradict the core that defines liberty.

Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War doesn't aim to make a historical judgement on these phenomena, as a conviction would shift this structure into the past, and the story would reach an end. This unsettling terrain must be constantly negotiated by the present to possibly imagine an antidote to hegemonic existence. For Ghouse, the key is to "recover the conflict lines that have animated artistic choices and that implicitly haunt the field of contemporary art until today". She thus astutely exposes a making of *meaning* that echoes the mechanics of a regime, navigating a labyrinth to uncover these conflicted worlds built by words.
- S.B.

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Announcements

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

July 2019 – April 2020

Typically Saturdays, 1:30 – 5:30 pm

Introduced in 1999, Jnanapravaha Mumbai's academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate Course in Indian Aesthetics (IA) examines the development of visual forms in historical and discursive context. Crossing the disciplines of art history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature and philosophy, the course treats roughly 5,000 years of Indian visual art and aesthetics, encompassing premodern, modern and contemporary forms, as well as popular traditions. IA scholars comprise internationally renowned academics who ensure that the visual material presented is broad-based geographically, historically, culturally, and materially. Over the years, in keeping with JPM's mission, the programme has evolved to include subjects of current research.

For admission, you are required to submit:

A copy of your last degree certificate and two passport-sized photographs.

Fee structure:

Diploma (writing and attendance) – Rs. 35,000

Certificate (attendance) – Rs. 25,000



Portrait of Raja Budh Singh of Bundi on Horseback. Jodhpur, c.1820. Opaque watercolour on paper. Jnana-Pravaha, Varanasi.

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN YOGA AND TANTRA

August 1 – October 4, 2019

Typically Thursdays and Fridays, 5:30 – 8:00 pm*

Ambitious in scope and interdisciplinary, Yoga and Tantra (Y&T), an introductory course, offers a critical inquiry into the field of yoga and tantra. The programme aims to trace historical antecedents to modern-day practice, exploring the relation between yoga and tantra, and offering a broad understanding of the development of yogic and agamic/tantric traditions in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain worldviews, as well as syncretic interactions with vernacular *Bhakti* traditions from premodern to modern times.

The course is at once a meditation on life and an encounter between the philosophical and the experiential, situated in the socio-religious order of the historical world even as it adduces the transcendental, esoteric, and mystical dimensions of an array of yogic and tantric traditions.

Emphasizing current research and publishing in the field, Y&T brings national and international scholars leading innovative research projects to deliver lectures and seminars that trace the historical development of yoga and tantra.

Y&T uses both academic and praxis-based approaches; presenting views from Sanskrit studies and philology, philosophy, literature, aesthetics, art history, religion, archaeology, and anthropology.

Fee: Rs. 18,000

*Timing for week one: 5:00 - 8:00 pm

For admission, you are required to submit a copy of your last degree certificate and two passport-sized photographs.



Four Mandalas of the Vajravali and Tantra-Samuccaya. Ngor monastery or affiliate, Tsang, Tibet. c.1460-1500. Opaque watercolour on cotton. Jnana-Pravaha, Varanasi



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.