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ABSTRACTS

PANEL #1 New Research on Rock-Cut Architecture: The Legacy of Walter M. Spink

Chair(s): Robert DeCaroli, George Mason University/ Pia Brancaccio, Drexel University

The first person in the US to receive a PhD in South Asian art history, Walter Spink was a trail-blazer and beloved mentor. Over his lifetime he taught generations of students both in the classroom and at his extremely popular Ajanta site seminars. Although he wrote on many topics, the Ajanta caves were his lifelong passion. With his measured pace and sly wit, he enthusiastically taught others to read the subtle clues left in the stone and plaster. These were details he uncovered after years of careful and patient observation. This panel invites scholars to share their current research on rock-cut architecture as a tribute to Walter and his legacy. The papers are united not only through the rock-cut subject matter but also in their methodology. Each uses the techniques of visual analysis and close investigation to reveal the history, meaning, and development of South Asia's rock-cut marvels. Paper topics include discussions of the decoration, construction, repair, and use of rock-cut structures. Because of the expansive nature of this topic and the large number of scholars who wanted to participate, we organized a double panel. The participants' interest is not simply contingent on the subject matter, but also stems from a shared desire to honor Walter, who played such a formative role in many of our careers.

“Reconfiguration and Transformation of Buddhist Sites in Western India”

Abhishek Amar, Hamilton College

The Western Ghats of India are home to extensive Buddhist heritage, specifically exquisite and ornate Buddhist monastic establishments. Several of these ancient cave sites attract a sizable number of tourists not only because of their ancient Buddhist heritage but also because they have been reconfigured as prominent Hindu sites of the region. Two specific examples are the shrine/temple of Ekvirā devī (a local goddess) in front of the ancient Karle caves and a Gaṇeśa shrine in the Lenyadri group of caves at Junnar. Interestingly, this Gaṇeśa temple is located within a Buddhist monastic structure. Both of these sites attract large numbers of Hindu visitors, who perform puja and other Hindu rituals under the supervision of a temple committee and priests. This paper will examine the process of reconfiguration of these ancient Buddhist shrines into Hindu sacred spaces and their subsequent transformation into prominent Hindu sites of the region. Why and when did these sites emerge as Hindu centers? What were the local factors that facilitated this reconfiguration? Considering the fact that Ekvirā devī is a local goddess worshipped prominently by the regional fisherman community, what role did this community play in the construction of Karle temple? Similarly, did the local community at Junnar play any role in the development of the Gaṇeśa shrine there? Through an analysis of the above raised questions, this paper will attempt to unravel the multiple layers of history at these ancient Buddhist caves and their transformation into prominent Hindu sites.

“From Cave to Palace: Re-Thinking the Morphology and Role of the Buddhist Cetiya in the Western Deccan Caves”

Pia Brancaccio, Drexel University

Intended as an homage to Walter Spink, who taught us to never stop interrogating the evidence recorded in the living-rock, this paper aims to shed new light on the form and function of the *cetiya* halls ubiquitous in the Buddhist caves of Western Deccan. A re-examination of this architectural format and its ornamentation will underscore the regional and archaizing trends that until now have been overlooked in the study of cave architecture. The paper will also discuss the manner in which Buddhist caves in this region were situated amidst various traditions of ascetic and cenobitic monasticism.

“Remodeling, Repairs, and Renovations at the Kanheri Caves”

Robert DeCaroli, George Mason University

Typically, those who study the past focus on how things began. They apply their skills to determining when things originated or the precise date of creation. However, the history that shapes architecture (including rock-cut architecture) does not end the moment it is made. Structures can be intentionally altered to address new needs, accidentally impacted by long periods of habitation, or naturally degrade over time. The priorities of a community might change from year to year and can shift dramatically over the course of centuries. This presentation will consider the history of repairs and renovations at the Buddhist caves of Kanheri with regard to two topics. The first has to do with how the residents of the caves managed water – addressing both the need for it and the damage it can cause over time. The second topic is to ask how early caves were renovated to accommodate new images of the Buddha. Evidence gathered from Cave 3 at Kanheri suggests that not only was it one of the earliest cave sites in the Western Deccan to display Buddha images, but accommodations were made to add additional images after the structure was complete. Signs of the later addition of figural imagery can be seen at several caves at Kanheri, suggesting a period of renovation aimed at accommodating the rising importance of the Buddha’s image cult.

“Narrative Themes in Ajañṭā Cave 1: The Gift of the Body and Moral Perfections”

Charlotte Gorant, Columbia University

Within the rock-cut monastery of Ajañṭā during the 5th century, scenes of painted Buddhist stories in Cave 1 interweaving above cell doors and across the walls of the main *vihāra* draw the viewer into a spectacular visual world. Walter Spink, who has studied this cave extensively, has suggested that Hariṣeṇa's royal vision inspired the elegant riches depicted in the visual stories of this “emperor’s cave.” Through an investigation of narrative *jātaka* paintings showcasing the body as gift, in conjunction with the bodhisattva images flanking the main *vihāra* shrine, I interpret the royal and bodily beauty in these scenes as arising merit from these generous acts in connection with moral perfections of the ideal bodhisattva.

“Scale as a Tool of Spatial and Experiential Transformation at Ajanta and Kanheri”

Jinah Kim, Harvard University

Scale plays an important role in the human perception of space. However meticulously one photo-documents a rock cut cave temple like Ellora’s Kailasa temple, it is difficult to grasp the affect of the monumental rock cut space that a visitor experiences on site from these photographic representations. Technological advancements of the past two decades allow high-definition 3D virtual

tours using VR headsets, which is designed to manipulate one's vision and trick the brain to see flat images three dimensionally, in order to generate the illusion of being in a real space. The unnamed makers who were charged with carving rock cliffs in the Deccan plateau into special spaces where the Buddha sermons with miraculous powers, and where celestial beings frequent, faced a similar challenge of creating an immersive experience of being present in another world. Many visual, sculptural, and architectural strategies were mobilized to meet this demand. One such strategy may be the manipulation of scale: miniature Buddha shrines that lining the lower rim of the ceiling of Cave 26 at Ajanta may simply represent the presence of myriads of Buddhas celebrating the Buddha's sermon. But why repeat the architectural frame in miniature? If we shift our focus to consider scale as a design factor in rock cut architecture, images of miniature shrines and donor figures take on new meanings. This paper will examine patterns of manipulation of scale at Ajanta and Kanheri to suggest how an analytical focus on scale can help articulate the transformative immersive experience of rock cut architecture.

“Mountains and Water in Medieval India: Looking at Caves through a Geoaesthetic Lens”

Tamara Sears, Rutgers University

In volume 5 of his magisterial history of Ajanta, Walter Spink provides the reader with a short guide detailing the best way to experience the site. He begins at the far west, to take advantage of the morning light, and instructs the visitor to diverge from the path to discover particularly scenic viewpoints. He also details multiple routes to *dhaddhaba* waterfalls that feed the Waghora river, enabling the visitor to navigate the difficult terrain during different seasons. Along the way, he informs the visitor to take special note of the “carved layers of rock, cut over millions of years into sculptural forms which are like Henry Moore sculptures turned inside out.” Although Walter Spink's life work was never explicitly about the relationship between architecture and nature, his writings often reflected a deep awareness of their interconnections. Turning a geoaesthetic lens towards rock-cut sites, this presentation examines the ways in which their builders expressed a similarly deep awareness of the close relationship between geology and water through visual imagery, siting, and architectural form. In addition to framing spectacular views of the landscape and manipulating rock surfaces to maximize the catchment of monsoon waters, they developed sculptural and painted programs that homologized natural phenomena with soteriological aspiration, and that emphasized the power of liberation through analogies, more specifically with seasonal changes and seismic events.

“Shubh Yatra: Return Trip to Ellora”

Lisa N. Owen, University of North Texas

In some of his earliest publications on Ellora, Walter Spink challenged traditional frameworks that divided this site into discrete religious phases of artistic activity. He was able to demonstrate that artists did not work as specialists for only one type of cave nor did they work on caves according to their own personal religious affiliation. Walter's meticulous analyses of architectural elements, carved motifs, and sculpted programs across Ellora's early caves revealed shared visual vocabularies that crossed religious boundaries. His work continues to prompt scholars to think about the agency of artists at Ellora and the fluidity of stone-cutting processes. In this presentation, I hope to echo Walter's approach by examining the earliest indications of Jain activity at Ellora. Upon careful reflection on my own work (and corrections to my perceived chronology of the Jain caves), I argue that initial Jain activity at the site developed alongside ca. 7th and 8th-century Buddhist and Shaiva artistic production. This revised dating upends scholarly views that Jain interest in the site began in the 9th century. My examinations center on select architectural and sculptural elements in the Jain complex of caves and their correlations with Buddhist and Shaiva carved features. I also briefly consider the aesthetic and conceptual impact of Ellora's Kailasanatha temple on its Jain counterpart, the Chhota Kailasa. Rather

than being Ellora's "final phase," I demonstrate that the Jain caves were integral to the growth and artistic development of this multireligious pilgrimage site.

**“What a Difference a Mudrā can Make: Iconology and Buddhology at Ajaṅṭā”
Nicolas Morrissey, University of Georgia**

In a short paper published in 1982, “Flaws in Buddhist Iconology,” Walter Spink noted, in his characteristically pragmatic fashion, that while Buddhist “Iconographic usage is chiefly determined by textual prescriptions, current doctrine, and established convention,” other factors could prove equally – if not more – determinative. For Professor Spink, nowhere was this more evident than at Ajaṅṭā, where the geological reality of the site, with veins and fault lines running throughout its basalt matrixes, offered both opportunity and obstacle for sculptors and excavators. It was also often emphasized by Professor Spink that the cultural reality of Ajaṅṭā, too, proved influential in iconographic choices made, with composition and symmetry at times prevailing over what may have been the dictates of textual or doctrinal prescriptions. This paper will revisit Professor Spink’s keen eye for ‘mistakes’ in iconography at Ajaṅṭā, with an examination of how at least one unexpected iconographic anomaly might potentially be explained, if not understood.

PANEL # 2 Devotional Objects and Ritual Contexts in South and Southeast Asia

Chair: David Eford, Wofford College

This panel explores the materiality of object and artifact, the resources and techniques used to produce them, and the contexts in which their utilization took place. Through various case studies, the papers in this panel explore iconographical interpretations, sacred spaces, and their travel far beyond their sites of manufacture, whether as commodified object or portable ritual device. In addition, the focus on the objects and sculptures provides a means of reevaluating and addressing a wide range of such complex issues, such as the chronology of South Indian sculpture, the relationship between royalty and Buddhist monastic communities, proportional systems in early Buddhist architecture, text and image, and trade across the Indian Ocean. Whether accessioned in a museum or sheltered in a mountain cave, sculptures and objects eloquently elucidate the complex dialectic of interactions in the South and Southeast Asian societies of their origin.

**“Light of Devotion: Oil Lamps of Kerala”
Carol Radcliffe Bolon, Smithsonian Institution**

Light of Devotion: Oil Lamps of Kerala is a study of medieval to modern period Hindu ritual oil lamps primarily from Kerala in India, including comparative examples from other regions. This material has barely been studied before. Kerala being a religiously conservative state is difficult for non-Hindus to gain access to temples or to be granted photographic privileges to museum collections. My study has grown during four research trips over the past decade with the support of the Archaeological Survey of India and the American Institute for Indian Studies. I visited temples, interviewed Kerala royalty, priests, metal crafters, dealers and scholars. I have also studied the oil lamps that dot the globe in museum collections formed in the 19th-20th centuries in Europe and the USA.

Early and later traditional lamps are quite beautiful. Few people know about the early lamps made in designs no longer made. They are to be seen especially in the Thrissur State Museum in Kerala. A few well-known collections exist in other museums, especially the well-known Raja Kelkar Museum in Pune, and there are a few private collections in India as well.

Most people have little idea about the tradition of use of oil lamps in Hindu temple ritual although it is the most enduring and profound use of oil lamps in the world. Other world cultures that used oil lamps in ancient times, for example the Roman Empire or Renaissance Italy, have studied and extensively displayed and published these decorative arts. Even Hindus worshipping in temples may be unaware of the heritage of these decorative/ritual sacred objects. Oil lamps can be valued, preserved and published as both sacred objects and the aesthetic record of their time and place.

Beyond this focus on sculptural oil lamps, there is another gap to fill concerning metal cast images of deities. Existing books on South Indian metal cast sculpture are dominated by the art of the Chola period (9th to 12th centuries) in Tamil Nadu. The contribution to south Indian sculpture in bronze by Kerala and other southern areas during the same period has been overlooked.

Whereas Kerala oil lamps are frequently inscribed, though none with dates, the *bimbas* are not. Their figure style is identical. I believe that I have found an anchor to the dating of Kerala bronzes through discoveries made among the oil lamps. These lamps and their inscriptions may offer a key to unlock the gnarly problem of the dating of Kerala sculpture. Their dating can be moved earlier than thought.

“Resourcing Religion: Gems, Metals, and Ivory in Burmese Buddhism”

Alexandra Kaloyanides, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

How do a country’s natural resources shape its religious and cultural life? This paper explores the impact that gems, metals, and ivory have had on Burmese Buddhism. I focus on a selection of objects that will be showcased in the British Museum Exhibition, “Myanmar in the World” scheduled for October 2023. These objects include bejeweled Buddhas, golden offering vessels, and elephant tusks carved with scenes from the Pali Canon. These prized possessions highlight the particular ways that Burmese communities in Burma’s last kingdom (ruled by the Konbaung dynasty from 1752–1885) have used natural resources in their religious expressions. I argue that the particular sensory qualities of these materials shape royal and monastic experiences of the Buddha’s teachings and practices. Not only did Konbaung communities contour rubies, jade, gold, silver, and ivory to communicate Buddhist ideas but their religious cultures were also contoured by the elephants, rivers, ore, and precious stones that enrich the Southeast Asian country.

“How Intentional Were Early Buddhist Sculptural and Iconographic Programs? A Solution at Karle”

David Eford, Wofford College

The *caitya* hall at Karle, dating from approximately the first to second century CE, is an exceptionally well-preserved work of early Buddhist architecture, utilizing abundant architectural elements in its sculptural program and hundreds of sculpted figures throughout the cave, many of them *mithuna*. Despite an impressive array of elements and figures, there is little scholarly examination of its entire sculptural program, or of the extent the *caitya* hall followed an intentional plan for executing its myriad architectural elements and figural sculptures. Inscriptions recording individual donations by lay and monastic patrons might suggest piecemeal execution, as might anomalies misinterpreted as patrons exerting greater latitude to add imagery that violated a broader plan, such as a unique pillar that breaks symmetry in the hall, or *mithuna* sculptures signaling lay patronage somehow infringing upon the monastic environment of the cave complex.

However, this study reveals that a definite proportional system guided not only the execution of architectural space but also arrangements of sculptures and adornments. As one of the most well-preserved early Buddhist works, the *caitya* hall at Karle demonstrates an intentionality of design in its creation that runs counter to haphazard donations or outside influences. Furthermore, its strict program of execution may question recent claims favoring aesthetical attitudes towards unfinished and incomplete execution in the early Buddhist era. Instead, its highly coordinated program, executed in an era plagued by regional conflict and instabilities, validates that the *caitya* hall largely achieved completion due to robust patronage at the site.

“A New Look at the ‘Muhammad Nari Stele’ and Other Similar Complex Steles from Gandhāra”

Dessi Vendova, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA

The Mohammad Nari stele, a famous Buddhist artifact from Gandhara, has long puzzled art historians and Buddhologists ever since its discovery. Scholars have unsuccessfully tried to match it to various textual sources, but the mystery of the identity of the Buddha represented in the stele is still an unanswered riddle. Scholars have yet to come up with a satisfying interpretation as to what is depicted on it. A critical component to determine is who is the Buddha represented in the center of the stele. One long-held interpretation has been that the stele depicts the episode of Shakyamuni Buddha’s Great Miracle at Śrāvastī. This interpretation has been challenged in recent years, and among the newer interpretations is that the scene depicted is of Amitābha’s paradise Sukhāvātī, or of Akṣobhya’s paradise Abhirati, or of the preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*. As a result, various texts have been suggested as the sources for this and similar “complex steles,” the majority of them belonging to the Mahayana tradition. With my paper, I hope to provide a definitive answer to the riddle of the identity of the Buddha represented in the “Muhammad Nari Stele” and suggest a text that exactly matches the narrative program of the stele and demonstrate that these steles were part of non-Mahayana, mainstream Buddhist practices. These findings have the potential to drastically change our understanding of early Buddhist art and Gandharan art in particular and put under question and challenges the interpretation that these steles are evidence of Mahayana-related Buddhist practices and cults.

“An Indian Ocean Figure that Sailed Away: A Bronze *Yakshi* from Khor Rori”

Divya Kumar-Dumas, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World

Although certain objects from South Arabia exhibit hybridity, a small bronze fragment of a dancing *yakshi* figurine in the Smithsonian’s ANE collection is of Indian manufacture, brought to its findspot via maritime networks in the early centuries CE. I am currently exploring this and similar objects in a roundtable series, “Indian Ocean Figures that Sailed Away,” ISAW (2022). Through close analysis of objects and their contexts, the series reconsiders figurines that sailed out of India to points west in antiquity with the following premise: the afterlives of such interpretable artifacts can enrich our understanding of the ways and means of early Indian Ocean travel and trade. Excavated from a house near the city wall at Khor Rori, the Smithsonian figurine was probably a personal possession not intended for trade. In this talk, I will explore how this *yakshi* may have functioned as an apotropaic object for the Indian merchant traveling across dangerous seas--as a figure associated with water and with voyage in Sanskrit texts--as well as a reminder of home and possibly the riches offered by trees. The *yakshi* would have held valency in the Near Eastern context as well, where the (semi)-nude body signaled protection and good fortune. Religious, ethnic, and vocational identities of the *yakshi*’s owner interacted with the Near Eastern world in which he sometimes lived, raising thoughts about the interconnectedness of

trade, identity, material culture, and urban formation across the Indian Ocean in the early centuries CE.

PANEL #3 New Discoveries in Early Southern Buddhist Art: Changing the Paradigms

Chair: John Guy, Metropolitan Museum of Art

The territories of Andhradeśa in southern India played a critical role in shaping the character of early Indian Buddhist art. Yet, in the study and teaching of the formative phases of Buddhist art, that of the Deccan is largely overlooked in preference for that of the northwest (Gandhara), and the Gangetic basin of the north. This chapter of southern Buddhist art is the subject of a major international loan exhibition titled “Tree & Serpent: Early Buddhist Art in India, 200 BCE-400 CE” being organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art (currently postponed due to the pandemic). It will provide the first comprehensive examination of the early Buddhist art of the territories of Andhradeśa, critically appraising its place in the wider landscape of early Buddhist India. The proposed panel will represent new advances in the study of early southern Indian Buddhist art, informed in part by this exhibition research and by recent archaeological excavations. How can the innovative sculptural production of Andhradeśa and the wider Deccan bring to light the little understood process of development and transmission of early Buddhist art of Southern Buddhism? Guy’s paper will present a small stylistically coherent corpus that represents the beginnings of a lithic sculpture tradition in the region; Arlt will present a new reading of the drum panels that adorned the Kanaganahalli stupa, establishing new linkages to inscriptions at the site, and Shimada’s paper will examine the sculptural programs of two monasteries at Nagarjunakonda as a means of understanding a major stylistic transition of the period.

“Early Phase Andhradeśa Sculpture – Towards a New Chronology”

John Guy, Metropolitan Museum of Art

The lower Krishna river system of Andhra Pradesh, southern India, is the heartland of the ancient region referred to in contemporary sources as Andhradeśa. There is preserved one of the richest and yet lesser known legacies of early Buddhist devotional art. The density of monastery sites in this region, marked today largely only by the traces of stupas and monastic foundations, attracted passing antiquarian interest in the later 19th century but has been largely relegated to the margins of 20th century Indian art history.

Whilst the monastic remains are largely attributable to the early centuries of the Common Era, there is a small corpus of stupa-associated sculptures that point to the region being engaged in a vigorous pursued regional style by the 2nd and 1st centuries BCE. This paper assembles a corpus of works, assigned on the basis of recent advances in Indian dynastic dating, to the early centuries BCE, and argues that it constitutes discrete style that deserves recognition alongside the widely celebrated early phase Buddhist art of Bharhut Sarnath, Bodhgaya and Sanchi. These Andhra works display a remarkable stylistic unity, in all probability the product of shared workshop practices, aided by the mobility of skilled stone masons and sculptors along the roads and waterways of the lower Krishnariver system. In defining this corpus of early southern Buddhist art, this paper argues for Andhradeśa’s admission as a key participant in the earliest phase of Buddhist art production in India.

“Sculptures and Inscriptions along the Circumambulation Path of the Kanaganahalli Stūpa”

Robert Arlt, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities

While the inscriptions and large-scale carvings of the Kanaganahalli Stūpa have been the topics of multiple studies, the proposed paper intends to cover the key findings of a three-year research project that focused mainly on the drum and *āyāga* panels (76 in total). The original locations of these now displaced panels could be established which offered new possibilities to look at the donatory inscriptions. Doing so helped uncover hitherto unnoticed sets of related donations and to better understand the development of the *stūpa* and the site. A more concise picture of history of the artistic and architectural developments at the site is now possible, including the above-mentioned panels, sets of narrative friezes depicting the life of the Buddha and the published and unpublished *buddhapādas*. With an eye on related Buddhist sites and schools of art in the first centuries of the Common Era, the paper also intends to offer suggestions for what can be drawn from these findings beyond a better understanding of the Kanaganahalli Stūpa.

“Early Style of Nagarjunakonda: Sculptures from Sites 6 and 9” Akira Shimada, SUNY New Paltz

In the rich corpus of early Buddhist sculptures from Nagarjunakonda, the sculptures from Sites 6 and 9 occupy a unique position with their distinct stylistic and iconographical features. When the sculptures were created at Nagarjunakonda between the end of the 2nd century CE and the early 3rd century CE, the site had not yet begun the phase of vigorous construction work under the royal patronage of the Ikṣvākus. Buddhist monastic art of Andhra was, however, experiencing major stylistic and iconographical changes, arguably as a result of the expansion of political and cultural interactions with northern India. This proposed paper intends to highlight the major transitional moments in Andhran Buddhist art by examining in detail this particular corpus of sculptures.

“Vidūṣaka’s brothers” Monika Zin, Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities

The ancient Indian treatise on theatre, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, provides a description of the scenic jester, the *vidūṣaka*. He is said to have a “crow’s foot” on his bald head and a curved stick. A person corresponding to this description – the “crow’s foot” being strands of hair, often three in number running from the crown, really looking like the foot of a bird – is often found in the art of South Asia of the first centuries of our era. Especially in Andhra, this person is often seen in scenes of court life and it appears that these scenes reflect real life where court jesters entertained the king or had access to the women’s chambers. The question arises, however, whether the characteristics of a court jester were transferred to the *vidūṣaka*, or rather the theatre character provided the prototype for the jester’s appearance. The second possibility seems more credible, partly because jesters all over South Asia bear very similar characteristics. But something else can be observed: the strands of hair on the bald head can also be observed in actors appearing in a popular Roman theatre genre, the *mimus*. The paper will present the figures of jesters/*vidūṣakas* in reliefs and paintings from ancient India with special reference to the art of Andhra, where the iconography of the jester with “crow’s foot” and bent stick probably originated. Western elements are well documented as part of Andhra art in other contexts, and it cannot be ruled out that the appearance of the theatrical jester is another case in point.

PANEL #4 Matrices and Flows

Chair: Nachiket Chanchani, University of Michigan

Even as cultural transactions occur through various fluid networks, they often result in the formation of boundaries and help to construct perceptions of self and other. As art historians, we are hardly immune to this phenomenon. Oftentimes our own research is informed by networks within which we operate, and it is circumscribed by regional and disciplinary boundaries. This panel invites papers from scholars who are interrogating how freely artists of different races and ethnicities, objects fashioned of various materials, and diverse aesthetic practices have moved across regions that we today subsume within “South Asia” and “South-East Asia” The panel welcomes reflections on the extent to which such movements shaped and reflected certain ideas of assimilation and isolation, tradition and innovation, and legal and cultural boundaries? By investigating these questions about migration, cross-cultural exchange, and the visual arts the five papers in panel seeks to move well beyond two modern paradigms for the study of mainland and island Southeast Asia. One framework has argued that Southeast Asia received its most important aesthetic and political ideologies from South Asia. Another position has posited that Southeast Asia was long an autonomous region whose peoples selectively and self-consciously chose to embellish their worlds and worldviews with select motifs from various cultures including those of South Asia.

“Angkor and the Seventh Art: The Cinema of Norodom Sihanouk”

Penny Edwards, University of California, Berkeley

From videography of independence ceremonies at Angkor in 1953 to the feature films he directed throughout the 1960s, Norodom Sihanouk sought to project and realize his destiny as an architect of nation, and to captivate, control and unify his population through cinema. In his film scripts and journals, Sihanouk referred to the genre as le septième art [the seventh art], a term coined by Ricciotto Canudo in 1911. Mastery of the medium confirmed his ancestral claims to the genius of Angkor’s founders and his credentials as a modern ruler. Celluloid gave Sihanouk free rein to build his own monumental epoch – and the tools to record his achievements. Wedding monumentality, ephemerality, anicca (impermanence) and rebirth, this ephemeral yet durable genre was the perfect medium for Sihanouk’s dreamed real.

Presenting material from my forthcoming book, *Ephemeral Angkor*, this paper draws on archival footage, film journals and oral history to explore Sihanouk’s use of the ‘seventh art’ to create a new genre of royal chronicle in the silver screen, through films that bridged antiquity and modernity, and sought to establish both his artistry and his Angkorean ancestry. The paper will focus on *Crepuscule (Twilight)*, 1969. Screened and scripted in part as a diplomatic overture to India, *Crepuscule* cast Princess Monique as a widowed Maharani, Sihanouk as a royal war veteran and former military attaché in New Delhi, and the dazzling young Nurse Sopheap as a ‘pure Khmer’ whose role as a modern woman suggested the possibility of an Angkorean modernity.

“South Asia in Singapore’s Museums: Beyond the Patina of Diplomacy and Classicism”

Priya Maholay-Jaradi, National University of Singapore

This paper examines South Asia in Singapore’s museums — primarily the Asian Civilisations Museum — against the backdrop of cultural diplomacy and its representation through photographs. The paper’s inaugural point of enquiry is a press photograph of the opening of a special exhibition titled *Treasures from Asia's Oldest Museum: Buddhist Art from the Indian Museum, Kolkata (2015)*. This exhibition was part of a series of events which commemorated fifty years of formal diplomatic ties between India and Singapore. Following John Berger’s call to

overcome the ambiguity of a single photograph by reading it as part of a continuity of public history or as part of a cross-section of events, this photograph is placed alongside similar visuals. Much like the 2015 picture, other press photographs — as far back as 1962 — too project classical, Hindu-Buddhist objects as the basis of India-Singapore museum exchanges. Should we read these post-colonial visual regimes as an unthinking re-iteration of colonial and (Indian) nationalist imaginations of Southeast Asia as a recipient of classical Hindu-Buddhist traditions from South Asia? Or do we look beyond the sameness of these visuals to uncover corrective visions of South-Southeast Asia relations that may be unfolding elsewhere? Methodologically, the paper argues for connecting these similar press photographs with disparate genres such as exhibition catalogues and museum guides to expand the formers' discursive parameters and historiographical trajectories. Perhaps, the press photographs' repetitive patina of diplomacy and classicism, belie a young museum's revisionist approach.

“Coaxing *Kusha* to Speak a Connected History: Meditating on the Ritual, Aesthetic and Ecological Matrices of Salt Reed Grass in South and Southeast Asia”
Kaja McGowan, Cornell University

Known in Sanskrit respectively as *Kusha* and *Dharba* (*Desmostachya bipinnata* and *Imperata cylindrica* (L.)) these two varieties of salt reed grass have served for centuries as vital material ingredients in Hindu and Buddhist rituals and aesthetic practices that have moved across vast regions that we today subsume within “South Asia” and “South-East Asia.” Even as cultural transactions occur through various fluid networks, they often result in the formation of boundaries and help to construct perceptions of self and other. *Kusha*'s very materiality is integral to such boundary formation across time and space. This paper will interrogate how ideas about the ritual, aesthetic and ecological uses of *kusha* allow for a larger and more diversified range of actors than were considered previously, especially drawing on the role of artisanal experts as key players in forging political currencies past and present. (*Kusha*'s very name signifies *sharp* in the sense of *acute* and is the root for the Sanskrit word for “expert,” *kosala*.) At the heart of coaxing *kusha* to speak of its own expertise is the understanding that such a pervasive plant and its properties should be studied in partnership with various human communities in South and Southeast Asia. By examining the dynamics of *kusha*, important connectivity and new spatializations will unfold one blade at a time.

“Empty Bowls Full of Meaning: A Connected History of the Brahmaputra and Irrawaddy Valleys”
Nachiket Chanchani, University of Michigan

Polished brass offering bowls (*xorais*) are a prized possession in Ahom, Bodo, Kachari, and Chutia households across Assam state in the Brahmaputra Valley in India. For these ethnicities today, *xorais* are markers of quintessential “Assamese” hospitality and identity. However, little is known of the history of the *xorai*. In this paper, I offer several postulations. First, though most *xorais* are empty today, they were historically filled with diverse offerings for monasteries and dignitaries. Second, *xorai* forms were inspired by covered lacquerware containers made for communities in the Irrawaddy Valley and Shan Hills, both in present day Burma. Lacquerware containers first reached the Brahmaputra Valley in the nineteenth century, and there they were imaginatively remade by local artisans in brass. My third postulation that intensification of intercourse among and between the Brahmaputra and Irrawaddy Valleys and ‘Burmanization’ of the entire region (both partly a response to British colonists interested in expanding their sway) contributed to the popularity of *xorais* across Assam. Eventually, as new identities emerged and borders closed, the symbolic capital of *xorais* in Assam increased even as their origins were

half-forgotten. Finally, I reflect how studying *xorai* histories can help us understand how even as colonialism, rise of modern nation states, and the Cold War tried to fix the boundaries of “South Asia” and “Southeast Asia,” many communities living in the region have long seen boundaries and identities as changeable and fluid and found *xorais* capacious enough to contain diverse ideas at different times.

PANEL #5 *The Haunting of South Asian Art History*

Chair: Catherine Becker, University of Illinois, Chicago

How might the concept of the spectral lurk within the history and historiography of South Asian art and architecture? Emerging from the “spectral turn” in academia and popular culture at the end of the twentieth century, this panel invites papers that explore how the figure of the ghost or the concept of haunting might be harnessed to articulate a host of concerns, ranging from karmic causality to the conditions of late capitalism. Where or how might the ghost assert its presence as acts of resistance in the face of dispossession and social inequality? Images of spirit deities and *pretas* in ancient South Asian art, cursed objects from colonial India, haunted *havelis* of feudal landowners, filmic images of the unruly dead, or recent representations of the COVID-19 crisis might immediately come to mind and would be appropriate topics for further investigation in this context; however, this panel also encourages papers that explore what might be haunting the writing of South Asian art history. Where do we sense the traces of topics like caste, race, labor conditions, or sexuality within historiographic absences? How might the history of South Asian art reckon more directly and compassionately with its own ghosts?

“Demon-like Gods: Interpreting the iconography of Cāmuṇḍā as Personification of the Great Goddess’s Wrath”

Monalisa Behera, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Gods and demons are often positioned on the opposing sides as good versus evil. However, there are certain gods whose iconography contradicts the conventional aspect of ‘goodness’ and they appear ‘demonic’ as they take on the task of subjugating evil. This essay aims to explore the recurring shifts that take place between the divine and demonic by studying the imagery and iconification of Cāmuṇḍā. The reason for looking at Cāmuṇḍā under the lens of demonic is because she operates on similar levels in what is construed to be demonic, i.e., violence, fear, danger, wild, impurity and completely unconventional. As is the case with Cāmuṇḍā, mythology works overtime to afford her the divine status, but iconography keeps her committed to the idea of horrific. It is as if her potency increases with the amount of fear she can generate. Often described as wild and uncontrolled, Cāmuṇḍā is the personification of the wrath of the Devī (Great Goddess), and fights with various demons on her behalf. Thirsting for more blood or dancing drunkenly out of control, she, a goddess, becomes a threat to the cosmos and must be tamed or subdued, thus defying all common perceptions of divinity. Any study of iconography takes us into iconological concerns – the variety of contexts in which such images are used and what drove people to make them in the first place. When probing the definition of what is regarded as demonic in Indian art, we are reminded that Indian religions seldom categorise deities in a binary way of good and evil.

“Entering the Zenana: Ephemera and Power in Mughal Architecture”

Maggie Schuster, University of Illinois, Chicago

Seated within a richly decorated Mughal garden pavilion, Nur Jahan hosts the emperor Jahangir and his son, the future Shah Jahan. This is the scene captured in *Jahangir and Prince Khurram Entertained by Nur Jahan (1640)*, my central case study. The painting demonstrates the rich potential of Mughal ephemeral architecture to recover the agency of royal Mughal women. However, while we may find traces of Nur Jahan in an archive of Mughal paintings and literary sources, the cohort of laborers in the zenana who supported her endeavors continue to haunt Mughal history. This paper focuses on ephemeral architecture or the physical and sensorial elements of architecture that change constantly through both human and thingly intervention. I argue that in the ephemeral architecture of the zenana we see the actions of royal Mughal women and the labor force that supported them, both of whom are difficult to recover from court chronicles and later Mughal histories. An expansive approach to architecture alters how we understand power dynamics within these spaces, as by examining who held power over the ephemeral architecture we can track how the politics in these spaces changed over time. Therefore, the paper explores the double haunting of Mughal architecture, as the experiences of women in these spaces have been obscured by multilayered heteropatriarchal forces. Ultimately, the paper reclaims the Mughal zenana from its image in popular culture as a site of repression and exploitation to reexamine it as a politically and socially meaningful imperial structure.

“On Coomaraswamy’s Time”

Janice Leoshko, University of Texas at Austin

Trying to discern developments in Ananda Coomaraswamy’s scholarly practice is a challenge, as others studying his extensive writing have often noted. When developing a methodology for analyzing certain aspects of his views about Buddhist topics, I became interested in how his early scholarship might shed light on subsequent moves. This eventually led me to consider with greater care his time as director of the Mineralogical Survey of Ceylon (from 1903-1907) as Sri Lanka was then called. Despite his range of activities, the period is most often defined in terms of his first book, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908). It is a work primarily viewed as concerned with Sri Lankan arts and crafts, but a distinctive Buddhist thread also exists there. My paper outlines some of my discoveries regarding the factor of Sri Lanka in the complexity that Coomaraswamy eventually developed. My primary example is how his Sri Lankan experience helped him to utilize specific writing by Alfred Foucher to unsettle prevailing views of South Asian art in the first decade of the twentieth century. I am not referring to the material usually cited in discussions about his debate with Foucher on Greek influence in the development of Indian art, but rather the ingenious use of Foucher’s other research on later esoteric Buddhist art (*Étude sur l’iconographie bouddhique de l’Inde d’après des documents nouveaux*). I will also briefly address the larger consequences of his striking move.

“Picturing the Prison: Gandhi and the Yerawada Central Jail”

Mira Rai Waits, Appalachian State University

In 1985 the Bengali artist Rathin Mitra published *Gandhi: An Artist’s Impression: Text & Drawings*, a sketchbook documenting architectural sites that played an important role during Gandhi’s life. Included in the collection are sketches of British colonial prisons where Gandhi was incarcerated during the nationalist period; the most notable sketch is of the Yerawada Central Jail where Gandhi began his 1932 fast. These representations of prisons are unusual, as Sumathi Ramaswamy has argued, because they render beautiful a place of pain and suffering. They are also noteworthy for the way in which the prison is transformed into an image endowed with the potential to record Gandhi’s corporeal presence. Paying special attention to representations of Yerawada, this paper considers the prison as image, focusing on sketches, photographs, and

lithographs of British colonial prisons that were made or taken because they once confined Gandhi. Prisons, the infrastructural articulation of colonial jurisprudence in India, were infrequently pictured outside of official government representation. However when tied to prominent prisoners such as Gandhi, the prison, in both colonial and anti-colonial accounts, becomes a subject “worthy” of representation. When the prison is pictured in this way, conflated with Gandhi’s body, the image alters our understanding of incarceration, shifting the prison from a space of punishment to commemoration. While Gandhi claimed that through the singular devotion to religion, God, and prayer he had transformed the prison into a temple, this paper recognizes the important role representation played in changing the function of colonial carceral space.

**“The Rewards of Random Scholarship”
Stephen P. Huyler, Independent Scholar**

As scholars, the attempt to constantly objectify our subject may hone and focus our lens, but it also distracts us from being open to broader associations, discoveries that can only occur when reasoning minds are put aside. Throughout my long profession as a scholar of South Asian art, I have preferred conscious subjectivity, allowing the subject to direct my attention, to be spontaneous rather than planned in my approach. I believe that an intention to substantiate a stated thesis can predispose and obscure my openness to other possibilities. Time and again in my half-century of field research in India, I have made random choices, literally intending to take one highway to a site or subject, but choosing instead to stop, back up, and follow an unmarked road. This choice is based entirely upon intuition and whim, and that random act has led to far more insights and profound realizations than any choice to follow a planned route for academic documentation.

I believe that if we non-Asians and South Asians working in fields outside our own natal region are ever to make significant inroads into a deeper understanding of South Asian art and culture, our perceptions will profit from allowing random choices to blend seamlessly with our well-constructed theories. I would like to give examples and discuss viable applications of this theory.

PANEL #6 *The Bhāgavata Purāna in the Visual Arts*

Chair: Daniel J. Ehnbohm, University of Virginia

**“The Chathankulangara Narasimhaswamy *Bhāgavata*”
Arathi Menon, Hamilton College**

The manifold wooden panels of Chathankulangara Narasimhaswamy temple emphatically embody bhakti. Dated to the fourteenth century and located in the town of Chengannur in Alappuzha, Kerala, this temple is a rare extant example of a regional tradition of wooden temple architecture. This temple is also a repository that is rarer still of purānic imagery from that period. The carved registers that frame the shrine’s many windows are filled with immediately recognizable scenes: here, Vishnu as Unnikrishnan (baby Krishna) steals butter and poses with his mouth opened wide to reveal the universe, there he kills Hiranyakashipu as Narasimhaswamy and is the calmness of Anantashai Vishnu. Here again, Krishna smiles, as Kāliya coils around his body, and there he poses as he lifts the cow over his head to drink its milk. True to the narrative

of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Krishna's brother Balarama too receives his due in his own devakoshta (niche) where he is shown crushing Dhenukasura.

The iconographic program at Chathankulangara Narasimhaswamy temple is interconnected and yet non-linear, and the temple displays rather than narrates its scenes. This paper argues for reading the sculptural program at the temple as an interwoven spectacle, and in so doing seeks to extend our discussions on bhakti as it was embodied in the premodern art and architecture of the Malabar region.

**“Krishna in the Kathmandu Valley: An Illustrated *Bhāgavata* from Nepal”
Neeraja Poddar, Philadelphia Museum of Art**

While exploring the collections at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA), I was struck by four dazzling illustrations where splendid architecture and dramatic landscapes in rainbow colours serve as backdrops as Krishna hunts, marries beautiful princesses, and engages in combat. The depicted episodes from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa were familiar to me from illustrations produced at the Rajput courts, in the Punjab hills, and in Central India. But here, Krishna had been transposed to the cities and palaces of the Kathmandu valley, his presence bearing testimony to the wide sphere of the Bhāgavata's circulation and influence.

The four PMA illustrations and the lavish Nepali manuscript to which they belong have never been studied in detail. This is despite the long history of Vaishnavism in Nepal, the ubiquity of artworks dedicated to Vishnu, and the manuscript's participation in a broader North Indian engagement with the Krishna legend. Moreover, the manuscript is a singular example in Nepal's canon and among the most extensive illustrated Bhāgavata manuscripts ever produced. In this paper, I will introduce the manuscript's arrangement of text and image, visualization of space and place, and storytelling techniques, and probe how its organization and narrative rhythm derive at least partially from the features it shares with the long, scroll-like, Nepali vilampu that depict both Hindu and Buddhist subjects. My broader goal is to prompt a revision of the dominant narrative of Himalayan art where “Himalayan” is seen as synonymous with Tibetan Buddhist art; such a characterization fails to account for Nepal's rich canon of Hindu-themed works and its entangled socio-cultural history where deities, religious practices, and artistic styles are shared between Hinduism and Buddhism.

**“An Enlightening Combination: Exploring the Text-Image Relationship in a
Bhāgavata Purāṇa Scroll”
Maud Siron, Hiéron Museum of Sacred Art**

In 1834, the French National Library (BnF) acquired a Bhāgavata Purāṇa scroll inventoried as “Sanskrit 477”. This scroll contains two colophons giving the year saṃvat 1850 (1793 of our era) and the calligrapher's name Mayā Lakṣmaṇa. Its format and material are remarkable: several sheets of paper have been glued together in order to obtain a single strip almost 18 meters long and only about 10cm wide. The entire Bhāgavata Purāṇa with its twelve books (skandhas) has been written in micrographic Sanskrit in Devanāgarī script and the calligraphy is so small that six lines of text occupy only one centimetre. There are 40 illustrations in total which can be classified into three types: a series of 16 introductory images preceding the text, 12 transitional images placed in between the 12 books, and 12 smaller medallions scattered throughout the text of Books I and II.

This paper will undertake a decoding of the “Sanskrit 477” scroll’s iconographic programme and an identification of some of its singular and unique aspects compared to other contemporary scrolls. It will attempt to determine the logic behind the choices of illustration, in order to understand the meaningful messages images convey together with the text. Studying this visual translation of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as well as the symbolical and sacred dimension of micrography shines a light on the many relations between text and image in this scroll, taking into account the ambiguity and permeability of content and form.

“Invictus and the Nectar of Immortality: Ajita, Amṛta, and the Churning of the Ocean of Milk Narrative in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*”
Vasudha Narayanan, University of Florida

One of the longest versions of the narrative of the churning of the ocean of milk is seen in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. This paper will explore the connections between the Bhāgavata’s version and art in two ways.

My first question discusses sculptures depicting this story in two Pallava temples and asks if we can get clues about dating, at least for this section of the Purāṇa? Our discussions will help us learn more about royal patronage and this part of this large Purāṇa and also about co-opting of common narratives by competing sectarian groups near Kanchipuram.

In the second part of the paper, I ask if there is any unique feature to this story in the Bhāgavata, and if we can identify that special feature in sculpture. My work, tracing the story through many purāṇas and the itihāsas has shown that the description of Vishnu’s handling of the serpent, Vasuki, in the churning of the ocean story in the Bhāgavata is quite distinctive. In my paper, I will show that the only place where this feature is seen is in the Angkor Wat bas-relief of the churning of the ocean of milk. This relief is 49 meters wide and is the largest bas-relief in the world. The paper will explore how we can understand this connection between the text and the bas-relief in Angkor.

PANEL #7 Ephemerality as Endurance

Chair: Pika Ghosh, Haverford College
Discussant: Annapurna Garimella, Independent Scholar

This panel returns to the tensions between the durability of materials and things in their relation to practices of making and consumption to explore the nature of value and agency. Together they resist the privileging of permanent and precious materials, on antiquity, and the one-of-a-kind that shaped the discipline of art history from Renaissance European collecting and writing to focus on the malleability of interpretation. Yet, we know that coins were melted, buildings renovated or decimated, and deities came with their rituals of protection or reinstallation in times of turbulence. The proclivity for non-archiving endures, and often intersects with impulses to commemorate and conserve in practices centered on evanescence, celebration of mutable processes, defacement, or erasure that engage a range of political, historical, cultural and economic flows. Together the papers examine transformations in media and materials from clay and cloth to albums and books, spatialized diversely from courtly workshops for elite clients to everyday household rituals and roadside sheds that are animated seasonally --- to ask how an art historical narrative embracing mutability and recycling can disclose a host of values from homage and thrift to ease, healing, and non-attachment.

“Making, Using, Disposing, Remaking... : Terracruda Sculpture as an Art of Re-creation in Southern Asia”

Susan S. Bean, Independent Curator and Consultant

Terracruda [dry, unfired clay] is among the most widely used materials for figural sculpture in southern Asia. Terracruda's inherently transformational character – readily melting into slurry in the presence of water and crumbling to earthen bits under impact – has marginalized it in the literature on the region's sculpture. Survivals are rare in comparison to works in stone, metal, terracotta and even wood. But more importantly, dominant approaches to art in the West long privileged durable and costly sculptural materials, relegating terracruda to the periphery for its mundane and fragile nature, while acknowledging its usefulness for prototypes of work to be realized in metal or stone. In southern Asia, terracruda has been valued for the same characteristics that marginalized it in the West – commonness, earthiness and mutability. The widespread availability and low cost of modeling clay and the instability of terracruda forms, make unfired clay an ideal material for proliferating occasions of limited duration when figures are created, placed for viewing or worship, and then discarded, to be replaced by new work on the next occasion. This presentation focuses on practices of terracruda sculpture in Bengal and Maharashtra to consider how the transformational nature of terracruda has facilitated sculptors and their clienteles in remodeling devotional practices, political alignments and stylistic preferences.

“The Ephemeral Permanence of Water in the Making and Breaking of Material Things”

Cristin McKnight Sethi, George Washington University

Water is the universal solvent, a ubiquitous substance which causes material disintegration and erosion, and in excess, can render seemingly permanent things impermanent. Yet at the same time water is indelible: on a physical level, water leaves an immutable mark on an object; molecularly, water changes and transforms, but never goes away. This paper explores the paradoxical ephemeral permanence of water as a substance and catalytic tool for the creation and/or dissolution of visual and material things. Looking from cultural practices of ritual immersion, like those associated with the annual Ganesha Chaturthi festival, to techniques of mordanting and dyeing cotton and silk cloth, this paper considers how the endurance and ephemerality of water can help dislodge art history's disciplinary allegiance to permanence and preservation.

“Ephemerality, Cultivation, and Cuisine”

Holly Shaffer, Brown University

Food is ephemeral. Produce can last at most months, while cooked foods remain for a few hours or with conservation, a few years. Yet artists, cooks, and writers have developed methods of preservation – from documenting the cultivation of plants to transcribing recipes – that acknowledge continuity through memory and repetition as well as change through environmental factors, ingenuity, and loss. In this paper, I will align botanical paintings and recipe books produced by artists and chefs in north India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with oral histories taken primarily in Lucknow in the twenty-first century. How does thinking through a framework of ephemerality allow multiple times to co-exist and perishable objects to survive? Does art history as a discipline offer a method to study ephemeral arts like cultivation or cuisine? What might the temporality of cultivation or cuisine offer us as art historians?

“The *Muraqqa*‘ as a Medium and Mode of Preservation”

Yael Rice, Amherst College

Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, the *muraqqa*‘ (from the Arabic for “mended”), or album, was one of the most avidly patronized and collected manuscript types among South Asia's elites. As the term implies, the *muraqqa*‘ patched together discrete materials from different places and moments in time to form novel, suggestive arrangements. But these mends could often be short-lived: many seventeenth-century albums were dispersed during the centuries that followed, and their parts selectively reused to form newly stitched ensembles. While studies of these later assembled albums have historically privileged their earlier contents and “original” seventeenth-century states, I propose that the *muraqqa*‘s primary function as a medium and mode of preservation—by which I mean to sustain and enliven rather than to keep the same—precludes such temporal hierarchies. Hence, in taking these later albums more seriously, I also ask what it means to write the histories of ephemera that endure only because they change.

PANEL #8 Imagined Worlds: Art, Aesthetics, and Identity in South Asia

Chair: Kerry Lucinda Brown, Savannah College of Art and Design

“Vernacular Jain art in Eighteenth century Bikaner: The Case of the Mathen community”

Nandita Punj, Rutgers University

The princely state of Bikaner in Rajasthan is well known for its school of painting and art historical scholarship has primarily focused on the courtly art produced in the region. Through a case study of Bikaner’s Mathen community (originally Shvetambar Jain yatis/uninitiated domesticated monks, who were later evicted from the monastic order owing to laxity in practice), this paper will demonstrate the significance of the vernacular genre of art, in particular early modern Jain painting. The characteristics of vernacular art- simplicity, ease of accessibility and freedom of expression, were equally important in defining the visual culture of the period as was the art produced for elite circles. In Rajasthan, Mathens catered primarily but not exclusively to the Jains’ liturgical and devotional needs. They contributed to the development of the visual language of Bikaner by giving form and recognition to local practices and culture through incorporating traditional Jain and courtly motifs in their art. In addition to their ability to adapt from scribal work to painting various subjects on different media, Mathen artists forged an artistic identity for themselves by marking their work with their names and carving out a path for social mobility. By examining early modern Jain art produced by Mathens and focusing on a corpus of Bikaneri painted manuscripts of the Shalibhadra Chaupai (a Jain tale of giving directed primarily at merchants), this paper problematizes the relationship between courtly and vernacular categories, calling for a reexamination of the larger issue of ‘courtly- vernacular dichotomy’.

“A Courtly City in a Colonial World: Imagining Jaipur in the Long Eighteenth Century”

Shivani Sud, University of California, Berkeley

Whimsical, carnivalesque visions of European merchants, harbors, island citadels, and sailing ships, set within expansive urban vistas typify a new genre of paintings to have emerged in the royal capital of Jaipur in the late eighteenth century. These paintings are crucial in understanding

how the early colonial world was perceived and visualized by regional communities in South Asia. South Asia's long eighteenth century (c. 1680–1815) witnessed the rise of regional polities of power, the growth of colonial trading companies, and the expansion of transregional trade and pilgrimage networks. It is from within this new political, economic, and social matrix that there emerged a new *khayalat*, or an imagining, of the world—an imagining that is both constituted and revealed in a set of imaginative artistic practices from late-eighteenth century Jaipur. This talk demonstrates that Jaipur artists layered established aesthetic tropes, local and European artistic conventions, and imaginings of real, fantastical, and mythological places to envisage a world increasingly shaped by long-distance travel, colonial encounters, and cross-cultural exchanges. In doing so, I aim to foreground the visual and imaginative agency of Jaipur's artists and patrons in not only visualizing their own location within the world but also the ambivalent position of the European other in the early colonial period. While histories of global connectivity typically position Europe at its center, a turn toward non-Western regional cultures alerts us to the ways in which cross-cultural, indeed colonial, contact was understood and experienced by regional communities at the margins of Empire.

“Decoding a Colonial-era *Muraqqa*’: Making Minutiae in the Fraser Album”
Yuthika Sharma, University of Edinburgh/Northwestern University

Drawings of the Fraser Album, compiled between 1815-20 were made by itinerant Mughal court painters for William Fraser, the East India Company officer and British Resident of Mughal Delhi in early colonial India. The portraits of soldiers, women, landowners, holy men, musicians and nobles painted for Fraser form a highly significant corpus of genre portraits from this period, within what is termed as Company School of Painting.

By focusing on the making i.e. the artistic labour expended on the album and the work of its everyday subjects as sitters, this paper will draw upon the relationship between court painting, portraiture and album-making beyond the aesthetics of the Fraser album to its more operative role. Placing the album within the context of drawings of the Delhi School, the paper will address the often overlooked (unequal) relationship between the court-trained artist and the Company patron. Moreover, the individualised approach to portraiture seen in the album will be contrasted with the universalising format and typification seen within Company Paintings of this period. The paper will conclude that the album invites dual forms of sustained scrutiny – the first drawing attention to the labouring hand of the artist and second, the portrayal of the (non)labouring body. Recognising the work of the artist and the sitter, it will be argued, is complementary to revising the album as a visual standpoint to growing economies of human capital in crafts and manufactures that were to emerge during the Raj.

“Lain Singh Bangdel and the ‘Aesthetic Movement’ for a Modern Nepal”
Owen Duffy, Yeh Art Gallery, St. John’s University

A twentieth-century polymath, Nepali artist Lain Singh Bangdel (1919-2002) became an acclaimed novelist, art historian, preservationist, and painter who played a pivotal role in shaping the history of art in South Asia. This paper will explore how Bangdel helped fashion a modern art for Nepal as it emerged from isolation in the 1950s. In particular, this paper will examine how Bangdel's signature vocabulary of abstraction crystallized upon his homecoming to Nepal at the behest of King Mahendra, and B.P. Koirala, the country's first democratically elected prime minister, who implored him in a 1957 letter, to “organize [Nepal's] aesthetic movement.”

In the years leading up to his return to Nepal, Darjeeling-born Bangdel embedded himself with intellectual circles in Independence-era Kolkata, London, and Paris. This paper will trace Bangdel's connections with figures like Zainul Abedin, a Bangladeshi modernist and documentarian of the Bengal Famine, who Bangdel studied with at Kolkata's noted Government College of Art & Craft. After graduating, Bangdel found work as a commercial artist at the Kolkata-based firm D.J. Keymer, where he formed a lifelong friendship with acclaimed Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray. Considering these experiences, this paper proposes that Bangdel distilled his abstraction from dualities of the everyday: from the sublime imagery encountered in nature to the harsh realities of urban existence. Consequently, Bangdel's cellular abstraction emerged from a variety of sources, including the vernacular architecture of South Asian cities like Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) and Kathmandu, as well as the exalted peaks of the Himalayas.

MUSEUM EXCURSION/GALLERY PRESENTATIONS

Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University

Exclusions, Inclusions, and Ambiguities in a Teaching Museum

In the summer of 2021, the Asian gallery at Emory's Michael C. Carlos Museum underwent a renovation and expansion made possible through the Christian Humann Foundation and the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The collection was significantly re-organized, several sculptures previously held in storage were placed in the gallery, over twenty miniature paintings of the avatars of Vishnu and the Ramayana found their permanent homes in drawers installed in the gallery, and all the pieces received new labels.

In this panel, the Emory faculty, museum staff, and students responsible for this renovation will explore the exclusions, inclusions, and ambiguities that were a part of this renovation. Specifically, we will look at the process of writing labels with the undergraduate student in mind. Among other questions, we will ask: What should we highlight in a label when the narrative or identity of an object is unclear? Which version of a narrative should be privileged? Which ritual, or text, that relates to an object should be privileged? To answer these questions, we will focus on a few ambiguous objects in the collection: a sculpture from Mathura that was labeled as the Buddha but now is identified as the bodhisattva, a Gandharan frieze with a strange Vajrapani (?) whose narrative is unclear, a fierce goddess who spent decades likely falsely identified as Bhairavi, a medieval sandstone sculpture of Vishnu who was previously identified as "cosmic," but now has lost this identification, and a nineteenth-century watercolor that may or may not depict Vamana. Through our discussion of researching and writing about these objects, we hope to shed light on the role a teaching museum plays in creating, preserving, and manipulating knowledge.

Chair: Elizabeth Hornor, Michael C. Carlos Museum

For the last fifteen years, the Carlos Museum has worked closely with Emory faculty in the Departments of Religion and Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies to build the collections in service to university teaching. The faculty has been immensely supportive of this initiative, developing courses that focus on the objects, working with the museum on student-curated exhibitions, and, in 2021, contributing to a major renovation and reinstallation of the museum's permanent gallery of Asian art. Elizabeth Hornor, who served as project manager for these projects, will introduce the innovative collaboration between the Carlos and the faculty and introduce the panel.

“Red Sandstone Seated Buddha or Bodhisattva in Full Lotus Position?”

Sara McClintock, Emory University

The first image the strikes the viewer upon entering the Asia Gallery at the Carlos Museum is what appears to be a large red sandstone Buddha from Mathura. Despite his missing head and arms, the figure is similar to others, such as one in the Kimball Art Museum, that have been identified as seated Buddhas. Dating these images is not particularly contentious—they all come from approximately the 1st century CE, during the Kushan period. Like some of the figures produced in Gandhara during this period, these Mathura statues are often suggested to represent the first images of the Buddha in human form. Indeed, our own previous museum label identified the statue this way. Yet art historical research on the Buddhist statues from Mathura indicates that the majority of inscriptions name such figures as the Bodhisattva, not the Buddha. Our own statue has no inscription, so we faced a dilemma. Should we continue with the previous label, naming Mathura along with Gandhara as the birthplace of the iconic Buddha’s depiction in human form? Or should we take a risk and change the label to Bodhisattva? We chose the latter route, in part out of deference to the research and in part because it allows us to tell the story of the Bodhisattva’s journey and to link the piece to other objects in the gallery, including a Gandharan frieze in which the Bodhisattva in a previous life bows down before a Buddha from the distant past.

“Faking It: The Problem of Forgeries in Gandharan Art and the Michael C. Carlos Museum Narrative Frieze”

Karuna Kaur Srikureja, Denver Art Museum

In July 2012, police in Karachi, Pakistan seized a truckload of looted stone sculptures primarily from ancient Gandhara. The investigation led to a warehouse containing hundreds more sculptures, and ultimately close to four hundred works were apprehended. Just over a week later, the investigation took a turn when about seventy-five percent of these works were found to be forgeries. Three years later, in the fall of 2015, the Michael C. Carlos Museum was gifted a Gandharan narrative panel carved with a scene from the Buddha’s life. While an exciting addition to the collection, the piece is undocumented—the only provenance is a single page of a 1974 letter from an unknown sender, and the iconography of the piece itself presented several irregularities. The lack of verifiable facts surrounding the sculpture, as well as the pervasiveness of Gandharan forgery, has understandably led several experts in Gandharan art to suggest the frieze is a fake. Before dismissing a potentially authentic work, however, it is important to carefully examine all available evidence. This paper confronts the problem of Gandharan forgeries using the Carlos Museum frieze as a case study. The goal is not to make a claim about the sculpture’s authenticity, but to combine analysis of iconography, materiality, and hypothetical historical context to present a balanced presentation of available evidence and discuss the cultural implications of the phenomenon of fakes in Gandharan art.

“Who is the Fierce Goddess?”

Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, Emory University

The Michael C. Carlos Museum obtained a 12th century granite seated female figure as a gift from Ann and Robert Walzer in 2000. She came with the identification of Bhairavi, one of the 10 Mahavidya goddesses (manifestations of the Great Goddess) and consort of the fierce manifestation of the god Shiva, Bhairava. As an ethnographer of religion who has worked with traditions of a fierce South Indian village goddess (*gramadevata*) who shares many of the

iconographical features of this goddess—fangs, an upheld dagger, and a skull-bowl in hand—I was not totally convinced about her identification as Bhairavi. As part of the reinstallation project, I reached out to several art historians and scholars of religion regarding this piece. The art historians were quite certain she wasn't Bhairavi although they were not certain of another identity; and the religion scholars who had worked with village goddess traditions were quite certain she was a *gramadevata* (photographs of which will be shown in this presentation). For the new label, we decided to leave the goddess unnamed and identify her by her fierce (*ugra*) iconographic features, while drawing comparisons to both the fierce tantric goddess Ekajata Tara and *gramadevatas* who share these same features.

The identification, perhaps misidentification, of the fierce goddess may be explained, in part, by what the art collector or art historian knew when they identified her as the fierce Bhairavi, who is part of a classical Hindu pantheon. Village goddesses, traditionally served in South India by persons from un-privileged castes, rarely enter the worlds of South Asia art history and museums like the Carlos; and so fanged, sword-wielding, fierce *gramadevatas* were likely not in the imaginations of those who named her Bhairavi and continued that transmission. Our current label—Fierce Goddess—cracks open the door to traditions of communities who have been left out of most art museums.

“Why Does Vishnu Have Eighteen Arms?” **Aditya Chaturvedi, Emory University**

The sandstone sculpture of the eighteen-armed Vishnu, if not unique, is certainly an unusual depiction of Vishnu. This sculpture was originally labeled as *Cosmic Form of Eighteen Armed Vishnu*, and the label referred to the famous episode from the *Gītā* in which Krishna displayed his cosmic form to Arjuna.

In 2019, while working on this sculpture for a term paper, I was not quite convinced that this sculpture depicted Vishnu in his cosmic form. In analyzing the sculpture then, I turned to the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* and the *Mūrtivinirdeśa* of the *Kālikāpurāṇa*. These texts had descriptions about making Vishnu in his Vishvarupa or the cosmic form with multiple heads and hands. While our Vishnu had multiple hands, the absence of multiple heads barred us from labeling him as the cosmic form. As a textualist/historian, it is hard for me to ascertain anything without corroborating it with a textual reference. However, in studying South Asian art history, I have come to realize that one needs to be very imaginative and often go beyond textual descriptions in identifying objects.

In writing a new label for this object, we chose not to cross boundaries of texts we were working with. Embracing ambiguity, we decided to label it just as the *Eighteen Armed Vishnu*. The current label sticks to the description of the object itself without making any assertions about its relation to some narrative or ritual text. The art collectors were perhaps aware of the cosmic form episode from the *Gītā* and therefore decided to label it as such. In doing so they privileged the *Gītā* over other not so popular texts like the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. In my presentation, I will discuss: (a) the role premodern Sanskrit texts play in identification of premodern South Asian art objects; (b) and how embracing ambiguity in studying objects such as this allows for creating a space for discussions in educational museums like Carlos.

“What Should Vamana Look Like?” **Ellen Gough, Emory University**

Among the paintings of the avatars of Vishnu at the Carlos, one stands out for its ambiguity: a nineteenth-century Pahari watercolor that came to the Carlos in 2016 identified as a depiction of the fifth incarnation of Vishnu, the dwarf Vamana. Despite its identification, this painting displays none of the common iconographical markers of Vamana. In his form as a brahmin dwarf, Vamana is typically blue-skinned and diminutive, holding a waterpot and a parasol, while in his form as Trivikrama, he holds the attributes of Vishnu (*cakra*, etc.), raising a leg above his head to signify the three steps he takes to conquer the demon king Bali. In the painting at the Carlos, a man (king Bali?) does touch the feet of a four-armed blue figure, but the figure holds none of Vishnu's attributes, does not raise a leg, and has wild hair more common to Shiva than Vishnu. Other parts of the painting also do not directly depict known versions of the Vamana story. How, then, should we label this painting for a teaching museum?

At Emory in the spring of 2021, I taught a course on the Avatars of Vishnu that culminated in a student-curated exhibit that included this painting, displayed for the first time. Over the course of the semester, students were responsible for researching the piece and writing the label. This paper reviews the students' process of arriving at the current label for the painting by comparing different Puranic versions of the Vamana narrative with the painting and highlighting some similarities and differences in roughly contemporaneous Pahari paintings of Vamana. While the identity of the figure in the painting remains unclear, the process of arriving at a label has allowed students to examine neglected parts of the story of Vamana and question how much we should rely on texts when understanding material representations of narratives.