21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL

BEITRÄGE ZUR KUNSTGESCHICHTE UND VISUELLEN KULTUR

#4–2024

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION PUBLISHED BY THE DEUTSCHE NATIONALBIBLIOTHEK

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

This journal is published at arthistoricum.net, Heidelberg University Library 2024, under the Creative Commons Attribution License CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
The electronic open access version of this work is permanently available on https://www.arthistoricum.net and https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4

ISSN 2701-1569 / eISSN 2701-1550

arthistoricum.net
SPECIALISED INFORMATION SERVICE ART · PHOTOGRAPHY · DESIGN

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL

BEITRÄGE ZUR
KUNSTGESCHICHTE
UND VISUELLEN KULTUR

Stella Kramrisch and the Transculturation of Art History

(ed. by Matthew Vollgraff & Jo Ziebritzki)

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4

ARTICLES – ARTIKEL

REVIEWS – REZENSIONEN

EDITORIAL

STELLA KRAMRISCH AND THE TRANSCULTURATION OF ART HISTORY

Jo Ziebritzki & Matthew Vollgraff

A rapidly developing field today, transcultural art history emerged in the early 2000s as a critical response to the discipline's entrenched methodological nationalism.[1] By foregrounding the circulation and multidirectional exchanges of artists, materials, and ideas throughout various regions of the world, it challenges both the nation-state framework and essentializing approaches to culture.[2] Yet while the transcultural history of art has sparked considerable interest and debate in recent years, the transculturation of art history as a discipline remains relatively unexamined. This special issue follows the transcontinental intellectual career of a single individual in order to probe the epistemologies, methods, and networks that shaped art history into a transcultural field.

A renowned historian and curator of South Asian art, the Moravian-born Stella Kramrisch (1896–1993) is typically remembered as one of the founders of Indian art history, and of art history in India. During the seventy years of her productive career, she was an exile in unsettled times, at once an insider and outsider. She worked across continents and institutions, including the University

1
The work on this special issue began with a workshop on the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940, Warburg Institute) and a round-table discussion on Kramrisch as curator conducted on February 10, 2022 at the Warburg Institute, University of London. We thank Sria Chatterjee, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Eckhardt Marchand, Darielle Mason, Partha Mitter, Bill Sherman, Deborah Swallow, Paul Taylor, Sarah Victoria Turner, and the members of the *Bilderfahrzeuge* project, in particular Johannes von Müller, for numerous insightful discussions, which not only enriched the workshop but also extended well beyond it. In curating contributions for this special issue, we also reached out to participants of the 2012 conference *Divine Artefacts. Stella Kramrisch and Art History in the Twentieth Century* convened by Deborah Sutton, Deborah Swallow, and Sarah Victoria Turner. Several of the updated papers of the 2012 conference have been included in this issue. We are grateful to the two anonymous peer reviewers for their constructive comments on this issue. Lastly, we extend special thanks to Sria Chatterjee for her invaluable expertise and support, particularly during the early stages of editorial work on this issue.

2
See especially Monica Juneja, *Can Art History Be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery*, Berlin/Boston 2023; Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, London/Cambridge, MA 2005; Kavita Singh, Colonial, International, Global. Connecting and Disconnecting Art Histories, in: *Art in Translation* 9/1, 2015, 1–14.

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 787–810

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.107511

of Vienna, the art school Kala Bhavana in Santiniketan, and Calcutta University during the British Raj and into Independence. She also worked at the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes in London, and the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the US. While her work moved between ancient, folk and modern art, and between the sacred and avant-garde, her biography intersected with declining European empires, anticolonial Indian nationalism, and American geopolitical cultural strategy during the Cold War.[3] Kramrisch's trajectory also reflects the developing connections between art history and South Asian studies, as well as shifts in academic disciplines and departmental politics. Her life and work thus provide a compelling lens through which to reconsider how today's increasingly polycentric art history has been shaped by migration, mobility, the translocation of objects, and processes of translation.

This special issue adopts a multi-sited and interdisciplinary approach to capture the complexity of Kramrisch's itinerant career, which bridged diverse intellectual and cultural traditions. By spotlighting pivotal moments in Kramrisch's transcontinental journey, the contributions not only offer new perspectives on her work but also raise broader methodological and epistemological questions about the discipline of art history itself, especially in the wake of its 'global turn'. In this editorial, we will map out these connections by way of three themes. First, we situate Kramrisch's early work on Indian art within the historical development of 'world' and 'Oriental' art history in the early twentieth century. Second, we examine her distinctive mode of weaving together different social and temporal categories, and bringing ancient, folk and modern art into conversation with one another. Finally, we analyze how photography and collecting informed her work and contributed to a transcultural narrative of Indian art history.

I. From Orientalism to South Asian Art History

Around 1900, European art historians began to turn their attention to the arts of the so-called 'Orient', spurred by both the increasing influx of artistically crafted objects from Asia and the Near East,

[3] For biographical information see Darielle Mason, Interwoven in the Pattern of Time. Stella Kramrisch and Kanthas, in: *Kantha. The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal* (exh. cat. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art), ed. by Darielle Mason, Philadelphia 2010, 158–168; Barbara Stoler Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Essay, in: ead. (ed.), *Exploring India's Sacred Art. Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia 1983, 3–33. For various aspects of Kramrisch's work see Michael Meister (ed.), *Making Things in South Asia. The Role of Artist and Craftsman*, Philadelphia 1988; Michael Meister, Display as Structure and Revelation. On Seeing the Shiva Exhibition, in: *Studies in Visual Communication* 7/4, 1981, 84–98; Kris K. Manjapra, Stella Kramrisch and the Bauhaus in Calcutta, in: R. Siva Kumar (ed.), *The Last Harvest. Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Hidden Meadows Ocean Township, NJ 2011, 34–39; Regina Bittner and Kathrin Rhomberg (eds.), *The Bauhaus in Calcutta. An Encounter of Cosmopolitan Avant-Gardes*, Ostfildern 2013; Dossier Stella Kramrisch in: *Regards Croisés* 11, 2021; Christian Kravagna, *Transmodern. An Art History of Contact, 1920–1960*, transl. by Jennifer Taylor, Manchester 2022; Juneja, Can Art History Be Made Global?; Jo Ziebritzki, *Stella Kramrisch. Kunsthistorikerin zwischen Europa und Indien, Ein Beitrag zur Depatriachalisierung der Kunstgeschichte*, Marburg 2021.

and the proliferation of Orientalist images and objects produced in Europe. While Oriental studies had long been established in fields like philology, philosophy, and archaeology, it was not until the turn of the century that this scholarship began to converge with art history, which had traditionally focused on Mediterranean Europe.[4] This burgeoning interest in Orientalism was deeply entangled with imperial politics in Britain, France, Germany, and Austria (to name only some of the key actors). In the context of research on South Asia's material culture, figures such as archaeologist Alexander Cunningham, historian Vincent Smith, and scholar-educators like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ernest B. Havell helped lay the groundwork for art historical interest in Indian painting, sculpture, and architecture.

Thus by the early twentieth century, when Stella Kramrisch began her studies of Indian art at the art historical institute led by Josef Strzygowski in Vienna, British authorities had become increasingly interested in Indian archaeological remains and artifacts, which they viewed as the bearers of traditions and worldviews.[5] These artifacts, in particular Hindu temple architecture, became contested symbols in the ideological battle between imperial Orientalists, such as James Fergusson, and Indian nationalists, such as Rajendralal Mitra, who debated whether they were signs of "decadence" (Fergusson) or "grandeur" (Mitra).[6] The long-standing debate over whether Indian material culture should be considered fine art came to a head in 1910 at the Royal Society of Arts in London. Havell and his supporters argued that Indian objects deserved recognition as fine art, while the colonial administrator George C. M. Birdwood notoriously dismissed a Buddha statue as no better than "boiled suet pudding".[7] The lack of consensus in this debate prompted Indian art advocates to establish the India Society, a sister organization to the earlier Indian Society of Oriental Art

4
On this disciplinary landscape in the German-speaking context see Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire. Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, Cambridge 2009.

5
Saloni Mathur, *India by Design. Colonial History and Cultural Display*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2007, 5.

6
See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories. Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India, Part II: Regional Frames*, Delhi 2004, 85–174. For the dispute between Fergusson and Mitra, see 103–108.

7
Ernest B. Havell, Art Administration in India, in: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 58/2985, February 4, 1910, 274–298, here 287. The Buddhist sculpture in question originated not from India itself but from Borobudur in Java. As Marieke Bloembergen notes, both the supporters and the detractors of "Indian art" uncritically built on the nationalist conception of a Greater India, which cast the arts and cultures of Southeast Asia as outposts of India's cultural influence. See Marieke Bloembergen, The Politics of 'Greater India', a Moral Geography. Moveable Antiquities and Charmed Knowledge Networks between Indonesia, India, and the West, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63/1, 2021, 170–211, here 196.

in Calcutta, furthering the recognition of Indian art within both academic and public spheres in the capital of imperial Britain.[8]

In continental Europe as well, the scholarly promotion of non-Western art often faced fierce resistance. Prominent Orientalists of the early twentieth century reacted with hostility to aesthetically appreciative approaches to Asian art. In 1911, for instance, the young art historian Karl With approached Albert Grünwedel, curator of the Indian collection at Berlin's Ethnological Museum, to discuss the prospect of studying Indian art. Grünwedel's widely read 1898 book *Buddhistische Kunst* had argued that India lacked any genuine artistic tradition beyond the Buddha sculptures of Gandhara. In his biography, With recounts that after he had informed Grünwedel about his intended course of study, the senior Orientalist irascibly "jumped up from behind his desk, shouted at me that he would throw me out if I would ever again dare to speak of Hindu sculptures as works of art".[9] In fact, With found Strzygowski's art historical institute in Vienna to be one of the few places where he could pursue his research, eventually defending his dissertation on Indian sculpture in 1918.

Kramrisch was uniquely positioned within these imperial and cosmopolitan discourses.[10] She began her academic career with a dissertation on early Buddhist temple sculpture, after having studied art history with Strzygowski and Max Dvořák at the University of Vienna.[11] Strzygowski, the occupant of the first chair for "non-European art history", had sparked heated controversy with his 1901 book *Orient oder Rom*, which argued that the Near East and Central Asia had exerted a far greater impact on European and early Christian art than Greece or Rome.[12] Still a justly contested figure today, owing to his odious racial framework of history, Strzygowski undeniably broadened the scope of art historical studies well

8
The India Society, founded in 1910, sought to promote the appreciation of Indian art by exhibiting visual materials such as Ananda Coomaraswamy's line drawings and Christiana Herringham's reproductions of the Ajanta cave paintings. See Sarah Victoria Turner, Crafting Connections. The India Society and the Formation of an Imperial Artistic Network in Early Twentieth-Century Britain, in: Susheila Nasta (ed.), *India in Britain. South Asian Networks and Connections 1858–1950*, New York 2013, 96–114.

9
Karl With, *Autobiography of Ideas. Memoirs of an Extraordinary Art Scholar*, ed. Roland Jäger, Berlin 1997, 60.

10
On different visions of cosmopolitanism in art see Charlotte Ashby, Grace Brockington, Daniel Laqua, and Sarah Victoria Turner (eds.), *Imagined Cosmopolis. Internationalism and Cultural Exchange, 1870s–1920s*, Oxford/Bern/Berlin/Brussels/New York/Vienna 2019.

11
Stella Kramrisch, *Untersuchungen zum Wesen der frühbuddhistischen Bildnerei Indiens*, PhD dissertation, Vienna University, 1919.

12
Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom. Beitrag zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühchristlichen Kunst*, Leipzig 1901. See Suzanne Marchand, Appreciating the Art of Others. Joseph Strzygowski and the Austrian Origins of Non-Western Art History, in: Magdalena Dglosz and Pieter O. Scholz (eds.), *Von Biala nach Wien. Josef Strzygowski und die Kulturwissenschaften*, Vienna 2015, 256–285.

beyond the Mediterranean, encouraging his doctoral students to work on Persian, Islamic, Indian and Chinese arts, among others.[13] The books and visual material held at his art historical institute made it an unparalleled resource and center for pioneering research [Fig. 1]. However, although Strzygowski and his school have retrospectively been considered key proponents of 'world art history', most of his students dealt with more circumscribed cultural-historical units, such as (in Kramrisch's case) Indian art and architecture.[14]

This, then, was the intellectual environment in which Kramrisch began studying Indian art. During the height of European Orientalism, in the midst of World War I, Indian art was taken seriously as a subject of aesthetic and historical inquiry at Strzygowski's institute. Yet even in Vienna, very few scholars shared Kramrisch's deep appreciation for Indian painting, sculpture, and architecture. Moreover, her gender and Jewish background posed significant barriers to her career in German-speaking academia. Austrian universities did not employ women for paid positions at the time, and increasing antisemitism further limited her opportunities.[15] Consequently, Kramrisch found her first academic appointment neither in Austria nor in England – where her expertise in Indian art was valued for its relevance to the British colonial mission – but rather in India itself, at an anticolonial university founded by the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

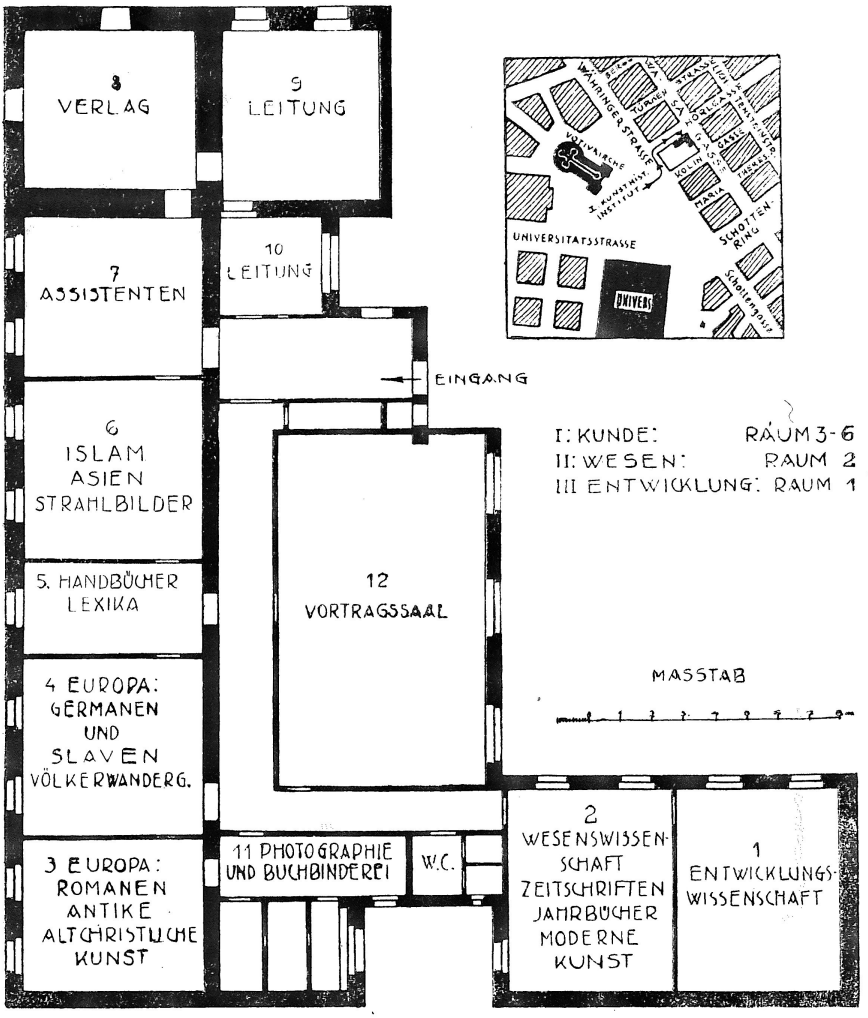
During a fellowship in Oxford following her 1919 dissertation, Tagore met Kramrisch and invited her to teach at Kala Bhavana, the art school of Visva-Bharati University, his newly founded educational institution in Santiniketan, a village north of Kolkata.[16]

13
Without naming Strzygowski directly, Kramrisch criticized similar approaches that make art "serve as an indicator of racial predestinations". Stella Kramrisch, The Study of Indian Art, in: *Calcutta Review*, 3rd series, 49, October 1933, 60–65, here 64. Nevertheless, as editor of the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, she continued to publish essays by Strzygowski into the late 1930s, at a point when his racialist approach to art history was difficult to ignore. See Josef Strzygowski, India's Position in the Art of Asia, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 1, 1933, 7–18; id., Three Northern Currents in the Art of the Chinese People, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 5, 1937, 42–59; id., Vergleichende Kunstforschung, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 6, 1938, 106–117. Kramrisch was hardly alone in her loyalty to her *Doktorvater*, who, despite his obsession with proving the 'Nordic' and 'Aryan' origins of Eurasian art and architecture, had also mentored and promoted numerous students of Jewish descent at his Vienna institute. See Michael Young, Jewish Students in Strzygowski's Vienna Institute and the Study of Jewish Art. A Forgotten Chapter in the History of the Vienna School, in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 29, supp. 2, 2023, 1–26.

14
See Georg Vasold, The Revaluation of Art History. An Unfinished Project by Josef Strzygowski and His School, in: Pauline Bachmann, Melanie Klein, Tomoko Mamine, and Georg Vasold (eds.), *Art/Histories in Transcultural Dynamics. Narratives, Concepts, and Practices at Work, 20th and 21st Centuries*, Munich 2017, 119–138; Juneja, Can Art History Be Made Global?, 41–78, esp. 64–70; Marchand, German Orientalism in the Age of Empire, 387–426; Jo Ziebritzki, The International Spread of Asian and Islamic Art Histories. An Intersectional Approach to Trajectories of the Vienna School (c. 1920–1970), in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 29, supp. 1, 2023, 1–24.

15
See K. Lee Chichester and Brigitte Sölch, Einleitung & Editorische Notiz, in: eaed. (eds.), *Kunsthistorikerinnen 1910–1980. Theorien, Methoden, Kritiken*, Berlin 2021, 9–37.

16
Strzygowski was also invited, but never followed through on his planned visit.



[Fig. 1]
Floor plan of the 1. Kunsthistorisches Institut at the University of Vienna, led by Josef Strzygowski, in: anon. (eds.), *Josef Strzygowski. Festschrift, Zum 70. Geburtstag dargebracht von seinen Schülern*, Klagenfurt 1932, 194.

Tagore welcomed the knowledge of the whole world to Visva-Bharati, facilitating transcultural dialogue and exchanges by inviting numerous international scholars to teach at his university.[17] During her first year as lecturer, Kramrisch taught primarily European art history and critiqued the work of students and colleagues. As her former student, the artist Binodebehari Mukherjee wrote retrospectively, Kramrisch "opened a new vista for Indian artists by explaining to them from the point of modernism, experiments made in various media and form in Indian art".[18] This focus on form was shared by the principal of the art school, Indian modernist painter Nandalal Bose.[19] Kramrisch's lectures, which were made compulsory for students and staff alike, may even have helped Tagore – also a painter in his own right – to find his style.[20] One canvas by Tagore, now in the Kramrisch collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, portrays an elongated oval face with a sly expression and a bob hairstyle, set against a vivid red background. Although Tagore's painting has no title, it is not unlikely that the sitter was Kramrisch herself [Fig. 2].

In Kramrisch's writings from the early 1920s, she argued that experiments with form, rather than the replication of Orientalist imagery or Western models, would allow modern Indian artists to build a bridge between pre-colonial and present times. When Indian artists suppressed their "individual and national temperament" in favor of European techniques, styles, and motifs, the result was an "aesthetic catastrophe", as it is phrased in an anonymously published article that can be attributed to Kramrisch. Rather, she emphasized the need to master foreign styles in order to go beyond them, noting that the "moment the outside influence is absorbed and made part of one's own mental equipment – it ceases to be an influence – because it ceases to dominate on the mind or sterilise it – it has become an enriching factor, a fertilizing medium".[21] Her

17
Rabindranath Tagore, Aims and Objects, in: Ranajit Ray (ed.), *Visva-Bharati and Its Institutions*, n.p.; Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati, in: Visva-Bharati (ed.), *Santiniketan 1901–1905*, Calcutta 1951, 13–16. On Tagore's pan-Asian cosmopolitanism see Partha Mitter, Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin in Calcutta. The Creation of a Regional Asian Avant-garde Art, in: Burcu Dogramaci, Mareike Hetschold, Laura Karp Lugo, Rachel Lee, and Helene Roth (eds.), *Arrival Cities. Migrating Artists and New Metropolitan Topographies in the 20th Century*, Leuven 2020, 147–157.

18
Cited in Mason, Interwoven in the Pattern of Time, 160.

19
R. Siva Kumar, Benodebehari Mukherjee. Life, Context, Work, in: *Benodebehari Mukherjee (1904–1980), Centenary Retrospective* (exh. cat. New Delhi, National Gallery of Modern Art), ed. by Gulammohammed Sheikh and R. Siva Kumar, New Delhi 2007, 64–133, here 74.

20
Samir Sengupta (ed.), *Rabindrasutrey Bideshira* [*Foreigners in Relation to Rabindranath*], Kolkata 2013, 289–292.

21
Anon. [Stella Kramrisch], European Influence on Modern Indian Art, in: *Rupam* 11, July 1922, 109–110, here 109. On this anonymously published article see Christian Kravagna, Über das Geistige in der Kunstgeschichte. Stella Kramrisch in der transkulturellen Moderne, in: *Regards Croisés* 11, *Dossier Stella Kramrisch*, 2021, 69–81. See also Stella Kramrisch,

[Fig. 2]
Rabindranath Tagore, *Untitled (Head of a Woman)*, ca. 1934–1940, 39.1 × 23.3 cm. Gift of Stella Kramrisch, 1966, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

advocacy for aesthetic autonomy by way of formal experimentation would have a profound impact on a generation of modern Indian artists.[22] Although her teaching and art criticism was still modeled on Western educational schemes, Kramrisch decisively shifted the emphasis from naturalistic representation to the "expressive" qualities of painting, thereby offering – or imposing – a distinctly modernist perspective.

Kramrisch's intellectual production was embedded within a dense web of contacts and discursive negotiations that placed her at the heart of modern artistic and intellectual circles like the Indian Society of Oriental Art, founded by Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore in 1907 [Fig. 3]. The society helped realize exhibitions such as the 1922 *Exhibition of Continental Paintings and Graphic Arts*, in which Kramrisch played an instigating role.[23] This comparative exhibition – which displayed works on paper by modern European artists, most notably from the Bauhaus in Dessau, under the same roof as work by the Bengal School – was neither a simple case of "artistic transmission" from West to East, nor "a straightforward cultural dialogue with the other", as Sria Chatterjee has observed.[24] On the contrary, the exhibition came to be seen as a proving ground for multiple modernities in which transcultural sensibilities were forged from the clash of cosmopolitan universalism and nationalist particularism.

Kramrisch's involvement in the so-called *Bauhaus in Calcutta* exhibition marked a defining phase of her transcultural career. For rather than ascribing any kind of priority to the Western avant-garde, she instead emphasized what European modernism owed to the arts of Asia.[25] Debating modern Indian art with the sociologist Benoy Kumar Sarkar in the pages of *Rupam* (the journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art), Kramrisch reiterated the standpoint of nationalist self-understanding:

> To know her own necessity of significant form should be the first endeavor of artistic young India. Then there will be no danger or merit in accepting or rejecting French space-con-

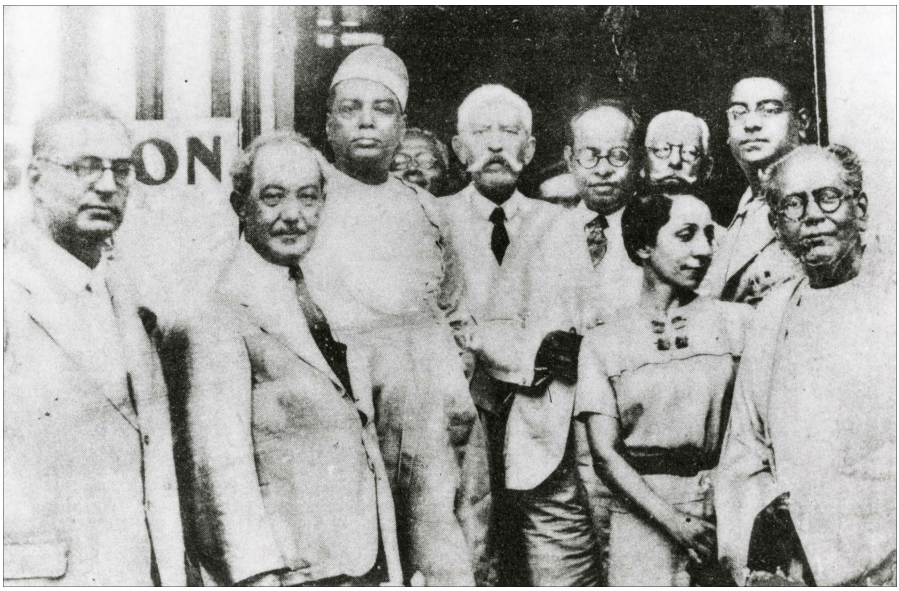
The Contact of Indian Art with the Art of Other Civilisations, in: *Calcutta Review*, 3rd series, 6, 1923, 514–530.

22
Ramkinkar Baij. A Retrospective, 1906–1980 (exh. cat. New Delhi, National Gallery of Modern Art), ed. by R. Siva Kumar, New Delhi 2012, 118.

23
Manjapra, Stella Kramrisch and the Bauhaus in Calcutta, 34–39; Bittner and Rhomberg, The Bauhaus in Calcutta.

24
Sria Chatterjee, Writing a Transcultural Modern. Calcutta, 1922, in: Bittner and Rhomberg, The Bauhaus in Calcutta, 101–107, here 101.

25
See Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement. German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire*, Cambridge, MA 2014, 249. It is indicative of her commitment to Indian modernism that Kramrisch was among the first critics to discuss the work of Gaganendranath Tagore: see Stella Kramrisch, An Indian Cubist, in: *Rupam* 11, 1922, 107–109.



[Fig. 3]
Unknown photographer, members of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, including Stella Kramrisch, ca. 1933. Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

> ception, Russian colorism and Chinese line and the like, for imitation is impossible where personality is at work.[26]

The very same aesthetic and political cause of autonomy that inspired Indian modern art also shaped Kramrisch's historiography of India's ancient sacred art, founded on the construct of a timeless essence of Hindu and Buddhist art. Conversely, she also situated Indian modernist painting within a continuous tradition of craft, virtuosity, and a shared anti-naturalistic visual language – an approach that built on the ideas of figures like Havell, Coomaraswamy, John Ruskin, and the Tagores.

Just a year after joining Visva-Bharati's art school, Stella Kramrisch left to become a lecturer at Calcutta University. From the early 1920s until 1950, she would spend nearly three decades there pursuing her lifelong interest in Indian temple sculpture and architecture, both in museums and in the field.[27] In addition, Kramrisch avidly collected ancient, folk and modern artworks, gaining access to rare manuscripts and sculptures despite the modest means available to her.[28] Her dedication to temple research culminated in her two-volume magnum opus *The Hindu Temple* (1946), which interpreted the symbolic meaning of Hindu temples in relation to their sites, proportions, and materials. Unlike earlier studies that focused on historical or regional variations, Kramrisch's book on the Hindu temple aimed to uncover how these temples embodied divine presence through adherence to a continuous symbolic tradition spanning thousands of years.[29] As she explained in later writings, the temple "is the house of the divine presence and is its very body".[30] Although not anthropomorphized as in sculptures or paintings, divinity was described as being manifested already in the temple's architectural features, such as the buttresses on its outer walls. Her

26
Stella Kramrisch, The Aesthetics of Young India. A Rejoinder, in: *Rupam* 10, 1922, 66–67, here 67.

27
Her research during this period led to milestone publications like *Indian Sculpture*, Calcutta 1933; *A Survey of Painting in the Deccan*, London 1937. Although her exact travel routes remain unclear, it is well-established that she traveled extensively. Stoler Miller, Stella Kramrisch, 10, 14–15; Sengupta, Rabindrasutrey Bideshira, 292; Chhotelal Bharany, Recollections, in: *A Passionate Eye. Textiles, Paintings and Sculptures from the Bharany Collections* (exh. cat. New Delhi, National Museum), ed. by Giles Tillotson, Mumbai 2014, 38–83, here 50.

28
Letter from Stella Kramrisch to Fritz Saxl, December 28, 1937, Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch; Bharany, Recollections, 50.

29
Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, with photographs by Raymond Burnier, 2 vols., Calcutta 1946, here vol. 1, 6.

30
Stella Kramrisch, Wall and Image in Indian Art, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 102/1, February 17, 1958, 7–13, here 7.

pioneering research on temple walls laid the foundation for future scholarship, notably pursued by Michael Meister.[31]

Female scholars were an anomaly in the colonial order, but Kramrisch stood apart from her contemporaries in other ways as well.[32] She was the only major figure in Indian art history with a PhD in the discipline, a qualification that made her especially attractive to Calcutta University, whose Vice-Chancellor Asutosh Mookerjee preferred scholars with German, rather than British, education.[33] As an Austrian and a white woman living in colonial India, she was a European distanced from the colonial establishment.[34] Independent and self-sufficient, she lived alone – first single, then married, but always leading a solitary lifestyle.[35]

II. Ancient, Folk, and Modern

The fields of world and 'Oriental' art history were marked by tensions between universalism and particularism, often mapping onto imperial and anti-imperial positions. Kramrisch's focus on what she saw as the distinctly 'Indian' put her in the latter camp, rejecting the imperial tendency to generalize Asia or the 'Orient' under a single umbrella. "Can Western historical methods be applied to Indian history?", she asked in 1933. "Do not the Indian facts demand an order and approaches which fit the facts? Are they to be passed through foreign meshes and measured according to foreign standards. [...] The Indian possibility carries a measure and destiny of its own."[36] Rather than adopting overtly nationalist rhetoric, Kramrisch sublimated the pursuit of political and cultural autonomy into a focus on spirituality and the sacred. As Christopher Wood notes, she was part of a European Indophilic tradition (situated somewhere between idealism and esotericism), which believed that the true

31
See for example: Michael W. Meister, Fragments from a Divine Cosmology. Unfolding Forms on India's Temple Walls, in: *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers. Temple Sculpture from North India A.D. 700–1200* (exh. cat. New York, Asia Society Galleries), ed. by Vishakha N. Desai and Darielle Mason, New York/Ahmedabad 1993, 94–115.

32
In the context of the British Raj, the only white women who interacted with Indian men were usually either missionary wives or sex workers. See Indira Sen, Between Power and 'Purdah'. The White Woman in British India, 1858–1900, in: *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 34/3, 1997, 355–376, here 362–368.

33
Ananda K. Coomaraswamy was a geologist by training; Vincent Smith, Alexander Cunningham, and T. A. Gopinatha Rao were archaeologists; Ernest B. Havell an arts administrator; Abanindranath Tagore and Alice Boner artists. See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art. Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920*, Cambridge 1992; Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism. India's Artists and the Avant-Garde 1922–1947*, London 2007.

34
Guha-Thakurta, The Making of a New 'Indian' Art, 8, 148.

35
Bharany, Recollections, 51.

36
Kramrisch, The Study of Indian Art, 62.

purpose of art lay in connecting with the suprasensory realm.[37] Hence, although she was not directly involved in India's independence movement, her search for an Indian 'essence' resonated profoundly with the goals of Indian nationalism – as did her exclusion of South Asia's Islamic heritage, such as Mughal miniature painting, from this 'Indian essence'.[38]

Alongside her research on ancient temple sculpture, Kramrisch assiduously collected and researched works conventionally designated as folk art. In her article *Timing the Timeless. Stella Kramrisch's "Unknown India"*, Darielle Mason reconstructs Kramrisch's lifelong interest in folk art as a scholar, collector, and curator. Her dedication to Indian folk art culminated in the exhibition *Unknown India*, which opened in 1968 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Mason's detailed reconstruction of the exhibition reveals how Kramrisch used the categories of ritual and tribal art to convey an unbroken continuity of tradition. These ambivalent concepts enlarged art history's scope to include domains such as textiles and terracottas, highlighting art practices traditionally preserved by women. Kramrisch's collaboration with Indian anthropologist Haku Shah, who accompanied the traveling exhibition to San Francisco and St. Louis, further enriched its innovative and genre-defying approach.[39]

At the same time, *Unknown India* deliberately elided conflicts of caste, class, religious and regional differences, succumbing to what Kavita Singh has called the "allure of primordialism".[40] The exhibition idealized lower-caste groups and indigenous "tribals" as bearers of a timeless purity and unique connection to India's origins – the 'Indian essence'. As Kris Manjapra has noted, Kramrisch had long maintained that the best Indian artists "were those who were most in touch with the primitive and unself-conscious Indian traditions".[41] Already in 1923, she argued that the "simple craftsman, the child, the woman – all who are in fact not fully awake to the new age – possess still the synthetic vision, so distinctive of Indian art. Indian children, and Indian women too, are spontaneous in their

37
Christopher S. Wood, *A History of Art History*, Princeton, NJ/Oxford 2019, 350–351.

38
This omission is evident in her writings and her lack of interest in a second photographic exhibition on Islamic art in collaboration with the Warburg Institute; see Jo Ziebritzki, Matthew Vollgraff and Sarah Victoria Turner, Archival Dossier. The Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art at the Warburg, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 5/4, 2024, Fig. 13.

39
For an informed critique of the exhibition program of *Unknown India* see Katherine Hacker: Displaying a Tribal Imaginary. Known and Unknown India, in: *Museum Anthropology* 23/3, 2000, 5–25.

40
Singh, Colonial, International, Global, 7.

41
Manjapra, Age of Entanglement, 250.

artistic expressions."[42] Far from the specular distancing typical of European anthropology at the time, however, Kramrisch's primitivism was instead inflected by the modern nationalist imagination of a Hindu past, as championed by intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore and Gurusaday Dutt.[43]

In her discussions of modern, folk and ancient Indian art, Kramrisch mobilized a variety of concepts to thematize and theorize the relation between artists, their environment, divine powers, and the work of art. Her meticulous search for precise terminology led her to introduce influential concepts, such as the originally Christian term "transubstantiation" (in *Indian Sculpture*, 1933), "time-bound" vs. "changeless" (in *Indian Terracottas*, 1939), and the interaction between the "great tradition" and the "little tradition" (in *Unknown India*, 1968). These terms significantly enriched the vocabulary for discussing Indian sculpture and painting, despite critics' and colleagues' occasional protests against Kramrisch's evocative and sometimes poetic language.[44]

Straddling both the aesthetic and religious registers, the concept of 'abstraction' provided a particularly productive medium for Kramrisch's mediation between East and West, ancient and avant-garde. As Sylvia Houghteling's essay *Another Perspective as Symbolic Form. Stella Kramrisch's Writings on the Ajanta Paintings* explores, Kramrisch's interpretations of the murals at the Ajanta caves drew as much upon Buddhist theology as they did on the modern aesthetics of cubism (more indebted to Gaganendranath Tagore in this case than to European Cubists). Her writings on Ajanta particularly emphasize the spiritual significance of the paintings' non-figural components. Thus, the cuboid rock formations in the murals' background were read not as mimetic representations of a real mountain but rather as dynamic forces that project forward and, through the technique of reverse perspective, immerse the viewer in the painting's nonlinear narrative.

Houghteling illuminates how Kramrisch's highly original reading of the murals' reverse perspective enacted a subtle critique of Erwin Panofsky's prominent 1925 account of the rise of linear perspective and the modern 'worldview'. Whereas Panofsky saw art as progressing towards a mathematically consistent mode of objective representation, Kramrisch found in Ajanta a more dynamic and

42
Stella Kramrisch, The Present Movement of Art, East and West, in: *Visva Bharati Quarterly* 1, October 1923, 221–225, here 225, as cited in Manjapra, Age of Entanglement, 250.

43
On Dutt's role in ennobling and romanticizing Indian folk art traditions see Katherine Hacker, In Search of 'Living Traditions'. Gurusaday Dutt, Zainul Abedin, and the Institutional Life of Kanthas, in: Mason, Kantha, 59–79. On primitivism as a transcultural concept in art history, see Juneja, Can Art History Be Made Global?, 181–200.

44
Ratan Parimoo, Stella Kramrisch. She Sculpts with Words, in: id., *Essays in New Art History*, New Delhi 2000, 377–380, here 378. Compare the critical reviews of her books enumerated in Rajesh Singh, The Writings of Stella Kramrisch with Reference to Indian Art History. The Issues of Object, Method and Language within the Grand Narrative, in: *East and West* 53/1–4, 2003, 127–148.

interactive form of perspectival vision, in which the viewer becomes at once the stage and the spectator. Her emphasis on the suspension of linear time and her modernist affirmation of visual fragmentation and rupture dramatically contrasted with Panofsky's notion of linear perspective as a medium of rational mastery over self and world and the attendant "objectification of the subjective".[45] Instead, the "radical energy" and "shattering dynamism" of the proto-cubist rocks at Ajanta suggested "another perspective as symbolic form", one that was based upon inner experience rather than scientific detachment. In this way, as Houghteling shows, Kramrisch's complex synthesis of avant-garde abstraction and Buddhist devotional cosmologies generated insights that continue to resonate in contemporary studies of the Ajanta murals.

Another key concept in Kramrisch's transcultural vocabulary is that of 'naturalism'. In a masterful reading of Kramrisch's translation of the earliest printed philosophical treatise on Indian painting, the *Citrasūtra*, Parul Dave Mukherji shows in her article *Stella Kramrisch, Sanskrit Texts and the Transcultural Project of Indic 'Naturalism'* how Kramrisch in the late 1920s struggled to navigate and translate Sanskrit concepts for 'naturalism'. Drawing on her own critical translation of the *Citrasūtra* and building on a more comprehensive body of original manuscripts than Kramrisch had at her disposal, Mukherji explores how Kramrisch creatively filled in the gaps in a partly corrupted source text. In so doing, this critical reading of Kramrisch's revealing mistranslations reconstructs how her "cultural unconscious" shaped her own reception of the text, and ultimately conditioned her understanding of Indian naturalism in terms of the Sanskrit concept of *dṛṣṭa* (roughly translated, "the visible"). Naturalism was, at the time, a politically loaded category: Western art historians had traditionally cited 'non-Western' cultures' putative lack of realistic naturalism as evidence of their artistic, and thus cultural, inferiority. Kramrisch's resignification of naturalism based on the *Citrasūtra* bridged European discourses with a close reading of ancient Sanskrit texts, producing historical evidence for Indian painting's unique standards – essentially different from European art-making, yet equal in technical prowess and philosophical refinement.

III. Photography, Collecting, and Exhibiting

Kramrisch translated between cultures not only through concepts, but also through exhibitions and visual media, primarily photography. As Frederick Bohrer and others have argued, photography's ability to scale artistic forms and facilitate comparisons between geographically dispersed objects was crucial to the development of

[45] Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, transl. Christopher S. Wood, New York 1997, 66.

art history as a discipline.[46] The medium was likewise central to Kramrisch's transcultural practice as both a scholar and a curator. Her use of black-and-white photographs in books and exhibitions in particular aligned with her anti-positivistic emphasis on the immediate subjective experience of Indian art and architecture.[47] By recreating intimate, in-situ encounters, photographs allowed her to convey the perceptual experience of viewing original Indian sculptures or temples to European, and later American, audiences. Even before her first visit to the Indian subcontinent, she had familiarized herself with Buddhist temple sculpture through photographs. At Strzygowski's institute in Vienna, the young art historian had access to Europe's most extensive university collection of books, lantern slides, and photographs of Asian art [Fig. 1]. Her 1919 dissertation on early Buddhist temples in India was exclusively based on visual documentation, including Alexander Cunningham's photographs of Mahabodhi and Bharhut, as well as Victor Goloubew's photos of the Sanchi stupa complex taken in 1910–1911.[48] Throughout the 1920s, she continued to rely on Goloubew's images where she was unable to study the temples in situ [Fig. 4].

In 1940, a year after Britain entered World War II and seven years before Indian independence, Kramrisch organized the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* at the Warburg Institute, a research library run by German-Jewish émigrés who had fled Nazi Germany. The *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* was composed primarily of around 250 black-and-white photographs, arranged to form a visual essay on thirty-five panels, a format that followed the Warburg Institute's 'house style' for photographic exhibitions [Fig. 5].[49] Kramrisch sourced the images from both the Warburg's photographic archive and her private collection, which also included the expressive images captured by the camera of the Swiss photographer Raymond Burnier. Marked by sharp contrasts and vivid, close-up details, Burnier's photos brought the sculptures to

46
Frederick Bohrer, Photographic Perspectives. Photography and the Institutional Formation of Art History, in: Elizabeth Mansfield (ed.), *Art History and Its Institutions*, New York 2002, 246–259.

47
While black-and-white photography was generally viewed as objective and distanced, Kramrisch valued it for its capacity to produce more expressive, dramatic images. See Monika Wagner, Kunstgeschichte in Schwarz-Weiß. Visuelle Argumente bei Panofsky und Warburg, in: ead. and Helmuth Lethen (eds.), *Schwarz-Weiß als Evidenz*, Frankfurt/New York 2015, 126–144.

48
Kramrisch, Untersuchungen zum Wesen der frühbuddhistischen Bildnerei Indiens. Goloubew's photographs of Sanchi are now housed at the École française d'Extrême-Orient in Paris.

49
Under Fritz Saxl's directorship, the Warburg Institute developed a series of successful photographic exhibitions throughout the 1930s. Of these, the Indian art exhibition was the most popular, touring multiple cultural venues in Britain. See Joanne W. Anderson, Mick Finch, and Johannes von Müller (eds.), *Image Journeys. The Warburg Institute and a British Art History*, Passau 2019.

[Fig. 4]
Victor Goloubew, Northern gate of the Great Stupa in Sanchi (ca. 1910–1911), in: Stella Kramrisch, Die indische Kunst, in: Curt Glaser (ed.), *Die aussereuropäische Kunst* (Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte 6), Leipzig 1929, 231–368, here fig. 256.

[Fig. 5]
Unknown photographer, exhibition shot of the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art*, Warburg Institute 1940. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Libraries and Archives.

life and helped to close the geographical and cultural gap between Indian artworks and Western viewers [Fig. 6].[50]

This special issue is supplemented by an *Archival Dossier* on the exhibition, compiled by the editors in collaboration with Sarah Victoria Turner. The dossier reconstructs the scholarly aims of the 1940 photographic exhibition as well as its public impact, showing how Kramrisch combined the cultural power of photography with her deep commitment to exploring Indian spirituality. The exhibition marked a noteworthy convergence of conflicting imperial and nationalist agendas, holding undoubtable appeal for British colonial circles while simultaneously pushing for an authentic understanding of 'Indianness'. In his review of the exhibition, Herbert Read poignantly decried Britain's ignorance towards the cultural heritage of its colonies, adding that the "neglect of our cultural values which is characteristic of our whole colonial administration has been mitigated by the enterprise of private bodies" such as those responsible for the exhibition: the India Society, the Warburg Institute, and Kramrisch herself.[51] The *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* drew large crowds and received enthusiastic critical attention during its time in London, after which it went on to tour museums and schools across the UK for several years. Its success prompted Fritz Saxl, director of the Warburg Institute, to declare that Kramrisch had done "more for Indian art in this country than anybody has done for a long time".[52] Francis Younghusband of the India Society, for his part, even praised the exhibition as a contribution to the war effort.[53]

However, not all responses were positive. The Punjabi author and journalist Iqbal Singh criticized the exhibition for what he saw as a lack of historical precision. He argued that Kramrisch's 'mystical' approach and reliance on photographs wrenched Indian art from its historical and cultural context, focusing excessively on abstract religious and metaphysical themes at the expense of aesthetic and technical details.[54] Singh's critique touched on methodological questions that Kramrisch herself had considered; however, her implementation of evocative photography to invite contemplation was rather part of what Manjapra has described as Kramrisch's

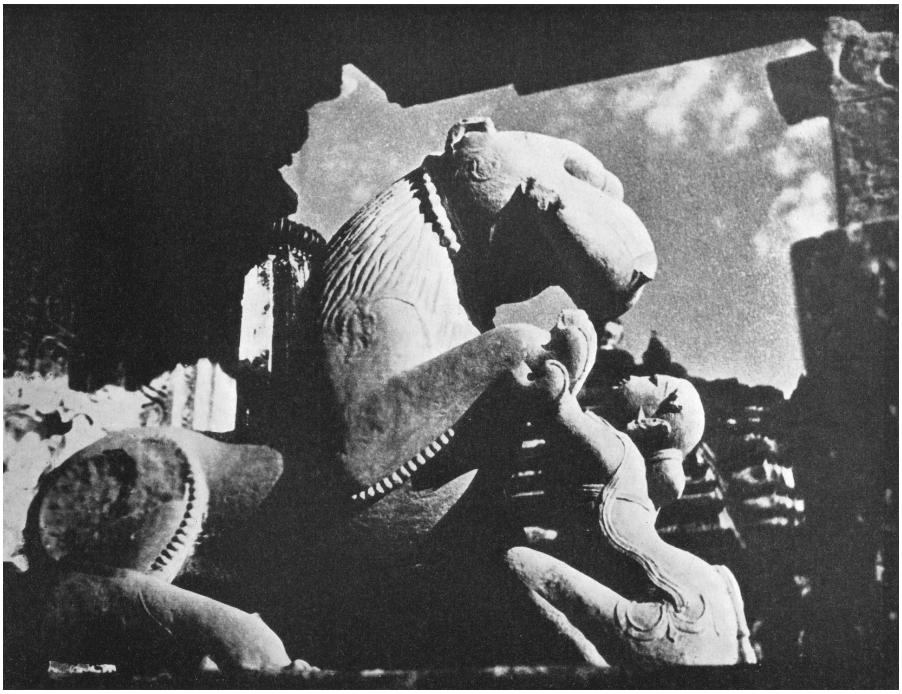
50
Sarah Victoria Turner, Alive and Significant, in: *Wasafiri* 27/2, 2012, 40–51, here 45.

51
Herbert Read, Indian Art, in: *The Listener* 24/619, November 21, 1940, 729–730. It is unknown whether the India Society also contributed to the 1940 exhibition from its own image collection, since only fragments of the society's archive have survived.

52
Letter from Fritz Saxl to Stella Kramrisch, March 14, 1944, Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch. On Kramrisch's working relationship with Saxl and the Warburg Institute, see Deborah Sutton, *Ruling Devotion. The Hindu Temple in the British Imperial Imagination*, Albany, NY 2024, 210–221.

53
Turner, Alive and Significant, 50.

54
Ibid., 46.



[Fig. 6]
Raymond Burnier, *Sardula at the entrance to the temple, Khajuraho, c. A.D. 1000*, from the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* at the Warburg Institute (1940), in: *Indian Arts and Letters* 14/2, 1940, Plate 3.

"expressionist wish to retrieve and reexperience a cultural world", an impulse distinctly opposed to more conventional historicist scholarship on Indian art (including some of her own German-language publications).[55] Her use of photography was rather part of a deliberate effort to merge historical analysis with immediate subjective experience and spiritual reflection.[56]

After the 1940 exhibition, and even after the proliferation of color photography, Kramrisch continued to use evocative black-and-white photographs in exhibitions. In *Unknown India* from 1968, for instance, she employed photography expressly to evoke atmosphere and provide visual context [Fig. 7]. In contrast to the photographic exhibition of 1940, *Unknown India* mainly showed original artworks. However, as Mason notes in her article in this issue, several large monochrome photographs by the American artist Harry Holtzman were mounted on the walls behind exhibits. Acting as both backdrops for the artworks and significant visual elements in their own right, these photographs brought additional cultural and environmental references into the exhibition halls in Philadelphia. The photographs by Holtzman and Burnier, selected by Kramrisch for her exhibitions and publications, were intended to establish a visual language that avoided replicating Orientalist tropes by alluding to expressionist art and white-cube aesthetics.[57]

Beyond photography, Kramrisch's relationship to Indian art was perhaps most closely connected to her practice as a collector, as Brinda Kumar illustrates in her article *From Field to Museum. Placing Kramrisch and Her Collection in Postwar United States* in this issue. When the Austrian art historian first arrived in Santiniketan, she was captivated by ancient temples, folk art, and modern Indian painting, and began collecting almost immediately. Her first acquisition – a landscape painting by a student of Kala Bhavana – came only after a delicate negotiation, requiring her to spend her last rupees.[58] Unlike other prominent collectors such as the Tagores or Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch did not have access to family wealth. Instead, she carefully budgeted her modest salary, often paying for her acquisitions in installments.[59] Despite these financial constraints, her collection flourished, driven by her passion and near-obsessive dedication.

55
Manjapra, Age of Entanglement, 256. For a premier example of her historicist scholarship see Stella Kramrisch, Die indische Kunst, in: Curt Glaser (ed.), *Die aussereuropäische Kunst* (Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte 6), Leipzig 1929, 231–368.

56
Kramrisch, The Study of Indian Art, 60–65.

57
For an analysis of key characteristics of Orientalist imagery see Mathur, India by Design.

58
Martin Kämpchen, *Rabindranath Tagore and Germany. A Documentation*, Calcutta 1991, 101.

59
Bharany, Recollections, 50.

[Fig. 7]
Unknown photographer, exhibition shot of *Unknown India*, 1968, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Libraries and Archives.

Though Kramrisch collected both folk art and modern painting, she was most dedicated to sculptural fragments from ancient temples. Kumar details how Kramrisch amassed a remarkable collection of these stone sculptures and fragments at a time when most collectors were more interested in paintings. Although she was a tremendously private collector who preferred to remain anonymous, her collection of works of Indian sculpture quickly gained recognition among experts. By 1950, her assemblage of Indian sculptures had become internationally sought after, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art's interest in her collection eventually facilitated her move to the United States. This interest stemmed not only from the appraisal of a priceless collection, but also from US foreign policy objectives in the Cold War. Kumar's article deftly traces the transnational networks and negotiations that led not only to the relocation of Kramrisch's collection but also to her own eventual settlement in Philadelphia, where she would spend four decades teaching and curating.

Kramrisch's move to Philadelphia marked both the final stage in her personal journey and a turning point for the discipline of art history. The Cold War era brought strategic academic shifts in the United States, with research institutions embracing area studies as a dominant framework for government-funded studies of key global regions. Her private collection enhanced the prestige of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's South Asian collection, while also solidifying the University of Pennsylvania as a hub for South Asian studies. In the United States, Kramrisch thus oversaw the last in a series of attempts to make art history global: from Strzygowski's institute in postwar Vienna, Kala Bhavana and Calcutta University under the British rule, to the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes in wartime London. Each of these settings contributed to the development of a transcultural perspective in art history, but it was her tenure in Philadelphia that aligns most closely with the contemporary trajectory of the field.

As art history became increasingly shaped by North American priorities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the limitations of the area studies model became more apparent. While it emphasized connections between regions rather than focusing on individual nations, the area studies framework struggled to address broader global trends and transcultural dynamics that drive artistic creation and reception worldwide. Kramrisch's life and legacy tie together these diverse strands of art history's development. As the articles in this issue demonstrate, a transcultural approach to the historiography of art can provide powerful insights into the global interactions among states, institutions, individuals, media, and collections – forces that continue to shape the artworld today, just as they did a century ago.

Jo Ziebritzki is a postdoctoral researcher and teacher of art history at the Ruhr-University Bochum. Her areas of expertise include the history of art history, modern art in Europe and South Asia, gender studies and transcultural studies. Ziebritzki has published articles on these themes with journals such as *Grey Room*, *The Journal of Art Historiography*, *Kritische Berichte* and *Kunst und Politik*. Her monograph Stella *Kramrisch. Kunsthistorikerin zwischen Europa und Indien. Ein Beitrag zur Depatriarchalisierung der Kunstgeschichte* (Büchner, 2021) received the Jutta-Held-Award (2021).

Matthew Vollgraff is a historian of science, media, and visual culture with a focus on modern Germany and its global entanglements. He is Senior Research Fellow in the History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is a member of the NOMIS project 'Depictured Worlds: The Perceptual Power of Pictures'. His first book, *The Imperial Childhood of World Art*, is forthcoming with the Bard Graduate Center.

ARTICLES
BEITRÄGE

TIMING THE TIMELESS

STELLA KRAMRISCH'S "UNKNOWN INDIA"

Darielle Mason

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 813–861

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.107515

ABSTRACT

This article reconstructs the physical and intellectual content of Stella Kramrisch's 1968 exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village*, organized for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. By probing Kramrisch's curatorial practice from conception to realization, it opens questions about her impact on canons and categories we continue to utilize today. In *Unknown India*, Kramrisch synthesized a vision rooted in the global Arts and Crafts movement and in India's movement for cultural independence. But here she explicitly struggled with taxonomy, moving South Asia to the forefront of global dialogues on terms including folk, tribal, tradition, authenticity, craft, design, and even art. As contemporary scholars debate the dynamism of authenticity, the intersectionality of the spiritual and practical, and the fluidity of hierarchies, *Unknown India* remains a touchstone.

KEYWORDS

Indian art; Folk art; Tribal art; Indigenous art; Stella Kramrisch; Haku Shah; Curatorial studies; History of museum exhibitions; Authenticity; Tradition.

In a career that spanned three-quarters of a century, Stella Kramrisch (1896–1993) engaged with a vast range of South Asia's visual arts as an author, curator, teacher, collector, and advisor. Her work and life broke barriers in ways yet to be fully assessed. Her vision continues to resonate across her native Europe, the United States, and the Indian subcontinent.[1] Kramrisch's name has long been inseparable from the historiography of South Asian art, but new understandings of the roles of museum collection, exhibition, and interpretive strategies in hierarchy and canon formation have placed her at the center of global discussions.[2]

During her final four decades, Kramrisch served as Indian curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, among the largest and oldest "encyclopedic" fine arts museums in the United States.[3] In 1968 she had her first opportunity to mount a major exhibition there.[4] In practical terms, *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* was a coup. Kramrisch [Fig. 1], with the assistance of co-curator Haku Shah (1934–2019) [Fig. 2] and high-level supporters in India, managed to bring together over five hundred objects borrowed from public and private collections in India, the United States, and Europe.[5] The objects were made in a range of materials, mainly clay, wood, cloth, metal, and paper. All originated in South Asia, primarily in what is today the nation of India but also in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), Pakistan, and Afghanistan. At the time (and, arguably, still today) the majority of these pieces would not have been termed fine art but would have been classified, depending on period and context, as folk art or craft, or as ethnographic or archaeological

1
Barbara Stoler Miller (ed.), *Exploring India's Sacred Art. Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia 1983, 3–33; Michael W. Meister, Kramrisch, Stella, in: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2005 (July 16, 2024); Darielle Mason, Interwoven in the Pattern of Time. Stella Kramrisch and Kanthas, in: ead. (ed.), *Kantha. The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection and the Stella Kramrisch Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia 2009, 158–168; ead., La ley de la montaña. Vida y legado de Stella Kramrisch, in: Eva Fernández del Campo and Sergio Román Aliste (eds.), *Las mujeres que inventaron el arte indio*, Madrid 2021, 300–322. At the Philadelphia Museum of Art, my thanks to Kristen A. Regina, Leslie Essoglou, and Susan Anderson for their help with archival materials and Katie Brennan for her editorial acumen. Eternal gratitude to Stella Kramrisch, Michael W. Meister, and Hakubhai and Viluben Shah for sharing their memories and knowledge over many years.

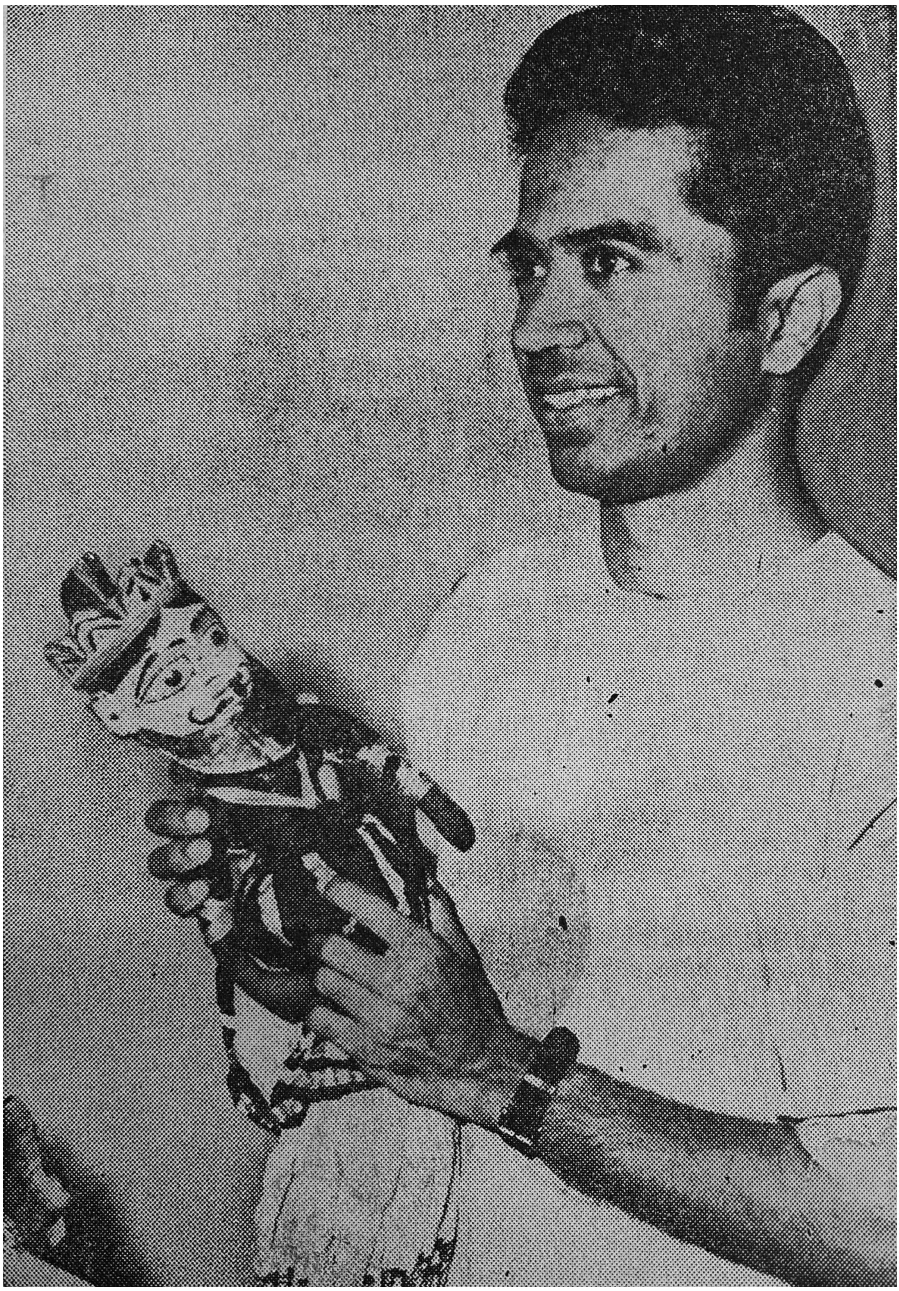
2
Parul Dave Mukherji, Whither Art History in a Globalizing World, in: *The Art Bulletin* 96/2, 2014, 151–155.

3
Kramrisch arrived at the University of Pennsylvania in 1950, following her collection of temple sculpture, which was displayed at the museum and then purchased in 1956. She became curator of Indian art in 1954 and emeritus in 1972 with lifetime tenure as the Indian Art department head.

4
Prior to 1968, her only US show had been Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of Nepal* (exh. cat. New York, Asia House Gallery), New York 1964. This was the first US exhibition of Nepalese art and led Philadelphia to open the first US gallery of Nepalese and Tibetan art.

5
Stella Kramrisch, *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribes and Village* (exh. cat. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art), Philadelphia 1968.

[Fig. 1]
Stella Kramrisch (far right) accompanied by photographer Harry Holzman and museum president Bernice Wintersteen at the opening of the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, SKP Box 88, folder 5, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.



[Fig. 2]
Haku Shah unpacks a puppet from Rajasthan for the installation of *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (July 15–August 20, 1968), St. Louis, MO, St. Louis Art Museum, in: *Globe-Democrat*, Wednesday, July 17, 1968, C-1, photographer: Jim Carrington, EXH, Box 42, folder 6, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

specimens. Prior to 1968, few of these types of objects had been exhibited – or even considered for exhibition – in Euro-American museums that self-identified as fine arts institutions, and fewer still had been permitted entry to these institutions' sacrosanct special exhibition galleries.

The exhibition traveled from Philadelphia to San Francisco to St. Louis. With its accompanying catalogue, it brought India's "folk arts" a moment of unprecedented respect and laid the foundation for a canon that persists to the present. While the works exhibited were new to US audiences, *Unknown India* was no epiphany for Kramrisch. Instead, she synthesized concepts honed decades earlier and engaged in ongoing debates over contested terms, including "folk", "tribal", "craft", "design", and "art". The show opened in Philadelphia when Kramrisch was seventy-two years old. Behind her was half a century of experience, including thirty years living, teaching, traveling, and collecting in India and nearly twenty years interfacing with student and museum audiences in the United States. Kramrisch's aggregate work on South Asia's folk art may prove to be among the most complex of her many legacies.[6] Her approach to the subject shared a method with her work on other aspects of South Asia's art and architecture, ranging from intensive fieldwork and visual analysis to consideration of symbolism and devotional content, to an ideology buttressed by ancient texts, often anachronistic to her material. The types and individual objects she chose to study, collect, and exhibit emphasized what she considered the unbroken continuity of the Indic past. Yet at the same time, she maintained that individual objects possessed varying levels of aesthetic power, and that the aesthetic should be considered alongside the object's meaning in determining its importance and desirability.[7]

I had the good fortune to be Kramrisch's successor at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and have interacted with the collection she created for over three decades.[8] Many of the pieces exhibited in *Unknown India*, including some she commissioned for it, comprise a significant part of the permanent collection. In re-presenting this material for museum visitors, I have faced many of the same issues as Kramrisch but have also had to grapple with her formidable legacy. In this paper, I discuss *Unknown India* from Kramrisch's intellectual background (Roots) through the realization of the exhibition

6
She may be best known for *The Hindu Temple* (2 vols.), Calcutta 1946; and *Manifestations of Shiva* (exh. cat. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art), Philadelphia 1981.

7
See Clair Huff, Review of Unknown India, in: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 11, 1968. Huff describes Kramrisch as "a tiny lady with silver hair and posture that makes you feel she is being presented at court" and quotes her as saying that her favorite period was from the fourth to eighth century when there was "much reticence. The whole awareness of life is there, but it was not a period of display – rather of collectiveness and power."

8
I joined the museum as the first Stella Kramrisch Curator of Indian and Himalayan Art in late 1996 but knew and worked for Kramrisch while a student at the University of Pennsylvania during the mid-1980s.

(Experience). My primary aim is to delve into the conceptualization of *Unknown India* and the experience she created for visitors by reconstructing the physical organization of the objects within the space. In this way, I seek to reveal Kramrisch's curatorial practice and open questions about her influence on the canon and categories we use today.

I. Roots

Kramrisch's official work on *Unknown India* began in 1965, the same year she met Haku Shah. But the roots of her conceptual framework reach back to the beginning of her career. Kramrisch's intellectual maturation in Vienna began with her involvement with the Theosophical Society and the new artistic generation that had arisen as the Vienna Secession. The local manifestations of the international Arts and Crafts movement were equally important as, for example, the city's museums of folk and applied arts (the Museum of Folk Life and Folk Art, which opened in 1895, and the MAK – Museum of Applied Arts, which opened in 1864, originally the Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde and the Österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie). At the University of Vienna, Kramrisch merged the conflicting methodologies of her two mentors, the archrival professors Max Dvořák (1874–1921) and Josef Strzygowski (1862–1941). Books have been written on the Vienna School, the art history program in which both men worked and from where Kramrisch received her doctorate in 1919, but Strzygowski was a key inspiration for her involvement in "folk art".[9] Born into an industrial family and trained as a weaver, he considered "folk craft" to be a legitimate focus of study and thought the unappreciated, "anonymous" craftsperson to be on par with "high" artists. Strzygowski became better known for his argument that works of art display unbroken lineages of racial, ethnic, and national "essence" or "purity", an ideology that later connected him with Nazism.[10] He also wrote virulent antisemitic texts, yet his mentorship and support of the Jewish Kramrisch offers nuance.[11]

Kramrisch would later hold to some strands of Strzygowski's ideologies, including an appreciation for so-called folk and applied arts, the valorization of the anonymous craftsperson, and even the

[9] For the Vienna School and folk art, see Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History. Empire and the Politics of Scholarship, 1847–1918,* University Park, PA 2013. See also George J. Furlong, Strzygowski and the Origin of European Art, in: *Studies. An Irish Quarterly Review* 18/72, 1929, 664–667, here 664.

[10] Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art. Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art*, Lincoln, NE 2001, 33–73.

[11] Strzygowski's views on individual Jews, versus "the Jews", seem more empathetic. He mentored Kramrisch, whose lineage was Jewish, and in 1919 gave her his own invitation to a temporary lectureship in England. George Vasold, "Im Chaos wandeln". The Vienna School of Art History and the First World War, in: *Austrian Studies* 21, 2013, 163–181, here 180 (transl. Deborah Holmes).

idea of cultural continuity. But her interpretations metamorphosed. While lecturing in England in 1919–1920, she met Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and, in 1921, arrived at his experimental university, Visva-Bharati, at Santiniketan in rural Bengal.[12] There the painter Nandalal Bose (1882–1966), principal of Kala Bhavan (the newly founded art program), hired her to introduce budding artists to the latest trends in European modernism.

Rabindranath's interest and philosophy of education incorporated the folk and the tribal by bringing everyday Bengali rituals into university life. *Alpona* (women's ritual rice-powder floor painting), for example, was taught as part of the curriculum, reinvented, and documented by members of Tagore's circle.[13] His utopic rural vision extended to the local Santal tribal community, who were a favorite subject of Bose's paintings.[14] The university held adapted or invented local festivals as well, including the harvest celebration of Poush Mela that involved not only performance but also a sale of local crafts and arts such as *pata* (vertical painted narrative scrolls), *kantha* (embroidered quilts), *dokra* work (resin-thread-technique metalware), and mundane items like *lota* (water pots), along with the sale of works by Kala Bhavan students.[15]

Kramrisch's (likely somewhat mythologized) memory was that her first day at Santiniketan coincided precisely with Poush Mela.[16] She purchased a "folk" piece (a handmade wooden toy cart) but also desired a painting by a Kala Bhavan student, which she could not afford, so she asked Nandalal Bose for a loan. This story, along with her thesis on the early Buddhist site of Bharhut, conveys her enduring fascination with the full range of India's historical religious legacy, elite and non-elite, ancient to contemporary, as long as she could find in a work that all-important "Indic" thread.[17] The anecdote also exemplifies Kramrisch's insatiable passion for acquiring

12
Although Kramrisch recounted conflicting versions of her first meeting with Tagore and their interactions in England, it is likely that he did personally invite her to Santiniketan.

13
Abanindranath Tagore, transl. Andrée Karpelès and Tapanmohan Chatterji, *L'Alpona ou les décorations rituelles au Bengale*, Paris 1921.

14
Rhythms of India. The Art of Nandalal Bose (exh. cat. San Diego, San Diego Museum of Art), ed. by Sonya Rhie Mace and Pramod Chandra, 2008. The motif of the Santal was soon taken up by one of Bose's primary students, Ramkinkar Baij. *Santhal Family. Positions around an Indian Sculpture* (exh. cat. Antwerp, Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst), ed. by Anshuman Dasgupta, Monika Szewczyk, and Grant Watson, Antwerp 2008.

15
Lota are everyday objects used for cleaning the body, including after defecation. But the same shape and name applies to a ritual water vessel used, for example, during morning sun salutation (*Surya namaskar*).

16
Miller, Exploring India's Sacred Art, 10.

17
Kramrisch repeatedly says or implies "Hindu" or "Indic" when discussing this continuity, at times explicitly excluding "hybrid", meaning Hellenistic-Roman (Gandharan) and Indo-Persianate (Mughal in particular). With a few exceptions, she did not collect hybrid material for herself or for any institution.

things she found meaningful or beautiful, a passion central to her personality and biography.

The seeds for Kramrisch's deep appreciation of folk craft as art and glorification of the anonymous maker, two pillars of the transnational Arts and Crafts movement,[18] had been planted in Vienna. They sprouted in London as she roamed the galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), but bloomed under Santiniketan's intense sun. At Santiniketan, Kramrisch also strengthened her vision of the superiority of the spiritual over the material. Although embedded in academic debates across Europe, this view was grounded in the ideological strategy of Asia's cultural leaders, including the Tagores, Okakura Kakuzo, and Ananda Coomaraswamy, who used the idea to elevate "Eastern" cultural heritage above "Western". In the case of India, it also helped them create an art they believed would be appropriate for their postcolonial nation.[19] Although Kramrisch spoke often of aesthetics as her primary criterion for collecting one object as opposed to another, her actual choices show that her decisions were equally if not more often based on her belief that a work had spiritual power, links with an unbroken Indic past, and makers who worked for a transcendent goal.[20]

Kramrisch remained at Santiniketan for less than two years before moving to the University of Calcutta, where she could teach her own subject – Indian art. She was the first European and the first woman to teach at the school since its founding in 1857, and it was not an easy road.[21] Although Kramrisch was self-reliant and introverted by nature, she soon became an active participant in the life of the city's artistic and intellectual elite. In 1932 she was appointed co-editor with Abanindranath Tagore of the leading English-language periodical, the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*. Another now-well-documented achievement was her role as primary curator, with Johannes Itten, of the 1923 exchange exhibi-

18
Sria Chatterjee, Postindustrialism and the Long Arts and Crafts Movement. Between Britain, India, and the United States of America, in: *British Art Studies* 15, 2020 (October 28, 2024), and Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art. Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920*, Cambridge 1992, 52.

19
Partha Mitter, Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin in Calcutta. The Creation of a Regional Asian Avant-Garde Art, in: Burcu Dogramaci, Mareike Hetschold, Laura Karp Lugo, Rachel Lee, and Helene Roth (eds.), *Arrival Cities. Migrating Artists and New Metropolitan Topographies in the 20th Century*, Leuven 2020, 147–158.

20
Stella Kramrisch, Traditions of the Indian Craftsman, in: Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India. Structure and Change*, Philadelphia 1959 (repr. in Miller, Exploring India's Sacred Art, 59–66).

21
Her position as a full faculty member was not formalized until much later and her situation was always precarious and underpaid. To subsidize herself, she taught for several decades at the Courtauld Institute in London but was not offered a faculty position there.

tions of art between the Bengal School and the Bauhaus in Dessau, Germany.[22]

Particularly notable in relation to *Unknown India* is her collaboration in her early years in Calcutta (now Kolkata) with her former student Devaprasad Ghosh (1894–1985) to collect for and establish the university's Ashutosh Museum. The institution opened in 1937 with Ghosh as director. Its lower-level galleries brought together the standard material seen in India's colonial museums of the time: archaeological relics such as excavated terracottas and religious sculptures, especially those of the local Pala-Sena dynasties. But in the large room on the top floor, Ghosh and Kramrisch displayed a vast collection of Bengali folk material. *Kantha* and *pata* jostled with Kalighat paintings. Wooden butter molds and other tools, utilitarian metalwork, clay votives, and ritual ephemera filled shelves around the walls.[23]

Ghosh sent rurally based university students on collecting missions to their hometowns, which included present-day Bangladesh. There they gathered items, often from their families.[24] The *kantha* in the Ashutosh collection so closely resemble many from Kramrisch's personal collection, now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, that it would seem they must have been made by the same families or even artists, indicating that Kramrisch acquired at least some of the overflow from the Ashutosh's endeavor.

She was also friendly with prominent Bengali collectors of folk material in Calcutta, most significantly the writer and social activist Gurusaday Dutta (1882–1941).[25] Dutta founded the Bratachari movement, which shared approaches with the international Arts and Crafts movement. He published on his collection and eventually housed it in the Gurusaday Museum in Joka, a suburb of Kolkata.[26]

Kramrisch's help in establishing the Ashutosh, her interactions with Dutta and Tagore's circle, and her ever-more-vigorous collecting propelled her toward the serious scholarly exploration of

22
Saloni Mathur, *India by Design. Colonial History and Cultural Display*, Oakland, CA 2009; Kris K. Manjapra, Stella Kramrisch and the Bauhaus in Calcutta, in: R. Siva Kumar (ed.), *The Last Harvest. Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore*, Ahmedabad 2012, 34–60; and Regina Bittner and Katherine Rhomberg (eds.), *The Bauhaus in Calcutta. An Encounter of the Cosmopolitan Avant Garde*, Berlin 2013.

23
This collection remains installed today, although light- and insect-sensitive works (such as textiles, paper, and books) are significantly deteriorated.

24
Since I have never been given access to the Ashutosh's files, I do not know the details of these acquisitions.

25
Gurusaday Dutta, *Folk Arts and Crafts of Bengal. The Collected Papers*, Calcutta 1990; and Katherine Hacker, In Search of "Living Traditions". Gurusaday Dutt, Zainul Abedin, and the Institutional Life of Kanthas, in: Mason, Kantha, 59–79.

26
This museum has been teetering on the edge of permanent closure for a number of years. At present it seems to be shuttered, and it is unclear what will happen with the collection in the future.

folk material. Arguably her most original contributions came not in 1968 but in 1939. That year she published "Indian Terracottas" and "Kantha" in the same issue of the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*.[27] In her writings on these very different subjects, we see her struggling with inherited constructs. In each article, she proposes new paradigms that gradually expand the foundation upon which she would later build *Unknown India*.

In the terracotta article, Kramrisch establishes a fundamental typology in which she argues against earlier scholars who had dated according to the formula of simple equals early, complex equals late.

> [Timed vs. timeless] is not [...] a question of any temporal conditions. It is a question not of sequence but of principle. The principle involved is that of ageless types and timed variations. The timeless types persist, essentially changeless; the timed variations result from impresses which the passing moment leaves on them.
>
> The two types occur side by side on the various levels of the different excavations. Today also the two types continue to be made, the one as "primitive" as ever, the other with all the attributes of style and local adaptations.[28]

This perspective contradicts Ananda Coomaraswamy's more analytic and chronologically oriented article published just a decade earlier on similar material.[29] It also differs from more recent studies of seemingly repetitive object production that understand non-industrial human production to be perpetually mutating. Here, though, the importance of Kramrisch's division lies in the effect it would have on her later work.

On the surface, "Kantha" appears to make a closely related point, but what it instead argues is not that the object's form persists "unchanged" but rather that it perpetuates representation of the unseen, a concept she privileges throughout.

> Time has nothing to do with the symbolism of Kanthas nor with their making. The symbols stored in the Kanthas belong to the primeval images in which man beholds the universe. Their meaning is present in their shape and in the position

27
Stella Kramrisch, Indian Terracottas, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 7, 1939, 89–110 (repr. in Miller, Exploring India's Sacred Art, 69–84); and Stella Kramrisch, Kantha, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 7, 1939, 141–167 (repr. in Mason, Kantha, 169–183).

28
Kramrisch, Indian Terracottas, in Miller, Exploring India's Sacred Art, 69. She uses "primitive" as a synonym for "timeless".

29
Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Archaic Indian Terracottas*, Leipzig 1928.

> and relation which these shapes have within the whole; symbol and composition are inseparable in the Kanthas.[30]

Tied in here with the "primeval" continuity of national/ethnic identity in symbol, form, and character is the romanticization of anonymous artists – despite the fact that some of the makers of *kantha* in Kramrisch's own collection stitched their names onto their cloths. What is particularly notable for the time, though, is that she speaks of women makers without condescension. By turning the full strength of her scholarly lens to the category, she gives domestic female production an unprecedented level of respect.

One additional project worth mentioning in relation to *Unknown India* is Kramrisch's single foray into the far south. Kramrisch had contributed chapters to a collaborative exploration of the arts of the then-princely state of Travancore (now the southern part of Kerala), for which she briefly surveyed stone and wooden temples, domestic architecture, murals, and metal icons.[31] The majority of the material dated from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Her primary foci were temples and the formal blending of Dravida (southern) style, here reflecting her definition of the region's "Great" or "Brahmanical" tradition, with Kerala style, which she equated with "indigenous".

Especially during the 1940s, Kramrisch was caught in traumas that intertwined the global and the personal. These included World War II, the death of her mother, the Great Calcutta Killings, Indian Independence, the Partition of India, the death of her husband, financial pressures, the misogyny and antagonism she faced in Calcutta, her rejection by the Courtauld Institute in London, and finally her move to Philadelphia. Over this period, Kramrisch's scholarly production never faltered. If there are general trends in her writing during these years, they include a more homogenized and achronological view of artists across the ("Hindu") subcontinent, along with a greater use of ancient texts to legitimize her conclusions. In addition, her written voice in English became more fluid (if no less complex) but also more definitive and universalized.

The revival of crafts as part of development schemes after Partition and the Nehruvian design movement that paralleled it brought renewed interest to India's folk art and crafts. But the aims of India's new movements were primarily modernization and establishing a market for handmade products rather than historical continuity, aesthetics, or cultural appreciation. In the United States, non-American folk art was excluded from fine arts institutions and

30
Kramrisch, Kantha, in Mason, Kantha, 174. For her early articulation of the duality of unseen and seen in India's literature on aesthetics, see Stella Kramrisch, Introduction, in *The Vishnudharmottara (Part III) A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image Making*, Calcutta 1928, 3–20c, here 10.

31
Stella Kramrisch, J. M. Cousins, and R. Vasudeva Poduval, *The Arts and Crafts of Travancore*, London/Travancore 1948. Kramrisch's chapters were abridged as Drāvida and Kerala. In the Art of Travancore, in: *Artibus Asiae*, Suppl. 11, 1953, 1–51.

relegated to ethnographic collections in natural history museums.[32] One important precursor to *Unknown India* was the 1955 *Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, which showcased nearly a thousand objects.[33] Kramrisch lent to the show but appears to have had little or no intellectual input.[34] Edgar Kaufmann Jr. (1910–1989), then the museum's director of industrial design, together with the architect, interior designer, and folk art collector Alexander Girard (1907–1993) borrowed and purchased many of the displays during a six-week trip around India.[35] Their research was rushed and minimal, although they were certainly shepherded by major figures in India's arts realm. To imbue a bit of scholarship, MoMA commissioned Pupil Jayakar (1915–1997) and John Irwin (1917–1997) to write for the book. Jayakar was India's leading voice in folk art and handicrafts (the following year she founded the National Handicrafts and Handlooms Museum).[36] Irwin, a textile specialist involved with Gira Sarabai (1923–2021) in establishing the Calico Museum of Textiles in Ahmedabad, was Keeper of the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The installation, designed by Girard, combined Orientalist fantasy, ethnography, and publicity for India's current textile production and export [Fig. 3].

> [It] was given the form of an imaginary bazaar or market place. Twelve square gilt columns were set around a fifty-foot pool of water and reflected in a wall of mirror at one end. Over the water were hung informally a bewildering assortment of saris. [...] Near this, the rarest brocades, tinseled gauzes, gossamer cottons and Kashmir shawls were ranged [...]. In an adjacent room, under a patchwork canopy [...] glittered a treasure-trove of the work of jewelers [...].

32
The interest in folk art in the United States had begun (as it continues) with a focus on US art from before the twentieth century. In the 1950s, the only attempt at a global focus was the Museum of International Folk Art that opened in Santa Fe in 1953.

33
Textiles and Ornaments of India (exh. cat. New York, Museum of Modern Art), ed. by Mortimer Wheeler, New York 1956.

34
MoMA's press release and catalogue acknowledgments thank Kramrisch, but as was her habit, she lent anonymously (listed as "Private Collection"). The frontispiece is a color detail of one of her *kanthas* (Philadelphia Museum of Art inv. 1994-148-686).

35
Saloni Mathur, Charles and Ray Eames in India, in: *Art Journal* 70/1, 2011, 34–53, here 39. This was Kaufmann's first visit to the country; Girard seemed to know little more.

36
This institution is usually called the Crafts Museum.

[Fig. 3]
Installation view of the exhibition *Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India* (April 11–September 25, 1955), New York, The Museum of Modern Art, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, photographer: Alexandre Georges © The Museum of Modern Art/ Licensed SCALA / Art Resource, NY.

> Another room was devoted to a great variety of tribal attire, household utensils, ritual figures [...].[37]

There were also female wax-mannequin groupings set on low platforms. They wore saris and jewelry and engaged in various craft-making activities. Ray and Charles Eames also lent a hand by creating a short explanatory film to be shown in the gallery.[38] Perhaps the most jarring and politically complex inclusion was just under the exhibition title. There Girard placed the V&A's *Tippoo's Tiger*, a life-sized wooden automaton that depicts an Englishman being devoured by a tiger. Through its subject, this monumental piece represents Indian resistance to colonial domination. In paradox, its history as having been looted by British East India Company troops during the 1799 sack of Tipu Sultan's Mysore Summer Palace embodies the savagery of that domination.[39]

This stage set could hardly be more antithetical to the "white cube" coined to describe the supposedly neutral installations of former MoMA director Alfred H. Barr Jr. (1902–1981).[40] Barr's format had long been MoMA's signature exhibition strategy and is now so culturally ingrained that, as demonstrated at commercial galleries and museums, it has become globally equated with the appropriate setting not only for modern art but for all art. *Textiles and Ornaments of India* was self-consciously about promoting the hand-made products and designs of a struggling new nation. MoMA's exhibition marketed through "Eastern" fantasy what would be beautiful to the American pocketbook. This imperial commercialism reflected the Euro-American world's fairs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries though now overlaid with a Cold War propaganda that glorified independent capitalism.

II. Conception

At *Unknown India*'s opening, Kramrisch reportedly said, "I've been wanting to stage this show for years and years. It has been my

37
Textiles and Ornaments, 11. Girard had earlier used the term "folk craft" rather than "tribal" for this last section.

38
Designers Ray (1912–1988) and Charles (1907–1978) Eames made over a hundred short films including this eleven-minute piece for MoMA. Although they were already collecting global folk art, this show was prior to their trips to India and involvement with the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, and the Nehruvian design movement.

39
Beginning an exhibition meant to celebrate India's handiwork with this object not long after Independence raises questions about the curators' motivations. Perhaps Girard, who collected what he thought of as folk toys, may have seen it only through this lens and not as a representation of Indian resistance and British aggression. Likewise, perhaps V&A curator John Irwin suggested it as a monumental "masterpiece" from his own museum, a curiosity meant to draw New York audiences.

40
For the term, see Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Berkley, CA 1999 (repr. from his series of essays published in *Artforum* 1976 and 1986).

dream."[41] Yet her first formal exhibition proposal seems to be one submitted to the museum's director Evan H. Turner (1927–2020) in 1965, although they undoubtedly had prior conversations.[42] Scribbled on the top of the typescript is "Statement on Indian Popular Art prepared by S.K.".

> An exhibition of the Folk Art of India will include mainly works of rural and ritual art but also popular art. [...] Each of these groups and others will be exhaustively represented by examples of outstanding artistic quality so that the ancient and still living traditions of India will be presented in their continuity. The majority of the objects will be from the seventeenth century to the present, some however go as far back as the eleventh century. [...] The second aim of the exhibition is to represent the Ritual Year such as it is celebrated in India by seasonal works of art in clay, grass, textiles, etc. and paintings. No such exhibition was held as yet in or outside India. The selection will be made on purely artistic merit. The visual impact of the exhibition will communicate the creative experience and with it, the myths and symbols which live in these forms.

In April of that same year, she submitted a longer proposal.

> The purpose of the exhibition is to show *levels* of Indian art *which have not as yet been brought together* [emphasis mine]. They are 1. Ritual Village Art; 2. Tribal or primitive art and 3. Popular art of the large cities. Most of these died at the turn of this century. The majority of the exhibits will be from the 18th and 19th centuries, and a few from earlier centuries down to the third millennium B.C. [...] The single objects will be chosen as far as they are works of art, on the basis of their artistic quality. *Their meaning will be made clear through their form* [emphasis mine].[43]

Here she simplifies the exhibition narrative by excluding the ritual year as a separate theme. She also pushes the chronological parameters from the eleventh century AD back to the third millennium BC, a move that allows her to demonstrate unbroken links with the

41
Kramrisch quoted in Ruth Seltzer, Art and Music Flood Our City with Culture, in: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 23, 1968.

42
Undated but attached to a letter from Turner to Jack R. McGregor (director of the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, a potential venue for the show), February 9, 1965, EXH Box 44, folder 11, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

43
Kramrisch to Turner, April 13, 1965, EXH Box 44, folder 11, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Kramrisch states that "about 300 objects (between 250 and 350) will be selected". Why this number is lower than that of her other proposals is unclear. Perhaps she did not want to terrify her director.

ancient past (the idea of the "timeless" that she articulated in her 1939 article on terracottas). At the other end of the timeline, she now plans to conclude at 1900 rather than the present. That various types of art in India deteriorated or died at different points is not a new idea for her. As early as the 1930s, for example, Kramrisch had written that the "Great Tradition" of temple sculpture had deteriorated by the thirteenth century, and in many other places, she says it died by the sixteenth.[44]

In the final sentences of the later proposal, she reassures the director of this self-consciously fine arts museum that he need not worry about the exhibition appearing ethnographic, as the focus would remain on the formal qualities of the objects. Visitors would be invited to admire an object and be inspired by it; they would intuit its use and context. For Kramrisch, cultural comprehension was secondary to artistic (aesthetic) appreciation and, she implies, never fully possible. Her aim was to spread even wider the umbrella of fine art and so encompass more of India's makers, media, and moments. Katherine Hacker designates this change in terminology from ethnography to art as a "taxonomic shift" in large part attributable to W. G. Archer, the V&A's keeper of the Indian Section and also a lender and advisor to *Unknown India* then working to aestheticize his own institution's mission.[45]

Another exhibition statement, handwritten on a sheet of notepaper and undated, seems to be dictated by Kramrisch more for herself than for others.

> Folk art of India: Aim of exhibition: To present levels of living art of India today, past other than that of the great trad[ition] of Brahmanical India. From 3rd mil. BC to pres. Emerges interrelations of tribal and rural art and way in which dif[ferent] historical places are absorbed by one + other + another hand tribal + rural trad[ition]s find their way into art of Hinduism. Will bring out consistency and continuity of the great tradition of India – also il[lustrate]s elasticity + coexistence of purely tribal forms. Meaning that this will fulfil[l] a definite function which could not be fulfilled in written or oral trad[ition]; Visual form is essential to the ultimate purpose of these people, i.e. achievement in internal peace – : these [objects are] <u>not</u> just folk art as word

44
Stella Kramrisch, Medieval Indian Sculpture, in: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 87/4535, 1939, 1180–1194, here 1181: "Although the content and method of art in South India have not radically changed, there is a deterioration in the quality of the sculptures." While she is speaking here about South Indian sculpture, she applied this idea of a hierarchy and aesthetic deterioration to all categories throughout her writings.

45
Katherine Hacker, Displaying Tribal Imagery. Known and Unknown India, in: *Museum Anthropology* 23/3, 2000, 5–25, here 12. See also Partha Mitter, The Imperial Collections. Indian Art, in: *A Grand Design. The Art of the Victoria and Albert Museum* (exh. cat. Baltimore, Baltimore Museum of Art), ed. by Malcolm Baker and Brenda Richardson, New York 1997, 222–229.

> is usually used. Extent 450 exhibits – time wise from 3rd millennium BC to 1966.[46]

Whereas she previously mentioned levels of India's art, here she specifies her meaning. There is "the great tradition of Brahmanical-India" at the top level. Everything apart from that, but within a generous category she terms the "art of Hinduism" and includes tribal, are the other levels.

It is notable that, even as she continues to use the title "Folk Art of India", she struggles with the phrase's implications. The objects were "not just folk art" because they fulfilled a spiritual purpose the same as, in her view, any art within the long, unbroken stream of Indic/Hindu visual-form production.[47] As in her early writings, Kramrisch equates "Brahmanical" with Great Tradition, these phrases meaning both mainstream and of higher value. She conceives Great/Brahmanical as one-half of a complementary duality.[48] In this project, she avoids the polemic of great versus little or lesser, at first opposing Great/Brahmanical with "other" until she eventually settles on the more fluid term "unknown". The most important aspect of her final choice is that "unknown" (rather than "other") flips the perspective from the makers and users to that of the museum and cosmopolitan viewers for whom these types of objects are, indeed, unknown. As Katherine Hacker and Vishakha Desai both emphasize, these things are unknown not only because they are made in distant places but also because they have little monetary value outside their sphere of use.[49] Yet a fourth exhibition statement, dated September 1, 1965, shows Kramrisch continuing to massage her narrative:

> The main stream of Indian art has been outlined in several standard publications, and its works are seen in museums and exhibitions. Their grandeur and diversity are of such absorbing interest that little attention has been given to *the undercurrents, sediment and subsoil whence the great monu-*

46
Undated, EXH Box 44, folder 11, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

47
The word after "inner" or perhaps "internal" is unclear but seems to be "peace". Kramrisch's lifelong conviction that transcendence was the primary motivator in Indic religions is a far stretch from John Irwin's view on the practicality of village and tribal actions. In the 1970s, for example, he wrote that "worship is not directed with a view to improve prospects of life hereafter; rather it's directed to gain immediate temporal advantage, or to avert the malignity of the spirits". Irwin quoted in: The Village Gods of South India, in: *Ethnoflorence*, December 2, 2008 (June 28, 2023).

48
As gender-studies scholar Shefali Chandra puts it, "the notion of a caste *system* occludes an analysis of Brahmanism: the power of the Brahmanical caste to reproduce its power and privilege over time". Chandra quoted in The Cunning of Brahmanism. Invisibility Has Its Privileges, Washington University in St. Louis Center for the Humanities, March 12, 2015 (April 7, 2023).

49
Hacker, Displaying Tribal Imagery, 13; and Vishakha N. Desai, Re-Visioning Asian Arts in the 1990s. Reflections of a Museum Professional, in: *Art Bulletin* 77/2, 1995, 169–174.

> *ments have arisen* [emphasis mine]. Their time, moreover, is in the past, the main stream having been cut off by the middle of the last century. No major work of Indian art has been created since. But the landscape of Indian art has not become arid. [...] The ritual, traditional art of rural India is yet alive and it dies hard in spite of progressive industrialization of the country. This ritual art differs from hereditary crafts and it is not a folk art. It[s] images and symbols are ancient and sacred. They imbue with their meaning the forms in which they are vested and let them grow ever anew, forms which are vigorous and varied while they recreate the ancient types or play with them, presenting them with pristine joy, newly clad.[50]

Looking over these concept statements in order, we see Kramrisch finding a way to subsume the idea of the ritual year without making it a competing theme, delicately balancing the Great Tradition with the "other" and reconciling an art she believed ended in the past with her desire to represent the vitality of the living. But this last statement also reveals that her terminological struggle was far from settled. She now draws a distinction between hereditary craft and folk art on the one hand and ritual art on the other. Throughout the planning phases, Kramrisch titled her exhibition variously "Folk Art of India", "Folk and Tribal Art of India", and "Traditional and Folk Art[s] of India". It was only in March 1967 that she submitted the catalogue to the editor as "Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village". The complete revision of the title demonstrates how much she had been wrestling with the taxonomy underpinning the whole.

Although the fundamentals of Kramrisch's idea were articulated by 1965, the object list and lenders needed significant work. Her ambition was to survey the entire subcontinent, but her experience was not up to that monumental task. While she had traveled extensively during her three decades in India and knew many collections and collectors, her familiarity was primarily with Bengal, which she praised as "one of [India's] richest provinces" (in terms of folk art).[51] Her original choice for Indian collaborator-courier was Devaprasad Ghosh, who would have tilted the selection even more heavily eastward. Luckily, in late 1965 she visited the first National Institute of

50
Stapled to letter from Turner to Charles E. Buckley (director of the City Art Museum of St. Louis), September 1, 1965, EXH Box 44, folder 11, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

51
Ibid.

Design in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.[52] There she met Haku Shah, who was working as an ethnographer.[53]

A multitalented painter inspired by the rural people and imagery of his native Gujarat, Shah had already built a significant personal collection. Kramrisch recognized his value to her exhibition. His passion for and knowledge of western India, his ability to communicate that passion, and his energy and persistence in researching and gathering eventually resulted in her naming him her co-curator. We have only a few of her letters to him but a number of his to her, almost all accompanied by a different, lively drawing [Fig. 4]. A September 1965 letter from Shah shows that Kramrisch had proposed him to the Indian government as official courier, although this was not confirmed for several years. This same letter demonstrates that he was commissioning work not only for the exhibition but also, in at least one case, for Kramrisch [Fig. 5].

> I think godhra, posina and Ramdeo horses will be ready when we need. I will order one more posin [*sic*] horse for you. Also the grass [peacock] [...] when I will go to my place I will ask those Adiwasis to make for us. Those marriage toys I will ask them in October. Kutch toys I am not sure. Ayanar man is ready anytime. Don't hesitate in asking me for any work. [...] I am happy that Delhi people have agreed to your proposal. I will be very happy if I can join the exhibition.[54]

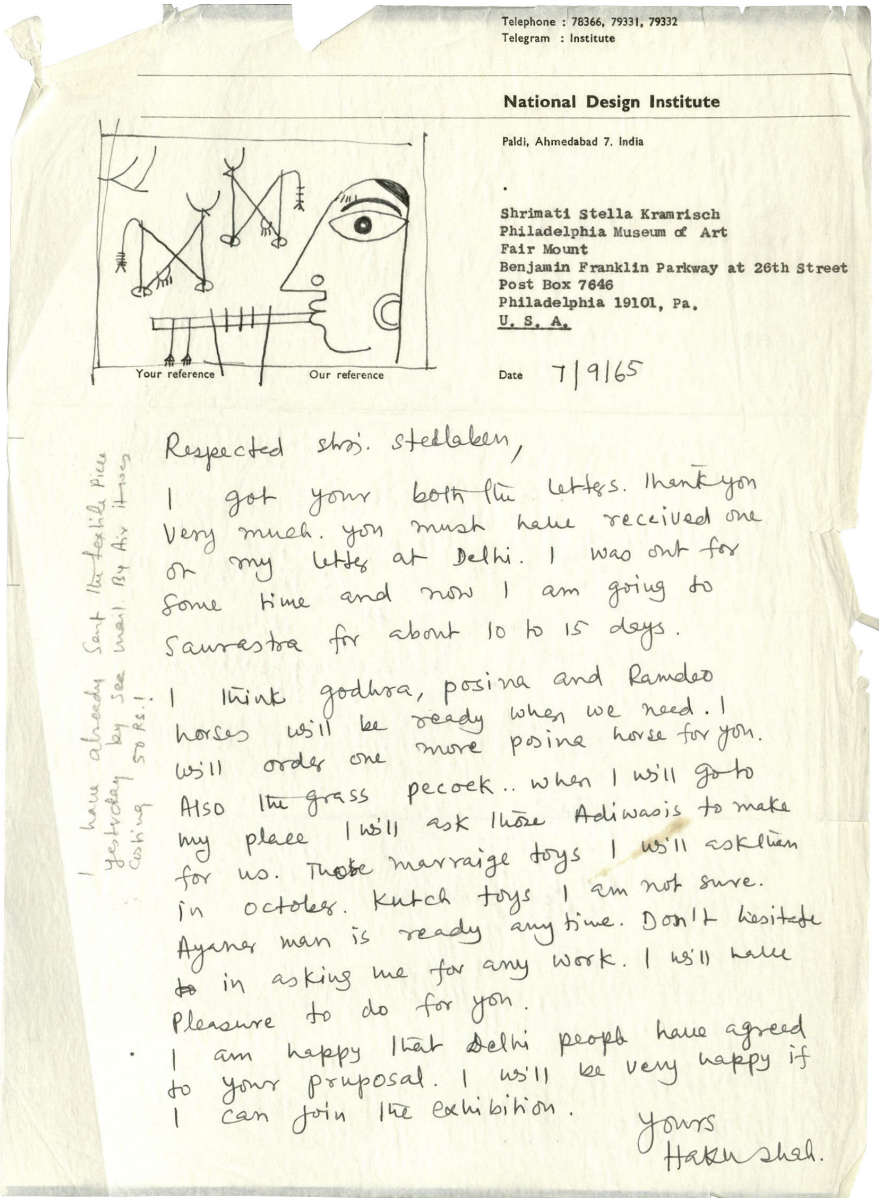
A second letter from about six months later reveals not only the difficulty of transporting the delicate low-fired clay objects but also the primary research that Shah was conducting in tandem with collecting and shipping.

> When the animals (especially she [buffalo] and cows) are not fertile they offer these horses to the god Dubaraj. They are for fertilizing function. [...] With these horses or some times instead of these horses they offer a Mor (it is made of card

52
The National Institute of Design had been founded in 1961 as a joint local, international, and government venture. Among other works on the institution, see Rebecca M. Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947–1980*, Raleigh, NC 2009.

53
Before and after his return from the United States, Shah collaborated with Swiss anthropologist Eberhard Fischer on Art for Tribal Rituals in South Gujarat, India. A Visual Anthropological Survey of 1969, in: *Artibus Asiae*, Suppl. 53, 2021; and *Rural Craftsmen and Their Work. Equipment and Techniques in the Mer Village of Ratadi in Saurashtra, India*, Ahmedabad 1970. Along with other publications and folk-art exhibitions, Shah also established several art and craft centers, including, in 1989, the still-vital Shilpagram in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

54
Shah to Kramrisch, September 7, 1965, IND Box 11, file Haku Shah, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. Ramdeo (now Ramdevra) is a place in Rajasthan; Posina (now Poshina), Godhra, and Kutch are in Gujarat. Adiwasis (Adivasis) is a term for individuals of tribal heritage, from communities officially labeled as "Scheduled Tribe" or "Janjati" and self-labeled as indigenous. Ayanar is a South Indian term for a village protector deity.



Telephone : 78366, 79331, 79332
Telegram : Institute

National Design Institute

Paldi, Ahmedabad 7. India

Shrimati Stella Kramrisch
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Fair Mount
Benjamin Franklin Parkway at 26th Street
Post Box 7646
Philadelphia 19101, Pa.
U. S. A.

Your reference Our reference

Date 7/9/65

Respected shri. stellaben,

I got your both the letters. Thank you very much. you must have received one of my letter at Delhi. I was out for some time and now I am going to Saurastra for about 10 to 15 days.

I think godhra, posina and Ramdev horses will be ready when we need. I will order one more posina horse for you. Also the grass pecock.. when I will go to my place I will ask those Adiwasis to make for us. Those marraige toys I will ask them in october. Kutch toys I am not sure. Ayanar man is ready any time. Don't hesitate to in asking me for any work. I will have Pleasure to do for you.

I am happy that Delhi people have agreed to your proposal. I will be very happy if I can join the exhibition.

Yours
Haku shah.

I have already sent the textile piece yesterday by see mail. By Air it was coming 50 Rs!

[Fig. 4]
Letter from Haku Shah to Stella Kramrisch, September 7, 1965 with a sketch of Krishna Gopala, IND Box 11, Correspondence 1966/67, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

[Fig. 5]
Votive Horse and Rider (Spirit Rider), Poshina, Sabarkantha District, Gujarat, India, 1966, terracotta, 98.1 × 26.7 × 40.6 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994-148-296. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.

> board and some colored papers). I have asked the fellow to send me that also.[55]

In all, *Unknown India* borrowed objects from forty-four museums and private collections in India, Europe, and the United States. India sent the largest percentage. That the vast majority arrived at all is an astonishing diplomatic and logistical feat on the part of Kramrisch, Shah, and their Indian supporters. According to the catalogue, the show displayed a whopping 525 objects.[56] Of these, nearly 160 are listed as from anonymous lenders. In virtually all cases, this means that they were part of Kramrisch's personal collection and so mostly Bengali.[57] Some of these, from metal animals to early terracottas, appear in photographs of her last home in Calcutta [Fig. 6]. Others, like *kantha* [Fig. 7], she had published, while more are known from her homes in Pennsylvania. Another forty works are listed as in the museum's collection. These Kramrisch had either donated earlier or commissioned through Shah. By the summer of 1967, some of the 175 objects shipped from India had begun to arrive. The first group, packed by a professional shipper, experienced severe damage. The others, which Shah packed himself, arrived in better shape. Unfortunately, governmental red tape kept Hakubhai, to use Shah's Gujarati honorific, from being present for the unpacking, but he and his wife, Viluben, arrived in time for the exhibition.[58] Although Shah is mentioned only once in the catalogue, in the director's postscript, where he is called Indian Curator, he appears more often than Kramrisch in press for the show.

Kramrisch wrote her extensive, multipart catalogue essay in her usual poetically obtuse prose. She organized the essay entirely differently than the geographically arranged entries and installation. In the first section, titled "The Setting", she speaks of rural India and the importance of place. In the second, "The Spirit Rider", she explores what she takes as the primary archetype: the horse and rider, which for Kramrisch became more than a votive object or ancestral image. In both catalogue and exhibition, the spirit rider is

55
Shah to Kramrisch, March 17 [1966], IND Box 11, file Haku Shah, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

56
This seems to accord with lender and shipping records, but they are not entirely consistent, and it is likely that at least some of the loans did not arrive from India.

57
Kramrisch donated most of her *kantha* and *pata*, as well as many of the smaller objects and paintings, to the museum during her lifetime. Some she gifted around the time of the exhibition, others in subsequent years, and the rest she bequeathed (in total, Kramrisch gave the museum nearly a thousand objects from her personal collection). For the exhibition, the museum was instructed to pack and transport a long list of works from her home. A few, however, did not enter the museum's collection.

58
As India's representative, Shah was required to oversee the unpacking, but although India's major arts leaders pushed the government to cut the red tape, funds did not come through in time, and with permission, the museum unpacked without him. The John D. Rockefeller III fund then stepped in to support all of Shah's travel. Turner to Porter McCray, September 20, 1967, EXH Box 40, folder 11, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

[Fig. 6]
Cabinet displaying objects from Stella Kramrisch's "folk" collection in her home in Kolkata, about 1940s, SKP Box 88, folder 5, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

[Fig. 7]
Kantha (Embroidered Quilt), probably Faridpur District, Bangladesh, late 19th century, cotton plain weave with cotton embroidery, 114.3 × 165.1 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994-148-684. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.

an organizing principal, weaving a pattern of transcendent meaning that links the subcontinent. Among other places, it appears on the book's cover and on most of the full-page contextual photographs (Plates I–VIII). Kramrisch's next section she titles "Autochthony". Here she connects "The Setting" to "The Spirit Rider", reemphasizing the importance of place specificity. This is indigeneity not in a tribal sense but in the sense of one's own and one's ancestor's sacrosanct earthly locale, and through that, one's place and one's community's identity within the world.

The following section, titled "Varieties of Tribal Art", introduces the hundreds of communities across India considered outside mainstream Brahmanical society but whose identities and cultural and religious boundaries were (and are becoming ever more) fluid. From the 1930s, the collective nomenclature for these groups included "tribal" and "Adivasi" ("first inhabitants" or "indigenous"), and the government included them in the category of Scheduled Castes.[59] Kramrisch's essay emphasizes that, in her view, these are marginalized communities that have always been outside and an undercurrent to the Brahmanical mainstream [Fig. 8]. She carries this theme of marginalization into the penultimate section, "The Art Ritual of Women", which focuses on the types of women's arts she knew best from her time in Bengal.

The concluding section, titled "Rural Practice and the Great Tradition", answers, at least somewhat, the question of why she chose to include works that are clearly patronized by royalty or urban elites. Her argument derives from her idea that, at a certain point in time, the structures of what she saw as Brahmanical temple sculpture, including its system of proportion and measurement, gave way to a more abstract vision, especially in terms of the human body [Fig. 9]. This she attributed to mixing (read "contamination") of village, indigenous, and underlying or autochthonous forms. On first reading, the subdivisions in her essay appear random, but Kramrisch embedded a logic that unifies the whole. The first three sections set out the importance and interrelatedness of place and sacrality. The last three sections, on the other hand, analyze cultural hierarchy. Here she first explores the most marginalized makers (tribals and women), then ends with her theory that the elite Great Tradition was both diluted and invigorated by the various others (villagers, tribes, women) which comprise an ongoing, parallel substrate.

Preceding her essay are a vivid series of full-page glossy photographs, six in color.[60] The initial nine, plus the cover, are by Harry Holtzman (1912–1987), a prominent abstract painter and educator. His dramatic photographs depict what he called "the

59
For an in-depth discussion of Kramrisch's treatment of "tribal", see Hacker, Displaying Tribal Imagery, 5–25.

60
These six color plates plus two of the black-and-white full-page plates fronting the essay illustrate Kramrisch's *kantha*.

[Fig. 8]
Deity on an Elephant, Bastar region, Chhattisgarh, India, late 19th – early 20th century, metal alloy, beeswax thread technique, 11.1 × 4.4 × 10.8 cm, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund and the Elizabeth Wandell Smith Fund, 1969-163-2. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[Fig. 9]
Vishnu Anantashayana, part of a temple pediment, Kerala, India, c. 17th–18th century, wood with polychrome, 50.2 × 179.7 cm, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Stella Kramrisch Fund for Indian and Himalayan Art, 2027-105-1. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.

village shrines" of southern India, with which he became obsessed.[61] Mostly cropped to close-ups, they show multiple generations of donated terracotta figures of horses or humans, often monumental in size, many surrounding a sacred tree. While Kramrisch's essay comprises the intellectual substance of the book, Holtzman's glossy photographs sell it.

The remainder of the catalogue begins with a table of contents arranged entirely differently from the essay sections. The first is "Terra-cotta and Clay Figurines, 3rd Millennium B.C. to 20th Century A.D.", clearly rephrasing the "timeless" argument she articulated in 1939. From there, all other sections of the catalogue she arranged according to large swaths of cardinal geography, as she conceived the exhibition itself. The appendix-like catalogue lists the objects by number. There are 470 entries, but some include multiples so that the show must have contained at least 525 individual objects. All seem to have been on view in Philadelphia, while fewer traveled to the other venues. For about half of the entries she gives only a descriptive title followed by place, material, date, and credit line. With the others she presents information ranging from a single sentence to an extensive paragraph. These seldom provide ethnographic or technical background information.[62] Instead, in vivid and concise language, Kramrisch describes the visual and aesthetic importance of each piece. Scattered within the entries are fifty-six small photographs of individual objects meaning that only about 10 percent of the objects are illustrated although various reviews praised the book as generously and well illustrated. A group of old binder notebooks labeled *Unknown India* in the museum's archives contain a black-and-white photographic record of the majority of the objects listed in the catalogue, although not always in catalogue order. Others listed in the catalogue are missing from the notebooks so only discoverable from outside sources. Rereading her essay with the full group of illustrations brings clarity to her organization. And when all five-hundred-plus images are placed in order, it is evident that she used them to test her own categories.

In the catalogue, Kramrisch divides India into five geographic regions subdivided by state. Within these sections, the objects are loosely grouped by type and, to a certain extent, by medium, but not by time period. Kramrisch's ordering may seem arbitrary, but it is not. For example, the "Rajasthan" subsection under "Western

61
Holtzman was a well-known modernist painter in his own right and Mondrian's heir. Grace Glueck, Harry Holtzman, Artist, Dies. An Expert on Piet Mondrian, in: *New York Times*, September 29, 1987. Holtzman photographed the village shrines of South India in 1957–1958 and 1960–1961. He also took some votive terracottas. Kramrisch contacted him in 1966 to request permission to publish photographs as well as to borrow terracottas. Holtzman lent nineteen works; the catalogue states that these would only be shown in Philadelphia. He later wrote of his obsession with the shrines when his photographs were shown in the 1970s exhibition *Village Gods of South India* at the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY.

62
Compare to Ruth Reeves, *Cire Perdue Casting in India*, New Delhi 1962. Reeves (1892–1966) was an artist and designer who spent years in India focusing on the processes of metal casting, particularly that using resin and beeswax threads. She donated her collection to the Syracuse University Art Museum.

India" begins with a metal lamp-bearing woman (*dipalakshmi*) with broad shoulders and hips – stolid, flattened, and boldly frontal [Fig. 10]. She is followed by other metalwork, primarily "Spirit Riders" grouped consecutively, then painted objects including toys, a painted scroll in front of which the story of Pabuji would have been performed, a painting on paper, and a large group of marionettes. These works reflect common facial features so that, through her choices and sequencing, Kramrisch creates a regional "style" that brings unity to Rajasthan's diversity. The following subsection, "Gujarat", begins with a parallel but very different *dipalakshmi* [Fig. 11]. She is willowy and elegantly detailed, with a regal neck, long, thin legs, and narrow shoulders and hips. A single braid hangs down her spine to emphasize her verticality. Both *dipalakshmis* stand perfectly balanced, arms bent to hold lamps. Formally they represent opposite visions of the auspicious feminine.

"Gujarat", the area best known to Shah, does not seem to try for a unified regional style. For example, tall wheel-thrown votive horses with elongated necks and legs and open pot-rim mouths with partially subsumed riders [see Fig. 5] precede cheery, off-kilter, hand-pinched horses covered with finger-dabs of white paint.

Looking through the objects she gathered, grouped, and sequenced, Kramrisch's final title of *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* takes on additional meaning. The exhibition is not only about helping objects and makers become better known to cosmopolitan viewers as art and artists, it is also about crafting a taxonomy. *Unknown India* represents Kramrisch's effort to classify and thus *know* India through a wide-angle lens. She had researched intensively and published on many of the object types in the show, such as Bengal's *kantha* or Kerala's architectural woodwork. But how could she now fit these types into a neat(er) art-historical puzzle engaging the entire subcontinent? While Kramrisch was aware that this task was ultimately impossible, she had been kneading and modeling the problem for close to half a century. It was time for her ideas to enter the kiln.

The subtext of Kramrisch's writing in the catalogue is that everything in the show is a "traditional" art. While she continues to find repeated forms that she calls "timeless" and others that she sees as locatable within a historical framework, she presents them all as products growing entirely from the soil of village, tribal, and popular India. Shah, however, told me an anecdote that problematized her use of both "traditional" and "authentic". It concerned an unbaked, polychromed set of individual figurines that together depict a marriage.[63] In Ahmedabad, Shah said, Kramrisch had met a group of itinerant potters from Ladol village, north of the city. Although they sold their animal and human figurines as individual pieces, she wanted an elaborate example for the exhibition. She

63
Kramrisch, Unknown India, 88, cat. 57. The figurines were intended to be ephemeral and their polychrome is so fragile that it cannot be consolidated. Since the exhibition, they have remained in boxes and were part of Kramrisch's bequest (inv. 1994-148-350a-ss).

[Fig. 10]
Dipalakshmi, Rajasthan, India, c. 17th–18th century, copper alloy, 19.7 × 7.6 × 7 cm, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994-148-129. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[Fig. 11]
Dipalakshmi, Gujarat, India, c. 18th century, copper alloy, 47 × 22.9 × 11.4 cm, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994-148-128. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art.

asked Shah to commission the potters to create an entire wedding party, something wholly outside of their usual ("authentic", "traditional") practices. But Kramrisch's catalogue caption reads only "Figurines of musicians, bride and groom, guests bringing offerings, ritual objects. These gaily painted toys are the work of the Vaghari, or toymakers, who sell their goods in village and town."[64]

My first reaction to Hakubhai's story was one of disappointment at the discrepancy between Kramrisch's presentation of all the material as authentic tradition and her willingness to manipulate production. On consideration, though, I recognized my own bias; rather than perceiving living artists interacting with their varied world, I perceived this "Western intervention" as negating the piece. I had been taught to value, as Vishakha Desai phrases it, an "authentic otherness" in "Non-Western" art, particularly "folk". When the authentic otherness appeared to be absent, I "considered [it] suspect and not very 'good.'"[65] Even dispensing with this hypocrisy, though, the question lingers: did Kramrisch intentionally frame all this material as authentically other to fulfill the expectations of her audience, or did she believe that all she gathered partook of some aspect of the unbroken Indic lineage, thereby imbuing it with authenticity, whether manipulated or not?

III. Experience

That *Unknown India* came to be realized in one of the nation's largest and perhaps most conservative fine arts museums is a credit to Kramrisch's stature. It is equally a credit to Turner, who was a young man during his tenure in Philadelphia and known for taking chances with unusual exhibitions. In his "Director's Note" to the catalogue, he wrote, "That this material is so little known in the West is perhaps explained by the fact that not before today has there been an atmosphere which would properly accept some of the methods and attitudes which created it."[66] Just as significant as its realization were the galleries Turner sanctioned for the exhibition's installation. Rather than hiding what could have been seen as crude craft in the "Oriental" galleries, located in the rear of the south wing on the museum's top floor, *Unknown India* was given a socially elevated location. It occupied the easternmost third of the focal special exhibition galleries. Its entry opened onto the Great Stair Hall at the museum's core and was set nearest to the primary east doors that

64
Ibid.

65
Desai, Re-Visioning Asian Arts, 170. Although Desai is speaking of "Western" reactions to Asian contemporary art and its interpretation (referencing James Clifford, Of Other Peoples. Beyond the "Salvage" Paradigm, in: Hal Foster (ed.), *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, Seattle, WA 1987, 1), I believe the comment applies to a broader framework.

66
Turner, Director's Note, in: Kramrisch, Unknown India, 81.

looked out on the city above what are today known as the "Rocky Steps".

But the file in the museum's archive marked "Unknown India Gallery Plans" holds drawings for one of the permanent collection spaces that had nothing to do with *Unknown India* (notably, folk material was never included in the permanent collection spaces before or during Kramrisch's tenure). So, at present, the only way to reconstruct the installation's narrative and flow is by reimagining it via ten installation shots together with the object photographs now linked to the catalogue entries. Not every section of the galleries or every object is visible or legible in the installation shots. What makes it even more of a puzzle is that the galleries were entirely rebuilt in the 1970s and several times since. There is enough information, however, to imagine the basic exhibition layout and how Kramrisch transformed her concept into experience.[67]

At first glance, the installation design appears banal. Each room has stark white walls and high white ceilings above polished cement floors. Unlike MoMA's 1955 gilded bazaar, this *is* Barr's white cube. These same galleries in Philadelphia had recently exhibited retrospectives of Picasso, Eakins, Mondrian, and Manet. While it is possible that the color might have been due to budget constraints, other design choices make it more likely that Kramrisch consciously selected the white cube to make a statement, marking these works as both "fine" art and "modern" art. She may even have intended to play off the audience's elision of "modern" and "primitive".

Although the majority of the objects in *Unknown India* were well under 30 cm high, it was still an achievement to accommodate their sheer number while preserving the openness and the breathing room between objects evident in installation photographs. Elegant triangular plexiglass wall vitrines maximized the visibility of each piece, eliminating shadow lines while reducing the weight of the bases. The large platforms slanted outward, reversing the angles of the vitrine bases [Fig. 12].

Labeling, though, seems to have been practically nonexistent. Looking back from inside the first gallery, a large topographic map of India rose above the entrance/exit [Fig. 13]. It carried place names but not state or regional borders. Most notably, neither this map nor anywhere else in the show appears to have specified the large geographic sectors by which the galleries and catalogue were organized. That this organization by geographic region was not immediately (perhaps seldom) comprehensible to visitors is evident not only from photographs but also from its almost complete absence of mention in reviews. Reviewers and visitors did

67
My thanks to Jack Schlechter, The Park Family Director of Installation Design at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, for his help in determining the exhibition's original location. Seltzer, Art and Music Flood Our City, states that Philadelphia architect David R. Singer designed and installed the show but there can be no doubt that Kramrisch organized the space and laid out the objects. She was known as a "hands-on" curator. Even for her last show, *Painted Delight*, installed the year she turned ninety, she famously sat on the ground to make sure the painters precisely mixed the wall color she envisioned.

[Fig. 12]
Installation view of the Western India Gallery, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

[Fig. 13]
Installation view of the Western India Gallery, with a map and the entry to the Mid-India alcove on the left, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

make frequent connections to traditions with which they were more familiar, from "primitive" and "folk" to African and Mexican, to Minoan and Matisse.[68] The restrained use of Holtzman's photo murals, a major aspect of the experience of the exhibition, instilled minimal context that dramatically punctuated but never dominated the objects. In the Great Stair Hall stood a prismatically overlapping photo mural with details of multiple clay votive figures, presenting visitors a sense of being one with a crowd of worshippers [Fig. 14]. Above the exhibition entry/exit was a single square photograph of monumental South Indian votive horses' heads, a detail of Kramrisch's leitmotif of "The Spirit Riders", and below it, against the gallery's rear wall, stood a platform holding the clay votive horses Shah commissioned in Poshina, Gujarat. Most of this first gallery was dedicated to the art of western India from Rajasthan and into Gujarat. On the left, below high windows, ran a long vitrine filled with small metal, wood, and clay objects [see Fig. 12]. It seems that Kramrisch grouped works in her first catalogue section (terracottas) nearest to the Poshina horses. In this way, she gracefully negotiated the awkward shift in narrative between medium or time versus region. Above the vitrine ran a 305-cm paper version of a Pithora mural, a type of women's festival art usually done as ephemeral wedding ornamentation on the wall of a mud house.[69]

A partial wall projected from the right of the entrance. When a visitor turned the corner, they found an alcove-like space inside of which they glimpsed works from what Kramrisch called "Mid-India".[70] The alcove's axis wall held backlit leather shadow puppets, while on the left hung a grouping of "tribal" masks [see Fig. 13]. Inside of the door appeared a dramatic mask with peacock feathers labeled "Baiga Tribe, Madhya Pradesh".[71] A second wall projected from the opposite side of the door so that the space flowed toward the gallery exit, continuing the Western India section with a delightful sequence of Rajasthani marionettes dancing.

The central and largest gallery of *Unknown India* contained the arts of eastern India, especially Bengal. Down the center stood a

68
For many visitors, formal elements of European primitivism such as geometric figuration or naive-appearing draftsmanship opened a door to works in *Unknown India*. But few would have been exposed to the work of South Asia's cosmopolitan artists of the 20th century or other modernisms then thriving in recently decolonized regions around the globe. Kramrisch was not only familiar with but also personally involved with the trajectory of Indian modernism, as was the artist Shah. Yet in her text for *Unknown India*, she ignores and even denies its existence.

69
Shah likely commissioned this piece for the show, and it may be the first example of Pithora painting "freed" from its mural context (inv. 1994-148-482). Made in 1966, Kramrisch kept the over 305-cm scroll in her personal collection until her death.

70
This area includes present-day Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Odisha.

71
Kramrisch, Unknown India, either cat. 157 or 158, likely the latter, which is larger (the photographs are missing from the notebooks and both are from a private New Delhi collection).

[Fig. 14]
Installation view with Holzman photographic murals and entry/exit between the Western India Gallery from the Great Stair Hall, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

series of accordion-like walls that added hanging space for *kantha* [Fig. 15]. The majority of these embroideries Kramrisch labeled as "East Pakistan" (present-day Bangladesh), and most were drawn from her personal collection.[72] One of these walls displayed two elaborate woodcarvings from West Bengal borrowed from the V&A. Once parts of a temple chariot, they were 213 cm high, making them among the largest objects in the exhibition.

To the left of the entrance hung a series of long *pata*, many of which were also owned by Kramrisch [Fig. 16 visible through the door on the right]. As in the Western India gallery, a triangular vitrine filled the window wall holding metal, clay, stone, brick, and wood ritual and everyday objects.[73] Just above appeared four wooden sculptures that Kramrisch related in various ways to tribal communities across eastern India.[74]

Unfortunately, there is no photograph of the space opposite the accordion walls. It must have displayed the rest of the Eastern India section, including souvenir paintings from the Jagannatha Temple at Puri and from the Kalighat Temple in Calcutta, along with the rest of the tribal works, including those from Nagaland.

From the Eastern India gallery, visitors could glimpse part of a Holtzman horse shrine mural that covered the entire rear wall of the final gallery [Fig. 17 and also see Fig. 15]. This five-panel montage used the same repeated overlap as the mural of the votive figures at the show's entrance. In this smaller space, though, its scale and proximity would have given viewers a sense of being enwrapped by the sacred tree, facing multiple terracotta horses lined up like an invading army beneath massive boughs.[75]

More than half of this final space was, like the mural, devoted to southern India. Against the window wall, Kramrisch mounted a selection of polychromed architectural wooden fragments from royally patronized temples in Travancore (present-day Kerala) and so in her view demonstrated the "deterioration" of the Great

72
Twenty-eight out of thirty-two were Kramrisch's. Of the two *kantha* from Bihar, one belonged to the Crafts Museum and one to Haku Shah.

73
Those visible appear to be from Bengal and Bihar, but the case likely also held figurines made by Kond tribal artists in Odisha as described in Hacker, Known and Unknown, 16.

74
One is a crouching woman (Kramrisch, Unknown India, cat. 330) labeled only as "Comilla, East Bengal, East Pakistan" (present-day Cumilla, Bangladesh), borrowed from the Bratachari Society. It may be a work by the Tripuri people, now primarily inhabitants of bordering Tripura state.

75
Holtzman's statements led to a confusion of the physical age of these terracottas with the deities and concepts they represent. He told reporters, for example, "We have every reason to believe that these deities are older than the Hindu Pantheon." When one reporter questioned why the delicate figures survived so long, Holtzman replied, "These village deities belonged to the lowest caste – the untouchables. Hence they weren't touched." Holtzman quoted in Seltzer, Art and Music Flood Our City. By the time the show reached San Francisco, the ideas had conflated, and a journalist wrote that these sculptures were "believed to be the oldest religious figures since Babylonian times". *San Francisco Examiner*, March 24, 1968.

[Fig. 15]
Installation view of the Eastern India Gallery, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

[Fig. 16]
Installation view of the Southern India Gallery with (left to right) monumental Kerala wooden figures, entrance into the Klee exhibition, northern India material, and entrance from the Eastern India gallery, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

[Fig. 17]
Installation view with a mural on the rear wall of the Southern India Gallery, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (January 20–February 26, 1968), Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives.

Tradition, as discussed in her 1939 essay.[76] Nearby were the most dramatic pieces in the show, two 180-cm-high wooden attendant deities, a woman and a horse-headed man, from Karnataka. Unlike the relief temple sculpture, these stand in the round and provide a sense of scale and power comparable to Holtzman's photograph.[77]

The southern Indian material alone could have filled this room, but Kramrisch had a final category, Northern India, with nowhere to go. Just to the right of these great Karnataka deities appeared a small doorway that seems to have connected *Unknown India* to the ongoing exhibition *Paul Klee 1879–1940. A Retrospective Exhibition*, so avoiding a cul-de-sac [see Fig. 16]. On the short wall to the right of this door, Kramrisch placed two wooden equestrians from Nuristan, Afghanistan, carrying her "Spirit Rider" to all parts of the subcontinent. Above both the doorway to the Klee exhibition and the doorway back to the Eastern India section hung appliqué canopies from Uttar Pradesh. Lining the right wall in another elegant triangular vitrine were, on the left, a selection of small sculptures from various parts of far northern India and, on the right (with no strict division), metal sculptures and ritual objects from the far south. Above the vitrine hung courtly embroideries, so-called Chamba Rumals, made in the Himalayan foothill region of Himachal Pradesh. In all, this gallery, rather confusingly, displayed objects from opposite ends of the subcontinent. Even so, Kramrisch's installation managed, through a process of aestheticization, to (almost) merge them into a unit, but it is unlikely that many visitors would understand the overarching regional organization without Shah as guide.

The exit to *Unknown India* was either via the side door of this final gallery into the rear of the Klee exhibition or back through *Unknown India* to the Great Stair Hall. If visitors exited the latter route, they encountered a gift shop.[78] From the shop, one looked down the corridor toward a Gujarati appliqué canopy that created a processional exit or introduction.[79] To further corral visitors, a case of backlit shadow puppets blocked the space between two of this corridor's massive piers.

On the evening of January 19, 1968, side-by-side exhibitions opened simultaneously in the museum's special exhibition galleries. In the eastern third was *Unknown India*. In the western two-thirds,

76
See the quote in note 44 above. Two were shipped with the agreement that they would be acquired by the museum (inv. 1966-115-1 and 1966-115-2), while a third remained on long-term loan (and on view), entering the collection in 2017 (inv. 2017-105-1).

77
These were borrowed from the Crafts Museum. The catalogue lists four (113–116, p. 93), but neither the photo notebooks nor any installation shots show more than two, so it is likely that only two were shipped, possibly for financial reasons.

78
The temporary gift shop in the photograph displays a niche in its rear wall which was recently completed to fulfill its original intended purpose as an elevator shaft.

79
Is it too far-fetched to wonder if the canopy in front of the shop may have been Kramrisch's nod to MoMA's 1955 commercialized bazaar?

with its entrance prominently located along the museum's main north-south axis, was the Klee exhibition, highlighting this Swiss-born German painter and theorist.[80] The Klee show was organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in collaboration with the Pasadena Art Museum in California. Unlike Philadelphia's encyclopedic mission, the Guggenheim, from its 1939 inception as the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, had long promoted modern art as painting and sculpture by white, male, academically trained artists from Europe and North America.

Among some Philadelphia Museum insiders, reaction to this seemingly disparate pairing was mixed. Bernice Wintersteen, the museum's president, complained in that year's annual report that the "shared billing [...] detracted from the importance of both shows".[81] But Turner understood that the pairing went deeper, as did Thomas M. Messer, director of the Guggenheim, who wrote Turner, "I think Klee and Indian Folk Art will go together splendidly and were it in New York, the link between the two would undoubtedly constitute the main theme of the critical commentary".[82]

There can be no doubt that Kramrisch herself understood the relationship. Klee had spent a decade at the Bauhaus (1921–1931), and Kramrisch had included his work in her 1923 exhibition in Calcutta. Of all those affiliated with the Bauhaus, it was Klee who resonated most deeply among artists across India. In particular, the painter-activist Jagdish Swaminathan (1928–1994) spoke of Klee's influence on his own art as early as 1966. Swaminathan later became the moving force behind Bharat Bhavan, the institution that opened in Bhopal in 1982 and brought "tribal" and "modern" art into conversation.[83] Klee's appeal for Swaminathan and other Indian modernists ranged from his art's cosmologic content to its reflections of India's "tribal" and "folk" art styles of geometric figuration, flattened picture planes, and intense coloration.

Followuing Philadelphia, *Unknown India* traveled to the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum (today part of the Fine Arts Museums

80
Paul Klee 1879–1940. A Retrospective Exhibition (exh. cat. New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), New York 1967. For the "influence" of the "Orient" on Klee, see, for example, Peg DeLamater, Some Indian Sources in the Art of Paul Klee, in: *The Art Bulletin* 66/4, 1984, 657–672.

81
Wintersteen, Report of the President, in: *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 63/298, 1968, 156–164, here 161.

82
Turner, Report of the Director, in: *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 63/298, 1968, 169–181, here 169; and Messer to Turner, October 19, 1967, EXH Box 41, folder 2, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

83
Madan Gopal Singh, Swami. Of His Times, in: *The India Magazine* 14/7, 1994, 15, quoted in Katherine Hacker, "A Simultaneous Validity of Co-Existing Cultures". J. Swaminathan, the Bharat Bhavan, and Contemporaneity, in: *Archives of Asian Art* 64/2, 2014, 191–209, here 207n46; and Jagdish Swaminathan, *The Perceiving Fingers. Catalogue of Roopankar Collection of Folk and Adivasi Art from Madhya Pradesh, India*, Bhopal 1987.

of San Francisco), whose director had been enthusiastic about the show since its inception. Oddly, like Philadelphia's, San Francisco's archive seems to retain no floorplans and has ten installation shots. From these, one can see that the space was smaller than in Philadelphia and had lower ceilings and fewer objects. But like Philadelphia, the design was white and modernist, although instead of slanting wall cases, San Francisco used square, freestanding vitrines with recessed bases [Fig. 18]. The first gallery again blended western and mid-India. Through its exit, visitors encountered another freestanding wall, this time holding two of Kramrisch's *kantha*. Around and beyond that, the second and larger room held the eastern India material. A separate vitrine contained terracotta and clay figurines, representing Kramrisch's first catalogue section. A faceted freestanding wall subdivided this gallery. On the side opposite the Eastern India section was Holtzman's mural of votive heads; presumably the space beyond contained the works from southern and northern India. As far as it is possible to determine, then, both San Francisco and St. Louis maintained the fundamental regional divisions and flow of Kramrisch's Philadelphia installation. The regional organization is seldom noted by reviewers apart from a review of the St. Louis show, which, unlike the other venues, had five separate galleries each clearly dedicated to a different region [Fig. 19].[84] But even that review focused primarily on the visual drama and incomprehensible but perceived religious power of the huge number of objects.

Announcements and reviews also differed in tenor from city to city. In San Francisco, performing arts and film took top billing. The museum's advertisement lacks Kramrisch's editorial hand, reading that the show is a "survey of a colorful, mystic, relatively unknown area of art. First showing in the Occident of rural tribal Indian art; 400 objects, 3000 B.C. to present created by primitive people for religious purposes."[85] Yet thoughtful reviews also appeared.[86]

Both in India and the United States, Shah was frequently accompanied by his wife, Viluben, and their memories remained vivid. The couple had spent a year in the United States staying near all three venues, where Hakubhai Shah trained guides, presented gallery talks, taught children, and exhibited his own art locally. Newspaper reviews of the exhibition from all its venues highlighted his primary, public role in bringing the show to life for visitors. In San Francisco, Shah hosted a prime-time television segment

84
John Brod Peters, "Unknown India". A Stunning Show, in: *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, July 20–21, 1968.

85
Oakland Tribune, April 7, 1968.

86
See, for example, Alfred Frankenstein, Art Nobody Bothered to Destroy, in: *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, April 7, 1968.

[Fig. 18]
Installation view of the Eastern India Gallery with terracotta case in the foreground, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (March 28–June 9, 1968), San Francisco, M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, Courtesy of the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

[Fig. 19]
Installation view of the Eastern India Gallery, in the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (July 18–August 20, 1968), St. Louis, MO, St. Louis Art Museum, Courtesy of Saint Louis Art Museum.

called "Tales of India" illustrated by works from the show.[87] He loved his role as a cultural connector and went on to become not only a significant painter but also an author and institution builder, promoting folk and tribal artists in many ways. Unlike Kramrisch, who struggled with categories, Shah had little issue with the fluidity of high and low, great and little, Brahmanical and marginalized. In a line from his exhibition catalogue for *Form and Many Forms of Mother Clay*, he expresses value in his usual unpretentious terms: "Simply because an object is common in the social sense, it does not mean that it is ordinary."[88] As his son Parthiv said, "My father respected the scholarship or skill in a person. He spoke of art critic Stella Kramrisch [...] in the same breath as he spoke of this tribal called Chelia. For him both were equal."[89]

IV. A Canon for India's "Folk Art"?

Despite positive reviews for *Unknown India*, the objects in the exhibition were not accepted as "fine" art in the way paintings by Klee or Manet were, nor are they today. Even temple sculpture from the "great tradition of Brahmanical India" could not breach that barrier, although Kramrisch had already spent a long career trying to bring the latter the respect she thought it deserved. Regardless of lifelong interest, she did not expend the same effort on, or perhaps have the same expectations for, legitimizing the everyday mediums and marginalized creators included in *Unknown India*. Her words and choices in the catalogue demonstrate that, no matter how much she appreciated this "other" art, she never jettisoned her personal hierarchy of period, aesthetic, medium, and maker, where earlier sculpture and Brahmanical temples superseded what she called their "undercurrents, sediment and subsoil".

Although Kramrisch deliberately eschewed the phrase "folk art", in the half century since *Unknown India*, scholars and collectors in India and globally have looked to the enormous but miscellaneous range of object types she included in the exhibition as a canon of India's folk art. Often the regional specificity she strove to demonstrate is homogenized into multicultural geographic enormities, and tribal groups are given overly broad nomenclature. Especially in the realm of "tribal" arts, the anonymity valued in Kramrisch's

87
Oakland Tribune, June 17, 1968.

88
Form and Many Forms of Mother Clay. Contemporary Indian Pottery and Terracotta (exh. cat. New Delhi, National Crafts Museum), ed. by Haku Shah, New Delhi 1985. Today the Shah family retains thousands of slides that Hakubhai and Viluben took during their travels for *Unknown India* and over the course of a lifetime of research. Many are water damaged and can no longer be identified, but they remain an invaluable resource that Haku's son Parthiv Shah is working hard to preserve.

89
Parthiv Shah quoted in My Father Is a Huge Influence on Me. Parthiv Shah on Haku Shah and His Own Journey as a Photographer, in: *Abir Pothi*, March 19, 2021 (June 12, 2023); see also Parthiv Shah Talks about His Father Haku Shah, an Artist Who Blurred the Lines between Art and Craft, in: *Abir Pothi*, March 18, 2021 (June 12, 2023).

era is today, thanks to market and generational forces, being jettisoned in favor of individuality, a transition that equalizes these makers with their cosmopolitan cotemporaries yet can likewise deteriorate into a cult of celebrity. In perspective, though, perhaps the most significant critique of *Unknown India* has to do with Kramrisch's persistent, although not unquestioned, myths of authenticity and timelessness. Since 1968, many steps have been taken in scholarship, and to a lesser degree in museum display and the market, to imbue a dynamic vision of cultural interaction and perpetual change. With *Unknown India* to learn from and to push against, we may move past the static of authenticity, merge the spiritual with the practical, dispense with preordained hierarchies including centers and margins, and recognize "autochthony" as nuanced and fluid.

Darielle Mason, PhD, was the inaugural Stella Kramrisch Curator and Head of South Asian Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and now serves as Senior Curator Emeritus. Her exhibitions and publications span multiple mediums and millennia across this vast region. Among her notable projects is a series of exhibitions on South Asian women's textiles, beginning with *Kantha. The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal*, which received the CAA's Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Award for Museum Scholarship. Mason's most recent book, *Storied Stone. Reframing the Philadelphia Museum of Art's South Indian Temple Hall*, integrates art-historical analysis and provenance research with the exploration of a century of evolving interpretive strategies and ethical considerations as witnessed through this pivotal museum space.

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE AS SYMBOLIC FORM

STELLA KRAMRISCH'S WRITINGS ON THE AJANTA PAINTINGS

Sylvia Houghteling

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 863–900

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.107510

ABSTRACT

In her 1937 publication, *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, Stella Kramrisch offered a transcultural analysis of the early Buddhist wall paintings at the caves of Ajanta. Kramrisch described a unique technique of "reversed" or "forthcoming" perspective in the paintings. This article proposes that her work can be seen as an oblique critique of Erwin Panofsky's influential *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1924/1927). Kramrisch also connected her analysis of perspective to the avant-garde of early 20th-century art and the work of cubist painters. This article concludes by situating Kramrisch's claims about the Ajanta paintings within the context of more recent scholarship on Buddhist painting and the environment in South Asia.

KEYWORDS

Stella Kramrisch; Ajanta; Perspective; Buddhist painting; Erwin Panofsky.

In the years after Erwin Panofsky presented his landmark lecture, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1924), another scholar, a tiny woman living in a Kolkata apartment who went to bed with a gun beneath her pillow, wrote a history of perspective from the opposite direction. The scholar was Stella Kramrisch, who published *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan* in 1937. The book ranged across two millennia, but it was the sections devoted to the early Buddhist wall paintings of the Ajanta caves in the Deccan plateau that contained Kramrisch's most striking and significant claims. Kramrisch described a unique perspectival technique used at Ajanta that not only rivaled European Renaissance perspective in sophistication but anticipated the avant-garde of early 20th-century art and the work of cubist painters. "All other types of painting obey two possibilities", Kramrisch wrote. "They treat the ground as surface and exist within its two dimensions or they create, in one way or another, an illusion of leading into depth [...] The painting of the Ajanta type is not conceived in terms of depth. It comes forward [...] It does not lead away, but it comes forth."[1]

This article focuses on Kramrisch's writings on the Ajanta paintings during a period of over forty years to explore how the transcultural approach she took to understanding perspectival systems shaped her art historical scholarship. When Kramrisch published *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, she had been living in India for fifteen years.[2] Although Kramrisch was teaching in Kolkata, she also sustained in the book a dialogue with European art historical scholarship that she had been introduced to during her doctoral work in Vienna.[3] Kramrisch's academic training had combined a study of European traditions with readings in Sanskrit and an engagement with Islamic and South Asian art. Her dissertation focused on the early Buddhist monuments of Sanchi and Bharhut, although she did not have access to the actual stone sculptures until traveling to Kolkata and instead based her conclusions on photographs taken by a friend of her advisor.[4] Even after relocating to

[1] Stella Kramrisch, *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, London 1937, 3. I am grateful to many who have offered feedback and constructive advice on this article: Tamara Sears (in whose graduate seminar I began this research), Sarah Turner, Deborah Sutton, Darielle Mason, Matthew Vollgraff, Jo Ziebritzki, and the two anonymous reviewers of the article. Any mistakes are my own.

[2] Barbara Stoler Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Essay, in: ead. (ed.), *Exploring India's Sacred Art. Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, Philadelphia 1983, 3–33, here 11.

[3] For Kramrisch's relationship to German-language art historiography, see Ratan Parimoo, Stella Kramrisch's Approach to Art History, in: Parul Pandya Dhar (ed.), *Indian Art History. Changing Perspectives*, New Delhi 2011, 69–88. See also Sarah Victoria Turner, 'Alive and Significant'. 'Aspects of Indian Art', Stella Kramrisch and Dora Gordine in South Kensington c. 1940, in: *Wasafiri* 27/2, 2012, 40–51.

[4] Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Essay, 7. The source for the photographs was Victor Goloubew. For details of Kramrisch's education, see also Darielle Mason, Interwoven in the Pattern of Time. Stella Kramrisch and Kanthas, in: *Kantha. The Embroidered Quilts*

India, Kramrisch maintained connections to Britain and Europe. The India Society, the London-based publisher of *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, was a nexus of British and European publications on South Asian art.[5]

By the time Kramrisch published her book on Indian painting in the Deccan, the Ajanta caves were well known to scholars throughout Asia, Europe, and the United States. The rock-cut caves at the Buddhist site of Ajanta were constructed in various phases ranging from 200 BCE to 650 CE. First publicized in Europe in the 1820s after their "discovery" by British Army officials in 1819 (they were only "unknown" outside of India), the paintings on the walls of Ajanta became a subject of great interest to British imperial officials as South Asia's earliest examples of monumental painting.[6]

Kramrisch first began formulating her ideas on perspective and Ajanta not in the context of her other studies of early Buddhist art, but in her writings on 20th-century painting, and particularly her early articles on the fluid, linear style of the artist Sunayani Devi and the work of the cubist painter, Gaganendranath Tagore.[7] Kramrisch encountered Gaganendranath Tagore's experimental cubist paintings in Kolkata in 1922 [Fig. 1].[8] After an exhibition of Tagore's work, Kramrisch wrote an article entitled "An Indian Cubist" for the Indian art journal, *Rupam*. She concluded her article by rooting cubism's origins in the Ajanta paintings: "Cubism was a 'discovery' of the West. The roots of it however lie in the East. 'Backgrounds' in Ajanta, many objects represented in Bharhut and Sanchi, the architecture in Rajput paintings are visualized in [a] cubist way."[9]

of Bengal from the Jill and Sheldon Bonovitz Collection and the Stella Kramrisch Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (exh. cat. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art), ed. by Darielle Mason, Philadelphia 2010, 158–159.

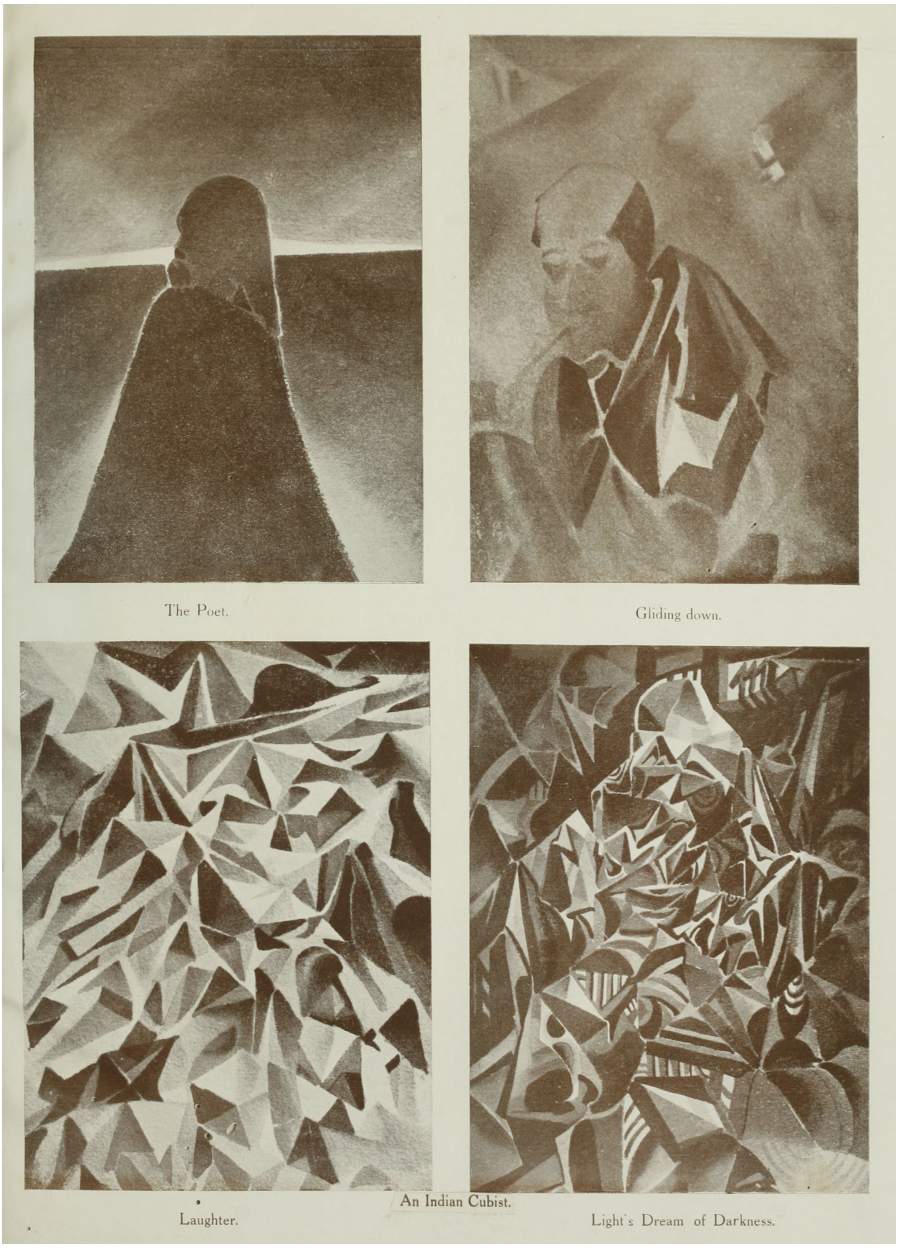
5
In 1915, the India Society London had commissioned color reproductions after copies of the Ajanta wall paintings in a project organized by Lady Christiania Herringham and completed by Nandalal Bose, who later became a major painter of the Bengal School. Kramrisch also cites the illustrations in this volume in A Survey of Indian Painting, 206, fn. 70. See Christiania Jane Powell Herringham and A. H. Fox Strangways, *Ajanta Frescoes. Being Reproductions in Colour and Monochrome of Frescoes in Some of the Caves at Ajanta after Copies Taken in the Years 1909–1911 by Lady Herringham and Her Assistants*, London/New York 1915.

6
Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters. A History of European Reactions to Indian Art*, Chicago 1992, 106; Divia Patel, Copying Ajanta. A Rediscovery of Some Nineteenth-Century Paintings, in: *South Asian Studies* 23, 2007, 39–62.

7
Stella Kramrisch, Sunayani Devi, in: *Der Cicerone* 17, 1925, 87–93.

8
On modernist art in Kolkata, see Sria Chatterjee, Writing a Transcultural Modern. Calcutta, 1922, in: Regina Bittner and Kathrin Rhomberg (eds.), *The Bauhaus in Calcutta. An Encounter of the Cosmopolitan Avant-Garde*, Berlin 2013, 101–108; Martin Beattie, Problems of Translation. Lyonel Feininger and Gaganendranath Tagore at the Fourteenth Annual Indian Society of Oriental Art Exhibition, Kolkata, India, in: Martha Langford (ed.), *Narratives Unfolding. National Art Histories in an Unfinished World*, Montreal 2017, 81–99; Julia Madeleine Trouilloud, The Reception of Modern European Art in Calcutta. A Complex Negotiation (1910s–1940s), in: *Artl@s Bulletin* 6/2, 2017, 97–111.

9
Stella Kramrisch, An Indian Cubist, in: *Rupam* 11, 1922, 107–109, here 108.



[Fig. 1]
Paintings by Gaganendranath Tagore, illustrations in: Stella Kramrisch, An Indian Cubist, 107–109, here 109.

After describing the "static order" of European cubism, she writes of Gaganendranath Tagore's work, "Our artist introduced cubism in India, and at once cubism shows another aspect. It is not the static and crystallic, but the animate and dynamic which crystallize into cubes, cones, etc. Here the cubes do not build up a systematic structure, but they express the radiating, turbulent, hovering or pacified forces of inner experience."[10] As can be seen in her early work, Kramrisch interpreted cubist painting comparatively and transculturally, praising the "animate and dynamic" nature of Tagore's cubism in opposition to the "static and crystallic" European cubist paintings. Moreover, she focuses on what can seem like a formal quality in Tagore's work (its "radiating, turbulent" arrangement of cubistic forms) to connect it not only to the much earlier artistic practices of Ajanta, but also to the metaphysical "pacified forces of inner experience".

Present-day scholars have wrestled with the legacy that Kramrisch bequeathed in her voluminous and lyrical writings. As Michael Meister wrote retrospectively of Kramrisch's contributions to the field, "it is her vision that we recognize and struggle to prove".[11] While the connections that she drew between Buddhist paintings of the 2nd century and the art of the 20th century may have been tenuous, they also represent an important endeavor to move beyond an art historical model that led even specialists in Asian art to view their objects of study through a Euro-American paradigm. The paintings at Ajanta allowed Kramrisch to craft alternative art historical genealogies.

In this context, I contend that Kramrisch's arguments about systems of perspective in South Asian painting can also be understood to articulate an oblique critique of the art historian Erwin Panofsky's influential 1924 lecture and then essay, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* [*Die Perspektive als symbolische Form*], which first appeared in published form in 1927. In this work, Panofsky analyzed the development of illusionistic painting in European art that culminated with the introduction of single-point perspective during the Italian Renaissance. In its mimetic capabilities and its enduring strength as western art's most powerful visual "construction", single-point perspective presented for a scholar like Kramrisch one of the greatest obstructions to an affirmative history of South Asian painting. Kramrisch took up this challenge, positioning the techni-

10
Ibid., 109.

11
Michael Meister, Review of Stella Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple, New Delhi, 1976, in: *Art Bulletin* 62/1, 1980, 180–182, here 182. See also Parimoo, Stella Kramrisch's Approach to Art History, 69–88; Rajesh Singh, The Writings of Stella Kramrisch with Reference to Indian Art History. The Issues of Object, Method and Language within the Grand Narrative, in: *East and West* 53, 2003, 127–148; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories. Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, New York 2004, 255–262 and 359–360; Turner, 'Alive and Significant', 40–51; Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism. India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922–1947*, London 2007, 15 and 40; Beattie, Problems of Translation; Trouilloud, The Reception of Modern European Art in Calcutta; and most recently, Christopher S. Wood, 1940–1950, in: *A History of Art History*, Princeton, NJ 2019, 347–360.

ques used in the Ajanta paintings in opposition to what is known variously as Albertian, single-point, optical, or linear perspective. As she wrote later in her career in 1958, the Ajanta paintings were "organised in a perspective which is directed toward the beholder instead of leading away from him, as is the case with optical perspective in Western painting from the Renaissance on".[12]

Furthermore, Kramrisch's writings on Ajanta hold up a revelatory mirror to scholarship on the historiography of European perspectival painting. Studies of Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* published by Michael Ann Holly (1984), Christopher Wood (1991), W. J. T. Mitchell (1994), Hubert Damisch (1995), and James Elkins (1996) reexamined the ground laid by Panofsky, exposing his writings on perspective to the scrutiny of post-structuralist analysis and re-inserting the idea of a historically contingent viewer.[13] Yet Panofsky's evolutionary narrative has received less critique for eliding much of non-European art, given that it situates "Eastern", Byzantine art as a beginning point, and culminates with Italian art as the site of discovery.

Kramrisch created in her account of Ajanta an alternative narrative contemporaneously with that of Panofsky. She and Panofsky both read the work of the neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer, demonstrating how divergently, and yet how complementarily, two scholars could read the same texts in the context of radically different art objects. Kramrisch wove into her writings the broader philosophical concerns of the 1920s and 1930s, meditating on experience and perception, and the phenomenology of painting. Although she does not make reference to their work, her ideas about perspective overlap with the writings of early 20th-century German and Russian scholars such as Oskar Wulff and Pavel Florensky who explored the idea of "reverse perspective" or "inverse perspective" in the context of Byzantine and then later cubist painting.[14] Whether through chance encounters or parallel thinking, Kramrisch adopted the concepts of force, dynamism, and stereometry that reverberate within the manifestos of the European modernist avant-gardes and applied them to Buddhist painting made more than a millen-

12
Stella Kramrisch, Wall and Image in Indian Art, in: *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 102/1, 1958, 7–13, here 13.

13
Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca, NY 1985; Christopher S. Wood, Introduction, in: Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, transl. Christopher S. Wood, New York 1991, 7–26; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago 1994, 17–19; Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, transl. John Goodman, Cambridge, MA 1995; James Elkins, *The Poetics of Perspective*, Ithaca, NY 1996.

14
Clemena Antonova, On the Problem of "Reverse Perspective". Definitions East and West, in: *Leonardo* 43/5, 2010, 464–469. Antonova also notes that Pavel Florensky's own writings on "reverse perspective" in Byzantine art followed directly after he published on Analytical Cubism in the context of Pablo Picasso's early works in the Shchukin Collection, Moscow, following a similar trajectory as Kramrisch, ibid., 467. My thanks to Matthew Vollgraff for this suggestion.

nium before.[15] In this way, Kramrisch reached toward what Hubert Damisch, writing of Panofsky, identifies as a partially fulfilled task: she "demonstrates, makes tangible, how art was able, in its own way, to serve as both site and instrument of an intellectual project".[16] Her excavation of Ajanta's perspectival system is much more than an exercise in visual analysis: Kramrisch proposed, in the early years of the 20th century, that art outside of Europe could be a "site", and an "instrument", of a groundbreaking artistic endeavor.

I. The Paintings of Ajanta

In her 1937 *Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, Kramrisch devotes the first third of the volume to the paintings at Ajanta, and then turns to the paintings at the later, nearby rock-cut cave site of Ellora, where the "forthcoming" perspective is less prominent. The final section of the book provides an overview of the paintings made for the Islamicate sultanates of the Deccan, extending from the 15th into the 19th century. In this final section, Kramrisch brings together an impressive corpus of Deccani manuscript painting and compares these works on paper to contemporaneous wall paintings from the period as well. She argues that the later paintings of the Deccan, based in a Persianate style, exhibit a "flat" perspective in which "the entire panel is one surface".[17] Despite devoting nearly half of the book to the "rigour of outline and surface" that she found in later painting, Kramrisch rarely returned to this material in her subsequent scholarship.[18] By contrast, her interest in the Ajanta paintings' "forthcoming" direction of perspective endured and became an analytic that Kramrisch also went on to apply to sculpture and architecture. Moreover, Kramrisch had transcultural motivations for describing this unique perspectival system: she argued that the "forthcoming" perspective was rare, almost unique to South Asia, and constituted an alternative to European perspectival systems. As Kramrisch wrote in the introduction to *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, the "forthcoming" perspectival system was "relatively the least exploited in painting outside India".[19]

When Stella Kramrisch began writing on the perspectival systems found at Ajanta, the general scholarly consensus about the value of these early Buddhist paintings was thick with Victorian

15
For the formulation of these terms in the writings of the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich, see Miroslav Lamac and Jiri Padrta, The Idea of Suprematism, in: *Kasimir Malewitsch zum 100. Geburtstag*, Cologne 1978, 134–180.

16
Damisch, The Origin of Perspective, 14.

17
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 4 and 123.

18
Ibid., 172.

19
Ibid., 4.

sentimentality. The top British officials involved in Indian art education praised the paintings for their feeling and expressive power, which the scholars likened to the paintings of Italian masters. They did this, perhaps, partly to elevate the significance of ancient art found in British colonial territories within broader European art historical studies. John Griffiths, principal of the J.J. School of Art in Bombay, who had initiated the extensive project of copying the Ajanta frescoes in the mid-19th century, extolled the feeling of the painting of the wife of Nanda in Cave 16 known as the "Dying Princess" [Fig. 2], writing that, "for pathos and sentiment and the unmistakable way of telling its story this picture, I consider, cannot be surpassed in the history of Art. The Florentine could have put better drawing, and the Venetian better colour, but neither could have thrown greater expression into it."[20] E. B. Havell, then the principal of the Calcutta School of Art, wrote of the painting that he called the "Mother and Child before Buddha" that it was, "in its exquisite sentiment comparable with the wonderful Madonnas of Giovanni Bellini" [Fig. 3].[21] Laurence Binyon of the British Museum praised the monumental figural painting of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara [Fig. 4]: "this figure should be famous among the great creations of art, as nobly expressive and as pregnant with mysterious meaning as the colossal forms of Michelangelo".[22] The scholar and curator, Vincent Smith, was much more skeptical of comparisons that held the Ajanta paintings alongside European art. Before quoting Griffiths extensively, Smith writes that the "Dying Princess" was "deservedly praised by [Griffiths] in glowing language, endorsed by Dr. [James] Burgess and Mr. [James] Fergusson". Yet Smith wrote disparagingly that the Ajanta paintings did not merit praise "when compared with the world's masterpieces – no Indian art work does – but they are entitled to a respectable place among the second or third class".[23] Kramrisch's predecessors had analyzed the paintings according to criteria developed for European art and ranked them according to the prejudices of the day.

Moreover, while these European art historians looked to the sensuousness of the bodies and the religious content of the figural compositions, Kramrisch saw rocks. Throughout her long career, Kramrisch developed a rich language to describe the painted, cubic forms that recur throughout the backgrounds of the narrative wall paintings at Ajanta. She saw these rocks as the key to the

20
Cited in Mitter, Much Maligned Monsters, 268.

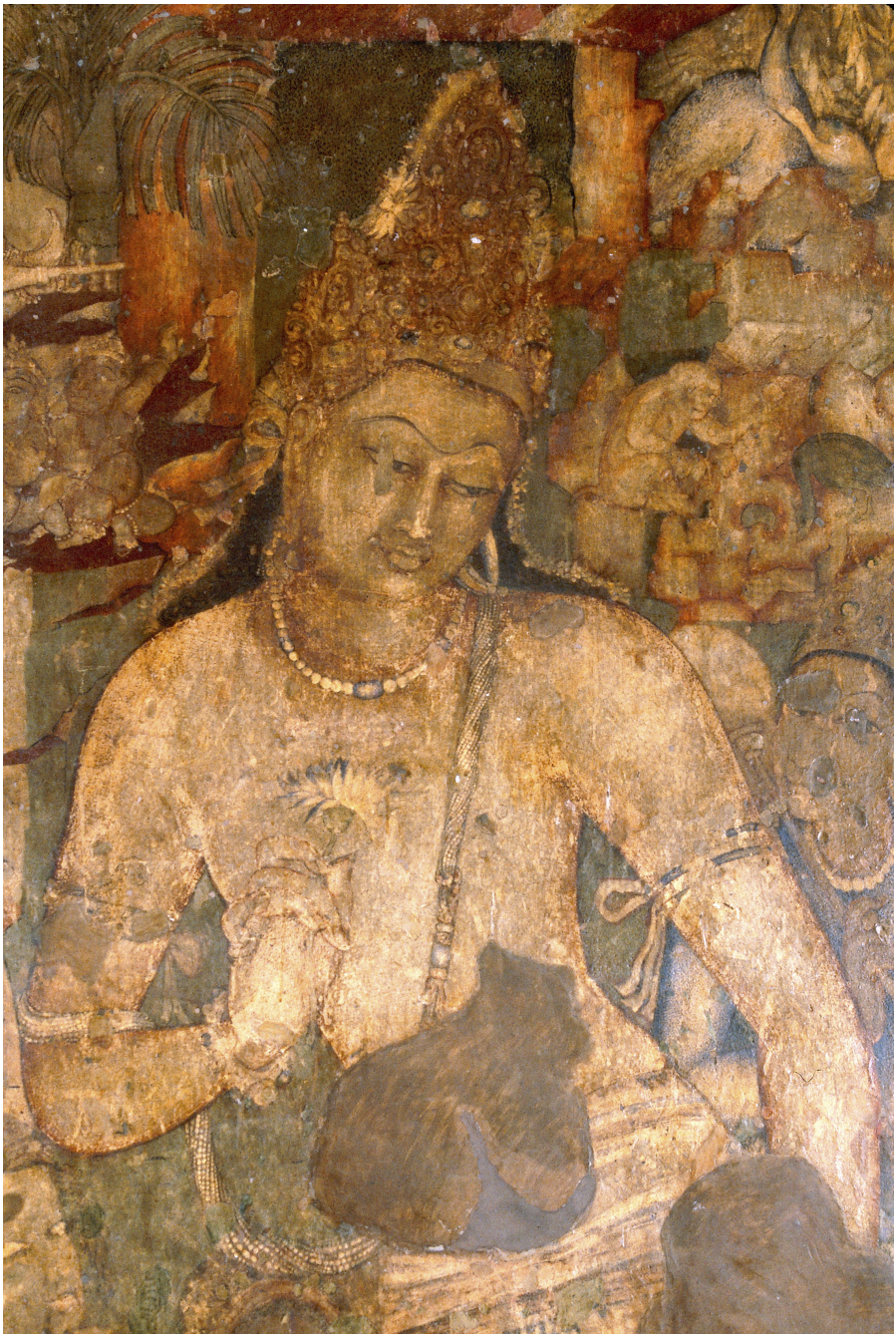
21
E. B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, London 1908, 164–165.

22
Laurence Binyon, *The Art of Asia*, London 1916, 7. For a sampling of such praise given to the Ajanta paintings in the early 20th century, see the popular guidebook, Kanaiyalal H. Vakil, *At Ajanta*, Bombay 1929, 29 and 36–37.

23
Vincent A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon. From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Oxford 1911, 173, cited in Mitter, Much Maligned Monsters, 268.

[Fig. 2]
Portion of a mural painting, ca. 462–480 CE, mineral pigments on plaster, Cave 16, Ajanta, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India, (Photograph, Walter Spink, 1968), AIIS Accession No. 061512, Photo: American Institute of Indian Studies.

[Fig. 3]
Mural Painting of the Buddha, ca. 462–480 CE, mineral pigments on plaster, Cave 17, Ajanta, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India (Photograph, 1978), Courtesy of University of Pennsylvania Libraries, the Mary Binney Wheeler Image Collection.



[Fig. 4]
Mural painting depicting Bodhisattva Padmapani, ca. 462–480 CE, mineral pigments on plaster, Cave 1, Ajanta, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India, image: Regents of the University of Michigan, Department of the History of Art, Visual Resources Collections.

perspectival system at Ajanta, pushing forward into the Ajanta paintings and hurtling into the figural scenes.

Kramrisch's contemporaries had noted these rock forms but did not investigate them further. Alfred Foucher called the rocks "crooked forms symbolizing a mountain" in his 1900 study of Buddhist iconography.[24] Unlike Foucher, Kramrisch largely avoided the iconographic decoding of the narrative scenes that engrossed her colleagues at the time, often only providing brief identifications for the story or figures in a scene.[25]

Kramrisch also resisted descriptions of the rock forms that saw them as derivative or aligned them with so-called "primitive art". Josef Strzygowski, Kramrisch's dissertation advisor from Vienna, wrote a specially commissioned article for Calcutta's *Indian Society of Oriental Art Journal* in 1933 that acknowledged the Ajanta rock forms as the "cubes and blocks" of the non-naturalistic landscape. In this text, which Kramrisch translated into English, Strzygowski avoided giving Indian artists credit for the projecting forms, writing that they "must have been imported into India". He continued, "this type of landscape built up with '*Formlinge*' ['form-things'] [...] found its way from Iran into all directions, into the mosaics of the Mediterranean and into eastern Asiatic art of the type of Tamamushi-shrine".[26] Kramrisch's account of these "cubes and blocks" differs from Strzygowski's. She never makes this argument for the diffusion of rock forms from Iran into India or their export out of it, although Strzygowski's proposed connection between rock forms in India and Mediterranean mosaics further links Kramrisch's work to the contemporaneous German and Russian studies of Byzantine art and perspective.

When Kramrisch translated Strzygowski's text from German into English, she also transformed the meaning of his use of the word "*Formlinge*" with such facility that it is almost unnoticeable. Using parenthetical notes in her translation, she explains the word, "*Formlinge*", meaning "form-thing", by glossing it as "i.e. cubical devices". When Kramrisch translated "*Formlinge*" into "cubical devices", she was also revising Strzygowski's understanding of the rock forms. The term "*Formlinge*" is a combination of the English "form" and a German suffix that suggests something indeterminate. The ethnographer and archaeologist, Leo Frobenius, a contemporary of Strzygowski, first used the term to describe motifs on San rock art in Zimbabwe that were suggestive of organic forms such as trees, but not definitive as to what was being represented. Accord-

24
Foucher described "formes biscornues symbolisent une montagne". Alfred Foucher, *Étude sur L'iconographie Bouddhique de L'Inde*, Paris 1900, 35.

25
See, for example, Alfred Foucher, Lettre d'Ajantā, in: *Journal Asiatique* 17, 1921, 201–245.

26
Josef Strzygowski, India's Position in the Art of Asia, transl. Stella Kramrisch, in: *Indian Society of Oriental Art Journal* 1, 1933, 7–17, here 11. In Box 7, Folder 14, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

ing to Siyakha Mguni, a *formling* is a "thing or object with a 'form' or 'shape' that is difficult to specify".[27] By providing her own translation, Kramrisch shifted the rock forms from the somewhat vague "form-things" to the intentional "cubical devices".

The rocks that Foucher, Strzygowski, and Kramrisch saw were not naturalistic forms. As Kramrisch described them, they were "prismatic shapes" that "show three surfaces, front, side and bottom simultaneously of the single boulders, in contrasting colours and with a shading which gives volume towards the edges" [Fig. 5].[28] Her interest in the rocks of the Ajanta paintings may have emerged out of her engagement with the three-dimensional medium of sculpture. Kramrisch's previous publications on sculpture, and particularly on the sculptural reliefs at the early Buddhist sites of Sanchi and Bharhut, had emphasized the linear, two-dimensional features of the shallow relief sculptures with particular attention to the facial expressions, bodily postures, and the interconnectedness of the figural forms. Characteristic of this focus is her first published article, "The Representation of Nature in Early Buddhist Sculpture (Bharhut–Sanchi)" which appeared in *Rupam* in 1921.[29] In this article, Kramrisch also emphasized the artist's interest in clarity of meaning, writing that the "conscious purpose of the artist is clear representation", and "to narrate, to tell exactly".[30] By the 1930s, her focus had shifted from narration to form, from "clear representation" to strategies for capturing space and volume in painting and sculpture.

While Kramrisch briefly mentioned renderings of three-dimensional structures in this earlier work, by the time of her 1933 volume on *Indian Sculpture*, Kramrisch included this theme in her opening chapter, entitled "Functional Devices of Inter-Relatedness" which addressed the "Visualization of the Third Dimension". She writes that the "conquest of the third dimension is one of the foremost tasks of every art tradition in the making". As she sets out to explain the rendering of the third dimension in *Indian Sculpture*, she establishes a contrast with European art:

> the system accepted by early classical Indian sculpture is not less systematical in its own way than that of the Italian

27
Siyakha Mguni, *Continuity and Change in San Belief and Ritual. Some Aspects of the Enigmatic 'Formling' and Tree Motifs from Matopo Hills Rock Art, Zimbabwe*, MA Diss., University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2002, 10. On the similarities in the "global projects" of Strzygowski and Frobenius, see Rémi Labrusse, Anthropological Delirium. Josef Strzygowski Confronts Alois Riegl, transl. John Goodman, in: *Art in Translation* 6, 2014, 59–75, here 68.

28
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 7.

29
Stella Kramrisch, The Representation of Nature in Early Buddhist Sculpture (Bharhut–Sanchi), in: *Rupam* 8, 1921, reproduced in: Stoler Miller (ed.), Exploring India's Sacred Art, 123–129.

30
Ibid., 128.

[Fig. 5]
Mural painting of rock forms, shrine antechamber, ca. 462–480 CE, mineral pigments on plaster, Cave 2, Ajanta, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India, photo by Sylvia Houghteling.

> Renaissance. But where the one endeavours to be optically correct, the other undertakes to be functionally consistent [...] [The devices in Indian sculpture] consist of a serviceable stock in trade, and have nothing to do with any optical perspective, be it a bird's-eye view or any other.[31]

According to Kramrisch, the "noticeable conventions" for depicting space included stacking figures above each other (instead of suggesting that one is behind another) and adjusting size of figures based upon their relative importance.

When Kramrisch turns to describe how important objects are made visible in early Indian relief structure, she identifies a stereometric approach to the rendering of the third dimension:

> The third dimension, according to Western perspective, has to be inferred, and cannot be seen as such, if rendered in relief; for then one surface only, i.e. the one parallel to the ground of the relief can be shown entire. The early Indian craftsman, according to the demands of the scene and its visibility or knowability, will tilt into the relief any surface on the top and at the sides of the vertical surface, to show the whole cube or prism of each single volume or object. So it comes about that altars of the Buddha, for instance, which are centres of worship, show the whole of the top surface almost as well as the front surface [...] The same is true of houses, where the two sides as well as the gabled roof make a compact stereometrical shape. This method, however, is carried out with utmost rigour in the rendering of rocks, specially [sic] in paintings (Ajanta, cave ix). There the hill is imagined as an array of several boulders, and each of them is abstractly transformed into a prism, of which three sides at a time are delineated, in contrasting colours as far as possible, so that extensiveness may be punctiliously demonstrated.[32]

Whereas European sculptors, according to Kramrisch, would render solely the surface parallel to the ground plane of a relief, the "early Indian craftsman" would splay the cube open, depicting not only the sides parallel to the ground plane, but also those perpendicular to it. To illustrate this point, she draws upon a photograph of the Bharhut relief sculptures held in the Indian Museum in Kolkata, in which one can see a platform, decorated with flowers, that has been tilted to face the viewer [Fig. 6]. As Kramrisch writes, the visual result does not conform to mimetic or mathematical naturalism, but it captures the "extensiveness" and the energy of what she called these "stereometrical" forms.

31
Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, Calcutta/London 1933, 19.

32
Ibid., 21.

[Fig. 6]
Relief carving on vedika railing, ca. 125–73 BCE, sandstone, Bharhut Stupa, Madhya Pradesh, Sunga period, Indian Museum, Kolkata, image: Regents of the University of Michigan, Department of the History of Art, Visual Resources Collections.

In a mathematical sense, stereometry refers to the study of three-dimensional shapes and volumes in space. Stereometry is separate from planimetry, which is the study of two-dimensional planes. In the first decades of the 20th century, the distinction between stereometry and planimetry was taken up by artists of the European avant-garde, particularly those interested in abstract, materialist forms of painting. Stella Kramrisch would have come into contact with European avant-garde experiments with planimetry and stereometry in 1922, when the Bauhaus famously sent an exhibition of pedagogical models and artworks to be exhibited in Kolkata.[33] Christina Lodder and Martin Hammer note that in German and Russian-language texts of the period, artists made a distinction between the renderings allowed by stereometry and planimetry: while stereometry was thought to deal with "the study of bodies and spatial figures generally", planimetry was defined as "devoted exclusively to figures lying on a plane".[34]

In order to evoke this sense of spatial figures, a stereometric drawing employs different techniques from those used in recessional perspective to depict figures lying on a plane. When a cube is drawn in recessional perspective, the front face of the cube is flush with the picture plane and the lines suggesting the sides of the cube recede into space in convergent orthogonal lines leading towards an unseen vanishing point. In a stereometric drawing, the lines suggesting the sides of the cube do not converge, but instead run parallel, as they do in real space. The prismatic forms that Kramrisch identified in Bharhut sculpture and the Ajanta paintings are rendered in this parallel perspective; their sides do not converge towards an unseen vanishing point.

The visual play of the prismatic forms at Ajanta, Kramrisch would go on to write in 1937, cannot be found in any textual instructions for artists. They are not "described in any of the known texts on painting [...] They are, however, essential requisites."[35] The essential quality of the rocks was that they brought force and energy to the paintings. In the same way that 20th-century abstract painters identified a charge and a dynamism behind their non-objective

33
On the Bauhaus in Kolkata, see Chatterjee, Writing a Transcultural Modern; Mitter, The Triumph of Modernism; and R. Siva Kumar, *Santiniketan. The Making of a Contextual Modernism*, New Delhi 1997.

34
Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder, *Constructing Modernity. The Art & Career of Naum Gabo*, New Haven, CT 2000, 51. A central premise of Naum Gabo's "constructions" was that stereometry was a description not of the mass occupied by a volume, but of the space. Kramrisch too was interested in the interplay between space and volume, writing in a footnote: "Space is form and – as space penetrates into form, form is space." Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 5, fn. 3.

35
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 8. Despite Kramrisch's comments, in a study of South Asian texts on painting from the first millennium CE, Isabella Nardi has found that "proportion" as well as "loss" and "gain" (which she glosses as "foreshortening") were important principles in early medieval texts on the principles of painting. Isabella Nardi, *The Theory of Citrasūtras in Indian Painting. A Critical Re-Evaluation of Their Uses and Interpretations*, London/New York 2006, 24–27.

works, Kramrisch too identified a propelling force of "becoming" in the abstract rocks. "Their stereometry proceeds from points which have to be imagined *behind* the painting itself, where they lie hidden like the germs of things to come. Their stereometry is charged with the spell which shows their form in the making."[36] The rocks were not merely a substructure for narrative; they were themselves the "essential requisites" because encased within them was the metaphysical meaning of the caves.

Kramrisch's writings on the rocks are a synthesis between this kind of vague spiritualism and the most rigorous language of avant-garde abstraction. She allied the stereometric rendering of the rock forms at Ajanta with technology and modernity, attributing to the forms "the energy of a train shown in a cinema with the ever growing engine coming larger and larger towards the spectator".[37] These gestures toward early cinema were not uncommon. In the same period, art historian Heinrich Zimmer employed similar language to describe Indian sculpture:

> This piece of sculpture is more like a motion picture than a painting. The notion that there is nothing static, nothing abiding, but only the flow of a relentless process with everything originating, growing, decaying, vanishing – this wholly dynamic view of life, of the individual and of the universe, is one of the fundamental conceptions [...] of later Hinduism.[38]

While Kramrisch drew upon metaphors from the cinema, she was also detailing a kind of escape from what Henri Bergson called in 1911 the "contrivance" of cinematography. In Kramrisch's understanding, the Ajanta paintings did not create an illusion, or artificial reconstruction of what Henri Bergson called "becoming".[39] According to Kramrisch, the beholder sees the actual process of becoming at the Ajanta caves:

> These paintings do not give an illusion on a flat surface, of the three dimensional conditions of concrete appearance or reality. The art precipitated from a reality teeming with

36
Kramisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 8.

37
Ibid., 7. Among the Lumière brothers' first short films from 1895 was one depicting a train pulling into a station. I thank Jo Ziebritzki for this reference.

38
Quoted in Adam Hardy, *The Temple Architecture of India*, Hoboken, NJ 2007, 38.

39
In the cinema, Bergson faulted the film "apparatus" with erasing the "inner becoming of things". The moving picture blurred the distinctions between different moments in time, creating seams between discrete photographs, allowing viewers to "place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially", Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, transl. Arthur Mitchell, Lanham, MD 1983, 306. What was lost in cinema was the "infinite multiplicity of becomings" that, in real experience, "passes before our eyes", ibid., 304. I am grateful to Ayla Lepine for pointing out this connection to me.

> possibilities of manifestation of which some are shown as they proceed from within it.[40]

Instead of distancing the viewer from experience, the cave spaces that held the Ajanta paintings made experience richer, denser, and more alive.

II. The Meaning of the Rocks

In *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, Kramrisch illustrated her commentary on the rock formations with a black-and-white reproduction of a 19th-century oil study of Cave 10 at Ajanta made by the students of John Griffiths [Fig. 7].[41] Yet Kramrisch's writings on Ajanta were predicated on her actually being there, corporeally experiencing the space of the caves. As she wrote in a footnote to *A Survey of Indian Painting*, "The notes on which the present study is based were taken on the spot during repeated visits".[42] Likewise, in the image captions and the footnotes of the text, she tries to mitigate the distance between her readership in Europe or elsewhere and the actual spaces of the caves by visually describing what the copied oil paintings or photographs can tell us. In the caption to each black-and-white image that appears in *A Survey of Indian Painting*, Kramrisch provides the actual paint colors that existed on the murals. In a footnote to Griffiths's oil painting, for instance, she notes that many of the rocks that exist in the Ajanta cave painting have been left blank in the copy.[43] Kramrisch's commentary also suggests her unusual position as a European-trained scholar based in Kolkata who was able to make "repeated visits" to Ajanta. Her extra notations demonstrate both how difficult it was to convey the paintings in fullness in her published work, and also how vital the experiential, spatial understanding of the paintings was to her arguments about perspective.

The painting in Cave 10 of Ajanta that Kramrisch reproduces dates to the earliest period of excavation and decoration, from approximately 100 BCE to 150 CE.[44] Positioned flat on the right

40
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 11.

41
The image Kramrisch produces is a painted copy made by John Griffiths and seven students in the late 19th century. It is currently held in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Early copies such as this one are often the most complete records of paintings, which have been subject to damage over the last century. On the history of the copying of the Ajanta paintings, see Patel, Copying Ajanta, 39–62.

42
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 206, fn. 76.

43
Ibid., 206, fn. 73.

44
Walter Spink, The Earliest Caves (c. 100 BCE to c. 150 CE), in: id., *Ajanta. History and Development. Volume 4: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture – Year by Year*, Boston/Leiden 2009, 1–5.

[Fig. 7]
John Griffiths and students from the Bombay School of Art, *Copy of mural painting of the Chaddanta Jātaka from Cave 1, Ajanta*, ca. 1872–1885, oil on canvas © The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IS.19-1885.

wall of the barrel-vaulted hall, the *Chaddanta Jātaka* tells the story of a queen, Subhadda, who summons a group of hunters to her court and commissions one hunter, Sonuttara, to kill the elephant king, a large, white, six-tusked elephant. In her previous life, the queen was the elephant wife of the six-tusked elephant and she became jealous of his attention to others. In this *jātaka*, a story of the Buddha's previous lives, the six-tusked elephant is an animal incarnation of the Buddha.[45]

The scene that Kramrisch reproduced in her book depicts the hunter catching a glimpse of the six-tusked elephant for the first time. The hunter, who in the textual narrative has climbed atop a hill, can be seen holding a sack over his shoulder and is looking out from a grotto-like space of projecting rock forms. His body and face are rendered in three-quarter-length view and the rocks that push by his head open out in the direction of his gaze. The frontal face, one side, as well as the bottom face of the rocks can be seen. The positioning of the hunter's head alongside these prismatic forms creates the illusion that the rocks extend in front of him, stopping only when they hit the surface of the picture plane. In her formal descriptions, Kramrisch notes that the projecting rocks can overshadow the human figures. "The groups [of figures]", she wrote in 1937, "taken as a whole are freed from the forward direction for they dwell in and are supported by it."[46] In her 1954 work, *The Art of India*, Kramrisch wrote that the various figures press forward, "as if discharged from a cornucopia behind the painted wall [... and] seem to penetrate it and to halt inside the painting, which is filled with their plastically rounded volumes".[47] The most aggressive forward movement in the painting occurs with the rocks, while both the hunter and the conversing figures behind him have been "halted inside the painting".

Seen in this painted representation, the rock shapes in the *Chaddanta* mural painting could be a technical feature, meant only to divide space. They could also be interpreted as purely mimetic, intended to represent actual rocks in a mountainous landscape. In the text of the *jātaka*, for instance, the hunter is said to have gained his first view of the elephant from the top of the "Golden Cliff".[48] It seems significant, however, that the scene in which the hunter first views the six-tusked elephant is one that propels his actions forward, leading to his slaughter of the Buddha. The rocks on either side seem to press into that futurity, creating stillness around the

45
Dieter Schlingloff, *Guide to the Ajanta Paintings*, New Delhi 1999, 26–27; Robert Alexander Neil, *The Jātaka. Or, Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, New Delhi 1990, 20–31.

46
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 16.

47
Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India. Traditions of Indian Sculpture, Painting and Architecture*, London 1954, 47.

48
Neil, The Jātaka, 27.

hunter. The prismatic shapes visually anticipate and perhaps even implicate the beholder in the urgency and moral gravity of what is to come.

The paintings of Cave 10 represent Ajanta's earliest phase and they contain the most bulbous rock formations. In the caves from Ajanta's later period in the 5th century, the rock formations have become geometric and boxy. Contrasting colors have been added to highlight the sharp, rectilinear edges of these rocks. In paintings of the same *Chaddanta* scene in Cave 17 (which Walter Spink dates to a rapid period of decoration in ca. 469–471), the curving forms of the elephants fracture into jutting geometric shapes painted in the upper right in yellow, white, and dark green [Fig. 8].[49] These shapes are less naturalistic and more linear; unlike those painted in Cave 10, which could still be read as literal rocks, these forms disrupt the narrative space of the paintings and press forward into the space of the hall.

In her writing, Kramrisch emphasized that the visual rhythm of the "forthcoming" paintings rather than the narrative continuity of the story, is even more apparent when the space is experienced three dimensionally. Kramrisch described the various scenes as coming forward in an outward direction

> up to the point where the one instant or scene of a story is strung together with the next in a sequence in which time has no share. Although many stories are painted, their course is not visualized. Such moments and scenes which endure in their importance throughout the story are laid out and are linked rhythmically.[50]

In her account of the narrative elements of the paintings, Kramrisch celebrated the seeming incongruity between depicted scenes, an interest also of scholars that have come after her. Vidya Dehejia has written of the Simhala mural on the wall of Cave 17: "The action moves in crisscross fashion, and no specific pattern emerges from a close study of the painted wall. In fact, one is confronted with a complete network of movement in space and time."[51] Dehejia introduces the term "narrative networks" to describe the interlacing of events and places that occurs across the mural walls. Like Dehejia after her, Kramrisch attended to the visual connections between scenes, the rhythmic linking by which "one instant or scene of a story is strung together". Kramrisch departs from the idea that narratives should be linear (for these are sequences "in which time has

[49] On the dating of Cave 17, see Walter Spink, 469–471. King Upendragupta's caves 17, 19, 20, 29, in: id., Ajanta. History and Development, 45–46.

[50] Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 7.

[51] Vidya Dehejia, On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art, in: *Art Bulletin* 72/3, 1990, 374–392, here 388.

[Fig. 8]
Mural painting of the Chaddanta Jātaka, ca. 462–480 CE, mineral pigments on plaster, Cave 17, Ajanta, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India, photo by John C. Huntington, Courtesy of the John C. and Susan L. Huntington Photographic Archive of Buddhist and Asian Art.

no share"), and reminds us to look at the borders between, as much as at the internal content, for an understanding of the scenes. The laws of time and space have been suspended in these cave spaces; the point of the paintings is not to tell a straightforward narrative, but to enclose the viewer in a meditative state.

The "projecting forms" at Ajanta press into the viewer, creating an immersive environment. Kramrisch wrote, "The same composition sometimes extends from wall to wall at an angle of ninety degrees and includes the enclosed space as its setting [...] It creates an interior space, immersed in which the beholder lives the myth."[52] Because the cave spaces are covered fully in paintings and rock-cut sculpture, there is no room for escape. The experience of viewing the paintings is both physical and psychological, both visual and spiritual. Unlike the single paintings with which Kramrisch illustrates the scenes, the caves completely envelop the beholder.

III. Perspective as Symbolic Form in South Asian and European Art

In 1937, Kramrisch returned to Europe to deliver a series of lectures at the Courtauld Institute of Art, the same year that she published *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*. Erwin Panofsky and Ernst Cassirer had recently fled to London after the rise of Nazism in Germany and, according to Barbara Stoler Miller, Kramrisch was influenced by their work, although she was "more impressed by Cassirer's *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen*".[53] In her continuing writings on Ajanta, Kramrisch seems to be reaching past her art historical colleagues towards the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer, the scholar whose work inspired the title of Panofsky's essay.

Erwin Panofsky's essay, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (delivered as a lecture in German in 1924 for the Warburg Library for the Science of Culture in Hamburg and published in 1927), transformed what had been relatively atomized debates about perspective within the fields of optics, Gestalt psychology, mathematics, and art history into a semi-philosophical question, introduced within the interdisciplinary atmosphere of the Warburg Library. In Panofsky's telling, the development in 15th-century Italian painting of a mathematically organized linear perspective represented much more than a new artistic trick; he interpreted this perspective device, using what he called Ernst Cassirer's "felicitous" term, as a "symbolic form", imbued with "spiritual meaning". "This is why it is essential", Panofsky wrote, "to ask of artistic periods and regions not only

52
Kramrisch, The Art of India, 46.

53
Barbara Stoler Miller writes, "Stella had studied Kant's theories of knowledge and judgment while she was a student in Gymnasium; she thus had a basis for understanding Cassirer's language and mode of analysis. She found his critical approach to the study of culture relevant to her own work on the complex symbolism of the Hindu temple". Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Essay, 17–18. I have not found evidence of any direct discussion between Kramrisch, Panofsky, and Cassirer.

whether they have perspective, but also which perspective they have."[54] Panofsky's essay increased the significance of perspectival systems within broader art historical studies, bringing with it an emphasis on the developments in 15th-century Europe and the period's systemization of linear perspective.

Panofsky narrated the development of single-point perspective as a construct, but also as a release of painting from the spatial dictates of architecture and sculpture. Whereas Kramrisch viewed painting as the outermost manifestation of an essentially architectural principle of "forthcoming", "projecting itself through the walls of the temple and expressing itself on and beyond the walls as buttresses and images",[55] Panofsky described Renaissance perspective as developing from the "emancipation of plastic bodies" from architecture.[56] The dual emancipation of sculpture from architecture, and painting from the plastic space of sculpture, Panofsky argued, made way for a revolutionary coherence between painted figures and their spatial surroundings. It made "their field of activity into a veritable stage" that the viewer beheld from afar.[57] Practically, the way to achieve this was through the use of single-point perspective, a mathematically consistent rendering of space in which three-dimensionality and spatial distance is suggested by the recession of shapes and figures in accordance with orthogonal lines, all of which meet at a single vanishing point.

Panofsky's narrative culminated with the 15th-century's systemization of linear perspective, or what he called "an objectification of the subjective".[58] Panofsky concluded that, "perspective seals off religious art from the realm of the magical", by "mathematically fully rationalizing an image of space".[59] Single-point perspective made it possible for a painter "to construct an unambiguous and consistent spatial structure" as a representation of visual perception.[60]

Kramrisch's analysis of the Ajanta paintings departed from Panofsky's perspective "sealed off from the subjective". By doing so, Kramrisch was also connecting her writing to the work of another one of her professors, Max Dvořák, whose lectures she

54
Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form, 41.

55
Kramrisch, Wall and Image in Indian Art, 7.

56
Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form, 53.

57
Ibid.

58
Ibid., 66.

59
Ibid., 72.

60
Ibid., 63.

attended in 1916–1917.[61] In a way that would seem to have shaped Kramrisch's later studies, Dvořák gave his sustained attention to epochs, such as the early Christian and Mannerist periods, when philosophy and religious sentiment were marked by a spiritual fervor that eschewed rationalism and orderly representation. He developed not only historical explanatory tools, but an appreciative narrative of these periods whose art had been denigrated as decadent and disorderly in comparison with the aesthetic norms of Classical and Renaissance painting and sculpture. Through Dvořák, Kramrisch may have gained a sensitivity to art historical moments when, in Dvořák's words, "Man opens roofs and vaults and replaces their heavy materiality with boundless space and optical visions".[62]

Kramrisch identified a specific alternative to Panofsky's linear perspective using spiritual language like that of Dvořák. If we perceive space "in a direction that does not lead away from us, but points back towards ourselves", she wrote, we become "stage and spectator of the world as we see and live it. There is nothing to lead us away into a distance outside ourselves and there is no room for nostalgia or perspective."[63] In melding "stage and spectator", Kramrisch denied the passivity of the spectator, and the "veritable stage" on which Panofsky's figures performed, allowing for the viewer's active participation in the scene. As she wrote with emphasis in an undated notebook, "Whereas the classical western painters make him [the observer] view the picture from 'in front of it'", in Indian painting, particularly at Ajanta, "the observer *moves* in this pictorial world".[64]

Kramrisch made these claims in a climate that lauded rationalism "sealed off from the realm of the magical". Kramrisch's contemporary, Ludwig Bachhofer, regarded deviance from mathematical, recessional perspective as a failure of skill on the part of the artist, attributed to technical inferiority, rather than elective artistic decisions. Bachhofer, a German émigré scholar of Chinese, Japanese, and Indian art and a professor at the University of Chicago, published a review of Kramrisch's *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan* in *The Art Bulletin* in 1939. In it, he contested Kramrisch's claim that the rendering of rocks and figures at Ajanta constituted

61
Kramrisch is documented as having enrolled in Dvořák's lectures "Über das Verhältnis der Kunst im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Zu den geistigen Strömungen" in the winter semester of 1916/1917, see Archive Information System of the University of Vienna, *Nationale der Studentinnen der Philosophischen Fakultät Wintersemester 1916/17 Buchstaben J–M*, Phil. Nat. 42 Frauen, f. 79 (November 26, 2024). I thank Jo Ziebritzki and Matthew Vollgraff for this reference.

62
Quoted in Mitchell Schwarzer, Cosmopolitan Difference in Max Dvořák's Art Historiography, in: *The Art Bulletin* 74/4, 2014, 669–678, here 675.

63
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 5.

64
Stella Kramrisch, undated notebook, Box 37, Folder 1: South and Deccan Art and Architecture, Indus Valley Civilization, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

"a peculiar conception of space", arguing instead that the paintings revealed the "plasticity" of Indian art and the fact that "The Hindu [...] is a born sculptor, and his painting is actually plastic art realized in another medium". The Ajanta rocks did reveal the "forthcoming" qualities that Kramrisch ascribed to them but "Indian painting [...] stops short of a real apprehension of space [...] the utmost the Indian could bring himself to present in this respect was a small group of figures within a closed room which he conceived as a sort of hollow body with definite boundaries".[65]

Bachhofer provides a revealing foil for Kramrisch. Bachhofer was a student of Heinrich Wölfflin at the University of Basel in Switzerland and completed his doctoral studies with a dissertation on Japanese woodcuts in 1921. Bachhofer struggled to integrate Wölfflin's famous stylistic dichotomies into his subsequent study of Chinese painting. Eventually, in a 1931 article entitled "Representation of Space in Chinese Painting during the First Thousand Years of the Christian Era", Bachhofer turned to Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* as a template for how to articulate the progression of spatial representations in Chinese painting. As Lillian Lan-ying Tseng has demonstrated, Bachhofer was faithful to Panofsky's model of the "sequential development of perspective".[66] His account began with the earliest forms of perspective in ancient Chinese painting and ended with the 8th-century Buddhist paintings at Dunhuang where orthogonal lines are present but do not ultimately converge at a single vanishing point. Bachhofer argued that even in the great paintings of Dunhuang, this "fourth stage which was so important in the Western painting is missing".[67] Bachhofer's insistence on a stylistic progression made him locate something as missing in the Dunhuang paintings, whereas Kramrisch describes the earlier Ajanta paintings as works with a plenitude of artistic merit.

In more recent years, scholars of Chinese Buddhist art have departed from Bachhofer's formulations and have proposed that the variety of perspectival forms present in medieval Buddhist painting embodies part of a robust artistic and intellectual process of plan-

65
Ludwig Bachhofer, Review of Stella Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan, in: *The Art Bulletin* 21/1, 1939, 93–94, here 93. At times, it is surprising how an astute scholar like Bachhofer dismisses the substance of Kramrisch's approach. Kramrisch readily admitted that the painters have created "a small group of figures within a closed room", but her interpretation returns the intentionality to the painter. The painter has created what Kramrisch calls "houses [that] open like magical boxes" in which "no lids are required, for the contents exactly fill the place of their performance, and terrace or balcony, pavilion or hermitage fit the charged space as the glass walls of an aquarium hold the water within it with the fish, gravel and plants". Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 11.

66
Lillian Lan-ying Tseng, Traditional Chinese Painting through the Modern European Eye. The Case of Ludwig Bachhofer, in: *Tradition and Modernity. Comparative Perspectives*, Beijing 2007, 508–533, here 519.

67
Quoted in Tseng, Traditional Chinese Painting, 527.

ning.[68] Multiple forms of perspective, as Eugene Wang has argued, can bridge the pictorial universe of the paintings with the viewer's world.[69] These scholars have connected disruptions of smooth perspectival space to a particular spiritual or philosophical approach.

Indeed, it was the metaphorical relationship between the formal composition of the art object's recession into depth (its "perspective" or *Anschauung*) and the artist's view of the world, a Kantian term that also could be translated as "perspective" or *Weltanschauung*, that made it possible for Panofsky to examine optical perspective as a form of philosophical inquiry.[70] For Panofsky, Albertian perspective was not just a newfangled artist's tool in the Renaissance, but a prescient articulation of a rationalist ethos that would come to dominate the humanist philosophy of the period. It was, Panofsky wrote, "nothing other than a concrete expression of a contemporary advance in epistemology or natural philosophy".[71]

Kramrisch too adopted the language of "perspective" as a viewpoint and as a worldview. In an article she published in German in *Artibus Asiae* in 1940, Kramrisch argued that even the varied floral, figural and geometric patterns that adorn the ceilings of the Ajanta caves – some of them rendered two-dimensionally, and some using illusionistic techniques to suggest three-dimensionality – were potential evidence of differing philosophical "views", or *Anschauungen*, held by the painters who decorated the ceilings.[72] For Kramrisch, the "views" of the painters were revealed not in their decision to render smooth mathematical space but in the variation in a relief pattern or the disruption caused by a set of protruding rocks.

Kramrisch's work also captures the intrinsically relativistic and constructivist concept inherent to Ernst Cassirer's symbolic forms. Cassirer, a neo-Kantian philosopher whose work spanned aesthetics, science, and language, proposed the idea of symbolic forms as a way to synthesize the development of scientific thought with the creation of cultural meanings. Inspired by the publication of

68
Sarah Fraser has shown that extant preparatory sketches provide a way of understanding the lived practices of early wall painters at Dunhuang and their "cognitive mapping" of "larger, complex tableaux". See ead., *Performing the Visual. The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*, Stanford, CA 2004, 70.

69
Eugene Y. Wang argues that the artists of the Dunhuang paintings intentionally deployed two different forms of perspective: bird-eye's perspective as well as what Wang calls "mirror" perspective, a view of a shallow, recessional space where one is metaphysically meant to see the Buddha image as one sees oneself in a mirror. See id., *Shaping the Lotus Sutra. Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*, Seattle 2005, 292.

70
"Perspective", Christopher Wood writes, "encourages a strange kind of identification of the art-object and the world-object. It is perspective, after all, that makes possible the metaphor of a *Weltanschauung*, a worldview, in the first place." Wood, Introduction, 13.

71
Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form, 65.

72
Stella Kramrisch, Einige Typen indischer Deckenmalerei, in: *Artibus Asiae* 8/1, 1940, 5–15.

Albert Einstein's *Theory of Relativity*, Cassirer came to view both science and culture as relativist forms of understanding, constantly evolving in a developmental process. Cassirer's work, particularly as it related to language in his first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923), traced a dynamic path of development from the most intuitive, expressive forms of language to the representative functions of natural language.[73] These developing symbolic forms can be seen to aid in the process, in the dynamic and constitutive act, of giving meaning to space and time.

If the symbolic form of linear perspective is constitutive of our knowledge it is because it helps us to understand three dimensions. It communicates that what in reality are parallel lines have been transformed into orthogonal lines that converge at a single point.[74] Yet this relationship is never explicitly clarified by Panofsky; the use that Panofsky makes of the philosophy of symbolic forms is limited to the single sentence in which he introduces Cassirer's "felicitous term". Panofsky uses "symbolic form" to suggest that perspective grew out of the human process of attaching "spiritual meaning" to a "concrete material sign". For him, linear perspective as a "material sign" solves the question of how to represent space, positing an end to a process and a final agreement on a perspectival system that would endure for five hundred years.

Kramrisch embraces Cassirer's thought in her account of projecting rocks in a more elastic way. Kramrisch's writing shares with Cassirer's account of the development of the symbolic form of language an interest in spatial metaphors that are not unlike Kramrisch's description of the projecting forms at Ajanta. Cassirer argues for spatial relations as the most fundamental concepts of linguistic creation, positing that certain ideas only became available to the "linguistic consciousness" when they were "projected into space and there analogically reproduced".[75] Cassirer conceives of the "symbolic form" of language as something that initially moved outwards from the mind and into the real spaces of experience. From there, Cassirer writes "we see how language draws as it were a sensuous-spiritual circle round the speaker, designating the center of the circle as 'I'".[76] The world is not separated out from consciousness, as in Panofsky's perspective, but is instead projected from the subjective center. The idea of a sensuous-spiritual circle that the speaker draws round himself echoes the visual outpourings of the

73
Michael Friedman, Ernst Cassirer, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2023, ed. by Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (November 26, 2024).

74
See Allister Neher, How Perspective Could Be a Symbolic Form, in: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63/4, 2005, 359–373.

75
Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 1, transl. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, CT 1955, 200.

76
Ibid., 215.

Ajanta painters who turn around their visions from their minds and paint them to project out of the walls of the caves. This process was dynamic and changing; for Kramrisch, the rock-like forms at Ajanta were constantly in motion, "travelling inside and along each of their prisms layer by layer and in as many directions as will lead forward".[77] Likewise, language development, Cassirer writes, "should be regarded as a form not of being but of movement, not as static but as dynamic [...] in this oscillating movement do we find the special character of all linguistic form as creative form".[78]

With regard to perspective, or the *Weltanschauung*, Cassirer writes that,

> each particular language [...] never simply expressed the objects perceived in themselves, but that this choice was eminently determined by a whole spiritual attitude, by the orientation of man's subjective view of objects. For the word is not a copy of the object as such but reflects the soul's image of the object.[79]

This is a narration of language that cannot be "sealed off from the subjective", as Panofsky had written of perspective. Symbolic forms unite the subjective, the human-centered, the "soul's image" in them.

For Kramrisch, the relationship between worldview and perspectival system was similarly grounded in the experience of the artist, the person putting forth the "soul's image" into the world. She wrote that when the painter set about to paint a scene from the Buddha's former life, it was not a mimetic representation of anything from the world, but rather a projection from the artist's mind:

> The painter thinks in pictures and when he paints them, he shifts their stage from within his consciousness on to the other side of the limits of his body. He turns the figures around [...] so that they confront him. They have come out from his mind to be seen by his eye [...] The wall paintings at Ajanta show the internal space of consciousness and its contents [...] This taking place of form, its progression from the storehouse of the mind into visibility, is painted in Ajanta in a direction which leads from within the picture outward.[80]

77
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 8.

78
Cassirer, Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, 269.

79
Ibid., 284.

80
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 6.

She noted in 1937 that the rock formations she analyzed were "not described in any of the known texts on painting", but instead attributed the ultimate source of images to the painter's "storehouse of the mind".[81] For Kramrisch, the idea of a painter "turning around" images to face them was part of her metaphysical concept of the artist or artisan.

Kramrisch regarded the rock-like forms and the sensuous figures at Ajanta as an outgrowth of a Buddhist artist's meditative mind. Yet despite the broad-reaching nature of much of her work, she did not seek to bind this "forthcoming" perspective in painting with a single, synthetic worldview. While she traced the formal qualities of "forthcoming" throughout millennia of South Asia art, she also seemed to have recognized the site-specificity of the Ajanta paintings. Many years later, in her notes on E. H. Gombrich's *A Sense of Order* (1979), Kramrisch was still considering the relationship between worldview and artistic style. She wrote of the "permanent recurrence of *alternatives*: absorption in or withdrawal from the world". In a side note she included oppositional pairs: abstraction vs. empathy; "geometrism" vs. expressionism. She was not quite satisfied with this formulation because she then wrote: "[...] but in a *traditional* art?? [cf. *Ajanta* as against western India Rajput ptg]".[82] Kramrisch seems to have been experimenting with the idea of slotting Ajanta paintings and Rajput art into these oppositional pairs, whether that meant aligning Ajanta with abstraction and withdrawal, and the much later Rajput art with expression and absorption, or some other combination. In the midst of reading Gombrich's psychologically inspired account of ornament, Kramrisch was still turning over these connections forty years after she wrote *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*. She never fully closed off the possibilities for meaning that a form of perspective could take.

IV. The Ajanta Paintings in Their Place and Time

At the time Kramrisch wrote her book on painting, she emphasized the artist's role in painting the walls, but she did not engage with the Buddhist institutional foundations of the Ajanta site or with its ongoing use after the creation of the paintings. Many of the cave sites that bear painted images of "forthcoming" perspective occur on the walls of *vihāras*, assembly halls surrounded by monks' cells. Recent scholarship has recovered extant instructions for the decoration of *vihāras* and evidence for their ritual use, information that might speculatively aid in contextualizing the visual structures that

81
Scholars have since disputed the connection between the Ajanta caves and the *Yogācāra* school of Buddhism, which uses the terminology of the "storehouse of the mind". See Joanna Williams, Review of Sheila L. Weiner, Ajantā. Its Place in Buddhist Art, Berkeley, CA 1977, in: *The Art Bulletin* 62/1, 1980, 177–180.

82
Stella Kramrisch, notes on E. H. Gombrich's *The Sense of Order* (1979), Box 7, Folder 15: Writings and Research, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

Kramrisch identified in the paintings at Ajanta. The 5th-century Buddhist practices at the Ajanta caves were in concordance with the precepts of Mahāyāna Buddhism and with the lived experiences of early Buddhist life. Gregory Schopen has gathered evidence for the importance of aesthetics to various monastic communities during the period of Ajanta's active use. These early accounts stressed the visual beauty of the cave sites with particular attention to lush gardens and painted interiors. Schopen translates and reproduces what he calls a "stereotypic" account of the ideal painted *vihāra*. The description derives from the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, a set of monastic codes, religious teachings and commentaries that were likely known within the Ajanta monastic community.[83] Schopen analyzes the account describing the paintings in the *vihāra* as "stealing (or 'carrying away', or 'captivating') the heart and eye, a veritable stairway to heaven".[84] This description employs the language of transcendence through perception (thus the "stealing of the eye") as part of the idealized experience of the monastic site. The metaphor used for the experience of art in the *vihāra* is evocative of how European observers would describe landscapes rendered with perspectival recession. Yet the painted scenes at Ajanta, as Kramrisch would assert, do not provide "staircases" that lead off into infinity; they build outward toward the beholder, forging a bridge between the illusory space of the painted vignettes and the interior of the *vihāra*.

Moreover, the architectural program of a *vihāra* hall, in which monastic cells encircled the assembly space, meant that each wall was also known to have a room behind it. It seems possible that those in the central pavilion space could have imagined the presence of meditating monks behind the walls. A prescription for painting a *vihāra* derives from the same Mahāyāna text of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and suggests that the presence of these cells behind the walls might have informed the layout of the paintings:

> On the outer door, you should represent a yaksa holding a staff; [in] the vestibule, the Great Miracle and the Wheel [of Existence] in five divisions; in the pavilion, a cycle of *jātaka* stories [...] in the bathhouse and steam-room, sufferings from the *Deva-Sūtra* or the different hells; in the infirmary, the Tathāgata giving treatment; in the toilet, a horrible cemetery; on cell doors, draw a skeleton and skull.[85]

83
The *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* is one of the few texts, besides the *jātakas*, that Richard S. Cohen argues was known to the Ajanta monastic community. Id., *Setting the Three Jewels. The Complex Culture of Buddhism at the Ajanta Caves*, Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1995, 123.

84
Gregory Schopen, The Buddhist "Monastery" and the Indian Garden. Aesthetics, Assimilation and the Siting of Indian Monastic Establishments, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126/4, 2006, 487–505, here 492.

85
Cited in Cohen, Setting the Three Jewels, 125.

The iconographic instructions for the functional spaces (bathhouse, toilet, infirmary, and living cells) acknowledge the bodily needs of living monks, but also emphasize the insignificance of bodily existence. The "skeleton and skull" recommended for cell doors serves, as in Christian iconography, as a *momento mori*, asserting the transience of human life.[86] Similarly, the *jātaka* stories provide moral lessons from the Buddha's former lives for contemplation. Kramrisch's writings focus on the artist, but it could have been the monk whose meditating mind was understood as bodying forth in the projecting forms from behind the wall in the monk's quarters.[87]

More broadly, the paintings, with their "forthcoming" perspective, likely aided devotees in experiencing the sight of the Buddha (*Buddhadarśan*). In her work on the Buddhist cave structures of the Deccan, Pia Brancaccio has discussed an increasing emphasis in Mahāyāna Buddhism on vision and on a devotee having both a physical and a mental "transcendental" experience of viewing the Buddha form.[88] The cave sites with the large-scale wall paintings also held large-scale sculptural representations of the Buddha, cut from the rock of the caves, that were at times flanked by two or more Bodhisattvas. The visitor to the *vihāra* site would first encounter the painted *jātaka* scenes with their rock formations, which, as Kramrisch has shown us, retain a sculptural sense of modeling in their plasticity and energetic projection. Moving deeper into the inner sanctum of the *vihāra*, the visitor would then encounter the actual rock-cut sculptural works.[89]

In a brief passage in *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, Kramrisch suggests that the first painted rock forms that the visitors encounter have a different meaning than those depicted in scenes situated close to the Buddha image. She seems to align the painted rocks' abounding energy with the earthly drama of the *jātaka* scenes, whereas the rocks' energy serves to highlight the far different presence of the monumental painted Bodhisattvas Padmapani and Vajrapani that flank the stone Buddha image in Ajanta's Cave 1 [see Fig. 4]. In the painted image of the Bodhisattva Padmapani, among the best-known from Ajanta, the rock forms press into the

86
Elizabeth Lyons, Heather Peters, and Gregory L. Possehl, *Buddhism. History and Diversity of a Great Tradition* (exh. cat. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology, 1985), 38.

87
This is another interesting connection with early 20th-century German and Russian theories of "reverse perspective" in Byzantine art, where the "reverse perspective" was interpreted by some as representing the view from those existing inside of the depicted space. See Antonova, On the Problem of "Reverse Perspective", 465.

88
Pia Brancaccio, *The Buddhist Caves at Aurangabad. Transformations in Art and Religion*, Leiden 2011, 98.

89
Stephen Teiser has argued in the context of Cave 17 at Ajanta that the ritual movement from the entry door of the cave to the shrine with the Buddha sculpture at the opposite end traces out a path to transcendence. Stephen F. Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel. Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples*, Seattle 2006, 83–101.

viewer's space alongside the smooth, serene figure of the Bodhisattva. As Kramrisch described it, "the crystalline rock cubes flame and consume their own shapes. A fierce combustion of crystalline definition still urges ahead while it has already reached its limits." The rocks here have pushed forward to their full extent, and the Bodhisattva form, "falls back upon itself and halts. Lowered eyelids screen the return of life gone out in its plenitude and come home."[90] The rocks cannot express the very different energy of the Bodhisattva, which has calmed the "fierce combustion" implied by the rocks and "come home".

This idea of a landscape reverberating around a center of spiritual stillness relates to another possible interpretation for the rock shapes that may have held significance for those traversing or inhabiting the craggy Deccan landscape surrounding Ajanta. Kramrisch herself notes that the Deccan plateau was full of unusual geological forms, although further east of Ajanta. She writes:

> To some extent such formations, bare boulders of stone, are peculiar to the country in several places in the Deccan, around Hyderabad for instance where stray rocks, barren and massive, are cleft of a sudden by the growth of one or the other tree with glossy leaves. In Ajanta itself the hills are mild and wooded. They are not exposed, except by the craftsmen who excavated the caves.[91]

In this brief aside, Kramrisch suggests an environmental context for the paintings of cubistic rocks, whether in a boulder of Hyderabad suddenly split by a growing tree, or a craftsman who witnesses the rocks "exposed" by the excavation of the caves.

The paintings could also be seen as representing more dramatic ritual events of the earth fracturing. Eugene Ciurtin has drawn attention to the centrality of earthquakes within early South Asian Buddhist texts, particularly in the context of the Buddha's meditations, and notes that visual representations of seismological activity have been long overlooked. Ciurtin writes:

> An indisputable contrast of extreme stillness and tremendous quaking may be found not only in such canonical and postcanonical texts, but also in visual representations. No scholar, it appears, ever started to investigate potential depictions of earthquakes in Buddhist art starting from a philological, historical, or doctrinal inquiry [...]. Commenting upon figurative representations of topical episodes in the Buddha's biography, recent scholars sometimes decide to 'leave aside the earthquakes, which were not easy to render

90
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 55.

91
Ibid., 41–42.

> figuratively'. (M. Spagnoli 2005 [2007] 338). However, the tradition we study, as well as the traditions of our studies, recommend a somewhat different attitude.[92]

As part of a larger project to reintegrate studies of architecture and the environment, Tamara Sears has taken up the question of earthquakes in early Buddhist painting and sculpture. Sears notes that although actual earthquakes were not common in the Deccan, and more characteristic of the northern regions surrounding the Himalayas, the *Viśvantara jātaka* stories that are depicted in Cave 17 of Ajanta describe the "shuddering" of the earth.[93] Cave 17 at Ajanta contains some of the most pronounced paintings of Kramrisch's projecting rocks, suggesting perhaps that these were painted as a response to texts describing the experience of earthquakes.

V. Perspective and Cubism

In the moment when Kramrisch first addressed Ajanta, form in the process of fracturing was not only a metaphysical, or even geological, idea. Her writing emerged in the decades of war, scientific disruption, and modernist turmoil in the realm of the arts. Kramrisch visited Ajanta in the wake of World War I, in the era after Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, the birth of modern physics, and of Cézanne and Picasso's disavowal of the picture plane. In this period, Rabindranath Tagore wrote of an escape from a world "broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls".[94] This had the effect, in the fields of structural linguistics and artistic theory, of laying bare how much hard construction had gone into the seeming stability of these forms up until their present moment. In the 1920s and 1930s, the challenge and problem of building anew after the shattering of form could even be seen as a geopolitical-aesthetic problem.

Hubert Damisch writes that it was "not a matter of chance" that "studies of perspective enjoyed their greatest vogue at a moment in which it might have seemed that modern art had definitely turned away from it".[95] While Panofsky barely mentioned modern art in his *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, he acknowledged in other texts what Damisch calls "the rupture effected in the pictorial order by

92
Eugene Ciurtin, The Buddha's Earthquakes (I). On Water. Earthquakes and Seaquakes in Buddhist Cosmology and Meditation, with an Appendix on Buddhist Art, in: *Studia Asiatica* 10, 2009, 59–123, here 88.

93
Tamara Sears, *Human Places and Cosmic Spaces. Ecological Engagements in Early Medieval India*, paper delivered at the conference, Buddhist Geoaesthetics, Brown University, Providence, RI, May 3–4, 2019.

94
Rabindranath Tagore, Where the Mind Is Without Fear (Poem 35), in: id., *Gitanjali (Song Offerings)*, London 1913, 27–28. The poem is more hopeful; against reality, it imagines at the end a "heaven of freedom" where his country will "awake".

95
Damisch, The Origin of Perspective, 23.

Cézanne" and the later cubists.[96] In his introduction to *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Panofsky wrote of perspectival construction that it "formalizes a conception of space which, in spite of all changes, underlies all postmedieval art up to, say, the Demoiselles d'Avignon by Picasso (1907), just as it underlies all postmedieval physics up to Einstein's 'Theory of Relativity' (1905)".[97]

While Panofsky regarded Picasso's work as a rupture, Kramrisch wrote in her notes that the perspective of "forthcoming", with its projection of geometric forms, shared with analytical cubism its origins in the "breaking up of the mountain into rocks, prisms and cubes".[98] Her words could be taken literally, in the case of the rock-cut caves at Ajanta, or the earthquakes shattering the stillness in Buddhist texts. And yet, figuratively, they serve as a powerful description for how cubistic paintings depart from the strict order of linear perspective. The "world-mountain" was an enduring concept for Kramrisch, representing the unity of all forms. In *A Survey of Indian Painting in the Deccan*, she writes how at Ajanta, "with palaces and rocks, the slopes of the world-mountain are covered".[99] The temple, she would later argue, was an embodiment of this world-mountain.[100] Yet she could countenance, even celebrate, in the paintings at Ajanta and in the cubist works, its fracturing into "rocks, prisms and cubes".

This may be where Kramrisch ultimately departs from Panofsky. While cubism marked the end of a dominant perspectival paradigm for him that coincided with the end of a positivist scientific worldview, for Kramrisch, there was continuity in the very fact of shattering dynamism. Perspective as a cubistic, "breaking of the mountain" was, for Kramrisch, part of the same process of organic "forthcoming" seen in the temple structure. For Kramrisch, the "breaking up of the mountain" was not an ending of perspectival reign, nor was it a shattering of world order. It was a means of pictorially representing "the radiating, turbulent, hovering or pacified forces of inner experience" and in describing this projecting perspective, Kramrisch put forth a continuous view of an art that envisions the process of becoming and dynamically searches for new languages of symbolic form.

96
Ibid.

97
Quoted in ibid., 22–23.

98
Stella Kramrisch, undated notes, Box 37, Folder 1: South and Deccan Art and Architecture, Indus Valley Civilization, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

99
Kramrisch, A Survey of Indian Painting, 12.

100
Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, vol. 1, Calcutta 1946, 222.

Sylvia Houghteling is Associate Professor in the Department of History of Art at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, USA. She is the author of *The Art of Cloth in Mughal India* (Princeton 2022), which received the 2024 Bernard S. Cohn Book Prize from the South Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies. Houghteling's ongoing research looks at textiles and temporality and the unique material histories of the eastern Indian Ocean trade.

STELLA KRAMRISCH, SANSKRIT TEXTS AND THE TRANSCULTURAL PROJECT OF INDIC 'NATURALISM'

Parul Dave Mukherji

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 901–924

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.107513

ABSTRACT

Stella Kramrisch's 1924 English translation of the first printed Sanskrit text of the *Citrasūtra* (from *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, 5th–9th century CE) made its mark on the nascent stage of art history and high nationalism in India. While translating this ancient treatise on Indian painting, she laid open a possibility of theorizing around Indic naturalism. Her ethics of listening to the text and its mimetic terminology is heroic at a time when her contemporary art historian, A. K. Coomaraswamy, had taken pains to expunge naturalism from Indian art history as an alien framework. Revisiting Kramrisch's translation today from the lens of transculturalism reveals her model of comparativism between western and Indian naturalism. It is particularly legible where Kramrisch confronted the most corrupt part of the text. My essay examines Kramrisch's 'cultural unconscious' via these 'mistranslations' while exploring how her keen ethics of listening complicate the recent move towards decolonizing Indian art history.

KEYWORDS

Stella Kramrisch; Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy; Indic naturalism; Mimesis; Indian art history; Decolonization.

Stella Kramrisch's (1896–1993) pioneering work on the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* is as much a work in language translation as it is in cultural translation. Written in Sanskrit, it was an encyclopaedic Hindu text from between the 5th and 9th centuries CE that contains the *Citrasūtra*, one of the earliest known texts on Indian painting. Given the status of Kramrisch's work as the first English translation, it left an enormous mark on the nascent field of art history in India. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that Kramrisch's own theorization about Indian art, in which 'naturalism' was central, was to a large extent shaped by her early exposure to the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇba*, of which the section on painting or the *Citrasūtra* will be the focal point in this paper.[1]

This paper revisits the moment in the 1920s when Kramrisch set upon translating this text from Sanskrit into English and explores her engagement with Indic 'naturalism' from a transcultural perspective. Kramrisch's quest for native meaning in this early text posits a paradox for decolonizing art history, a project that usually invokes the work of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), another seminal art historian of South Asian art who was contemporary to Kramrisch.[2] Their contrarian stance on 'naturalism' – Kramrisch's acceptance and Coomaraswamy's denial – poses a historiographical dilemma that surfaces in the interpretation of this text. The paper will also explore how Kramrisch, as a pioneering translator of the text, negotiates with some errors found in the first printed edition.[3] Her solutions to the hermeneutic challenges presented by the corrupted source text lead us into Kramrisch's 'cultural unconscious', or her expectations as translator that underlie her transcultural interpretation of this native text.

The key concern through which I enter Kramrisch's translation of the *Citrasūtra* is 'naturalism'. 'Naturalism', a fraught concept, had a certain currency in Kramrisch's comprehension of Indian art. I accept 'naturalism' as a 'concept metaphor' in the sense given by Gayatri Spivak.[4] This term also draws from cognitive linguistics,

1
See Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, Calcutta/London/New York 1933, as well as ead., *The Art of India. Traditions of Indian Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture*, London 1954.

2
Monica Juneja, Crafts and the Spiritual. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, in: Beate Söntgen and Julia Voss (eds.), *Why Art Criticism? A Reader*, Berlin 2021, 52–61, here 54–55.

3
In 1912, Venkateswar Press in Bombay published the first printed edition, later followed by Kramrisch. See *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, Bombay 1912 (henceforth referred to as V). It could not be regarded as a critical edition, as it was based on two unreliable manuscripts. Eventually, more dependable manuscripts came to light, which helped to place the text on a sounder foundation. In fact, the first critical edition of this text, produced by the Sanskritist Priyabala Shah, was only published as late as 1958. See Priyabala Shah, *The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Text, Critical Notes, Etc.*, Baroda 1958; and ead., *The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Translation of the Third Khanda*, Baroda 1961. Both volumes were published in the Gaekwad Oriental Series as numbers 130 and 137, respectively.

4
Gayatri Spivak on concept metaphor: "Whatever the identitarian ethnicist claims of native or fundamental origin [nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, even cultur-

which refers to the understanding of one idea, or a conceptual domain, in terms of another, enabling comparisons across cultures. Just as the notions of "nationhood, constitutionality, citizenship, democracy, even culturalism" do not have exact parallels in the Indian context, neither does the concept of 'naturalism'.[5] The construct of 'naturalism' that Kramrisch deployed drew considerably from what was familiar to her in European art history. In fact, her teacher, Max Dvořák had written an influential book titled *Idealism and Naturalism in Gothic Sculpture and Painting* between 1915 and 1917 when Kramrisch was his student in Vienna.[6] Her familiarity with the debates on western naturalism never deterred her from paying close attention to the endorsement of 'naturalism' in a culturally disparate text such as the *Citrasūtra*. Rather, 'naturalism' was a heuristic for Kramrisch to explore the gaps between western naturalism and its formulations.

It is in this discourse around 'naturalism' and her use of the comparative mode that Kramrisch's model of transculturalism comes to the fore. I take transculturalism to refer not only to the transfer of ideas from one cultural context to another but also to how an art historian trained in western art history like Kramrisch interprets art and ideas of another culture. Her theorization of Indic 'naturalism' is punctuated by frequent invocations of the naturalism of Greek, Italian Renaissance and Dutch art. What makes her embrace of naturalism remarkable is that during the time she was engaging with the *Citrasūtra*, the young discipline of Indian art history was deeply driven by cultural nationalism of the kind pioneered by Coomaraswamy. At the forefront of the defence of Indian art against disparaging colonial views about Indian art, Coomaraswamy had embraced the view that Indian art is essentially transcendental, a view that led him to reject naturalism per se. In fact, this conviction deeply conditioned his own interpretation of the *Citrasūtra*, which entailed a radically deliberate reinterpretation of even the most mimetic terminology found in the text. On the other hand, given Kramrisch's early exposure to the *Citrasūtra*, it

alism] [...] what is being effectively reclaimed is a series of regulative political concepts, the supposedly authoritative narrative of whose production was written elsewhere, in the social formations of Western Europe. They're being reclaimed, indeed claimed, as concept metaphors for which no historically adequate referent may be advanced from postcolonial space, yet that does not make the claims less important." Gayatri Spivak, Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality, and Value, in: Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory Today*, Ithaca, NY 1990, 219–244, here 225.

5
I use 'naturalism' within quotes when it is evoked as a 'concept metaphor' to distinguish it from the more entrenched understanding of European naturalism.

6
As reported by Barbara Stoler Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Sketch, in ead., *Exploring India's Sacred Art. Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch*, New Delhi 1994, 8. Dvořák's text was first published in 1918: Max Dvořák, *Idealismus und Naturalismus in der gotischen Skulptur und Malerei*, Munich 1918.

prepared her to remain open to the possibility of an Indian naturalism.[7]

Coomaraswamy was intensely invested in a nationalist defence of 'oriental' art against what was perceived as colonial misrepresentation, which entailed a strident rejection of naturalism per se on the one hand and almost a reverential espousal of transcendentalism on the other – a development that Kramrisch was witness to but remained more cautious about.[8] Today, when we revisit Kramrisch's translation of a text like the *Citrasūtra*, her decision to 'listen' to this early Sanskrit text on Indian art, which in fact, illuminated theories that were out of step with current nationalistic expectations from the past, is striking. It was clear that her goal was to grasp this text on its own terms, which prepared her to explore a possible Indic 'naturalism'.

Cultural difference featured prominently in her project to grasp Indic 'naturalism' by comparing it with European modes of naturalism. By the late 19th century, race entered the discourses around aesthetics, urbanism and art history. In colonial India, the plurality of races, which sometimes got reduced to the binary of just Aryan and Dravidian cultures, allowed them to be connected differently with those outside India. Quite early on, race had been a major concern for Kramrisch. This is not surprising given her art historical training by Josef Strzygowski, her teacher in Vienna, who had framed the history of art in explicitly racial terms.[9] In fact, as late as 1924 she published an essay titled "The Influence of Race on Early Indian Art".[10] For her, however, race resonated more with different ethnic traits she associated with North India and South India than with the late 19th-century discourse imbricated in the context of imperialism. More relevant to our discussion on naturalism is the take on race by John Ruskin, an influential English art critic and writer. He had, in fact, proposed a race-oriented model of art history with naturalism as a key demarcation of cultural difference between the colonizers and the colonized, encapsulated in his *The Two Paths* – the correct path that embraced naturalism in art exemplified by Greek art, and the false path that ended up in creating monstrous anatomies as in the art of the colonies.[11]

7
For Coomaraswamy's transcendentalist interpretation of Indian art, see Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, Cambridge, MA 1934.

8
It must have been a challenge for Kramrisch to think against the grain. On rare occasions, when she would confront a tricky reading in the text, she would fall back on the Coomaraswamian model and its claim of high morality for the traditional Indian artist/artisan.

9
In fact, Kramrisch had translated Strzygowski's article in the first issue of the *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*. See Miller, Stella Kramrisch, 16.

10
Stella Kramrisch, The Influence of Race on Early Indian Art, in: *Rupam* 18, April 1924, 73–76.

11
John Ruskin, *The Two Paths*, London 1907.

Both Kramrisch and Coomaraswamy, who had laid the foundation of art history in India, had to grapple with such problematic binaries but sought to question them in different ways. While Coomaraswamy rejected naturalism on the grounds that it was essentially a European phenomenon, Kramrisch, with her early exposure to the *Citrasūtra* and her ethics of listening to a text that was culturally alien, embraced it via transcultural relativism. For her, every culture could have its own culturally specific ways of representing nature whether it is Chinese, Indic or European.

Despite Kramrisch's best intentions to uncover Indic 'naturalism', the corrupt sections of the text often posed enormous challenges.[12] Now that more dependable editions of the same text are available, it is possible to revisit Kramrisch's 'mistranslations' to inquire into the model of Indic 'naturalism' that she had proposed. I will argue that it is in the most difficult sections of this Sanskrit text that Kramrisch's imagination about the Indic past, which shaped her cultural unconscious, comes into play.

This paper is broadly divided into two parts: the first part closely delves into Kramrisch's key readings and compares them with the current critical edition of the *Citrasūtra* in order to shed light on the model of Indic 'naturalism' that she was proposing; the second part engages with her theorization of such a model which had to a large extent resisted the dominant transcendentalist model for understanding Indian art.[13]

I. Kramrisch's "Discovery" and Strategies of Interpretation of the *Citrasūtra*

After obtaining her doctorate in 1919 from the University of Vienna, Kramrisch went to England. She had to wait for her visa that arrived in 1921 after which she set out for India. It was in 1924 that she began working on translating what proved to be a seminal text on pre-modern Indian art. That Kramrisch was already interested in the question of 'naturalism' in Indian art prior to her translation project is confirmed by an article she published in 1921 titled "The Representation of Nature in Early Buddhist Sculpture".[14] It was Aksaya Kumar Maitreya, the Bengali ideologue and the Director of the Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi (in present-day Bangladesh), who drew Kramrisch's attention to the salience of the third

12
Kramrisch's first edition is: A Treatise on Indian Painting, in: *The Calcutta Review* 2, February 1924, 331–386. This edition – which she considered "unscholarly", as pointed out by her biographer (Miller, Stella Kramrisch, 14) – was followed four years later by a revised and enlarged edition, titled *The Vishnudharmottara (Part III). A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image-Making*, Calcutta 1928. In this article, I follow the latter.

13
For the latest critical edition, see Parul Dave Mukherji, *The Citrasūtra of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, New Delhi 2001.

14
Stella Kramrisch, The Representation of Nature in Early Buddhist Sculpture (Bharhut-Sanchi), in: *Rupam* 8, October 1921, 7–10.

part of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* for Indian art history.[15] This text, composed sometime between the 5th and 9th centuries CE, unfolds in the form of a dialogue between king Vajra and sage Markandeya. The text is encyclopaedic in scope, dealing with a vast variety of topics ranging from astronomy, astrology and medicine, to grammar, metrics, lexicography, rhetoric, dramaturgy, dance, vocal and instrumental music, and the arts. However, it is the *Citrasūtra* section from chapter 35 to 43, with its focus on painting, that received fuller attention from Kramrisch and also formed the basis of my critical edition.

Not being an expert in Sanskrit, Kramrisch had to rely on the expertise of Devadatta Ramakrishna Bhandarkar (1875–1950), an archaeologist and epigraphist who worked with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) from 1917 until 1937. In the early 20th century, the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* circulated within a small group of Indian scholars steeped in traditional scholarship in the form of a printed text, published in 1912 by the Venkateswar Press and compiled by two Sanskrit scholars, Pandits Madhusudana and Madhavaprasad Sarma (this text will henceforth be referred to as V). It may be noted in passing that none of the Indian scholars who were aware of the existence of this text attempted to translate it into English. Maitreya, who had informed Kramrisch about the significance of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*, was an historian who often used Sanskrit references in his writing on the history of Bengal. Kramrisch's doctorate on Indian art had largely relied on photographs taken by Victor Goloubew.[16] When in India, she not only wanted to see the actual artefacts but also appears to have been committed to grasping the emic perspective, and what better way to do so than by translating a traditional *śilpaśāstra* or art treatise.[17] It was her English translation that brought this text into the disciplinary space of art history and made it difficult for any subsequent art historian of South Asian art to overlook this text. If Coomaraswamy singled out chapter 41 of the same text for his translation and critical annotation, C. Sivaramamurti successively revisited the text to argue for the existence of an Indian naturalism.[18]

15
A. K. Maitra also ran the *Journal of the Varendra Research Society* with the aim of discovering the history of Bengal. Kramrisch acknowledges Maitra in her work on the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* and in fact dedicates it to Abanindranath Tagore.

16
Miller, Stella Kramrisch, 7.

17
I draw the terms etic and emic from linguistics. They were coined by the linguist Kenneth Pike in 1954 and later entered the field of cultural anthropology. They are useful in understanding Kramrisch's keenness to grasp the 'native' meaning in her translation project.

18
See Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 52, 1932, 13–21; as well as C. Sivaramamurti, *Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharmottara*, New Delhi 1978. For the cultural politics surrounding the interpretation of the *Citrasūtra*, see my article, The Citrasūtra and the Politics of Authenticity, in: Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty (ed.), *Tattvabodha. Essays from the Lecture Series of the National Mission for the Manuscripts*, vol. 2, New Delhi 2008, 125–140.

Unfortunately the first critical edition of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* appeared more than three decades after Kramrisch's translation of the text. It was Priyabala Shah, a Sanskritist, who had embarked upon this task and published her edition in 1958. Being the first critical edition, it incorporated readings from four new manuscripts, making it a vast improvement over the Venkateswar printed edition of 1912 that Kramrisch was to follow. Nevertheless, when it came to deciphering the difficult sections of the text in which even the new evidence lacked clarity, Shah tended to gravitate towards Kramrisch's interpretations. Such was the authoritative stature of the first English translation of the *Citrasūtra* by Kramrisch.

What facilitated my work on a critical edition was my access to two more manuscripts, one in Nepal (N) and the other in Bangladesh (D), that Shah could not lay her hands on. Bringing out the critical edition of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* was part of my PhD in Oxford (1986–1991). It was my adviser, Alexis Sanderson, who urged me to work on this text, as according to him, even Shah's edition was unreliable given the fact that it had not consulted the two manuscripts mentioned above.

As its critical editor, my task was to create a stemma to understand the interrelationship among all the available manuscripts and figure out how they were related with the archetype or the perfect original whose hypothetical existence must be assumed.[19] These two new manuscripts, N in Newari script and D in Bengali script, happen to relate to the archetype independently, which implied that they did not share the errors found in the remaining manuscripts. Apart from emending the primary text based on the new evidence, my task also included a close attention to historiography, which involved engaging with how each of the previous editors starting from Kramrisch, Coomaraswamy, Shah, to Sivaramamurti, had interpreted the different editions of the text across decades.

As a pioneer, Kramrisch had the most daunting task cut out for her: how to coherently translate an early Sanskrit art treatise into English when the primary text itself was on shaky ground. Equally challenging was how to engage with naturalism in colonial times when cognate ideas like realism and verisimilitude were often deployed to set apart the art of the colonized from that of the colonizer on the grounds of racial difference.[20] I have identified her departures from the current edition through the following lenses:

i. *Moral*, to understand how a misreading leads Kramrisch to regard traditional artists as ethical beings.

19
See my edition for a diagram of the stemma: Parul Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, XXX.

20
In fact, within Britain itself, the treatment of artistic naturalism as an index of racial superiority had attracted a backlash from the ideologues of the Arts and Crafts movement in the late 19th century and subsequently from modern art with its turn to abstraction in the early 20th century.

ii. *Contradictory*, to underline the role of some errors that clash not only with the norms of visual representation accepted by the text but also with the artistic practice found in Ajanta paintings, understood by Kramrisch as being coeval with the *Citrasūtra*.
iii. *Metaphorical* refers to the fraught concerns around 'naturalism' in which the literal and the metaphorical meanings of terms get blurred, as for example, in the depiction of body hair.
iv. *Imaginative* suggests the most corrupt parts of the text that lead Kramrisch to conjure up a fantastical universe.

Out of the nine chapters that constitute the manual on painting from chapter 35 to 43, it is the last three chapters, from 41 to 43, that shine light on Indic 'naturalism', Kramrisch's central concern. At a time when the nationalist defence of Indian art had left little scope for naturalism to stay relevant, Kramrisch remained committed to the project of deciphering 'native' mimesis.[21]

I.1 Moral

Chapter 41 discusses four types of paintings – *Satya*, *Vaiṇika*, and *Miśra*. It is the first kind, translated by Kramrisch as "true to life", which has a direct bearing on Indic 'naturalism'.

> Markandeya said: Painting is said to be of four kinds: (1) 'true to life' (*Satya*), (2) 'of the lute player' (*Vaiṇika*), (3) 'of the city' or 'of common man' (*Nāgara*) and (4) 'mixed' (*Miśra*). I am going to speak about their characteristics (now). Whatever painting bears a resemblance to this earth, with proper proportion, tall in height, with a nice body, round and beautiful is called 'true to life'.[22]

Kramrisch's fidelity to the text is remarkable in comparison to Coomaraswamy's strenuous reinterpretation of this chapter. If Kramrisch translates *Satya* as "true to life", Coomaraswamy radically overhauls its semantics to interpret the same as "*Pure and Sacred*" (my italics) to align it with his transcendentalist framework. The transcendentalist framework assumes that traditional Indian artists deliberately closed their eyes to the observation of the external world and sought artistic inspiration from within. It also claimed

[21] In my own work on Sanskrit aesthetics, I have used mimesis as a cognate term of 'naturalism' to shed light on an overlooked theory of *Anukṛtivāda* or performative mimesis, a theory which was much in circulation between the 9th and 10th centuries CE. See Parul Dave Mukherji, Who Is Afraid of Mimesis? Contesting the Common Sense of Indian Aesthetics through the Theory of 'Mimesis' or Anukaraṇa Vāda, in: Arindam Chakrabarti (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Indian Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, London/Oxford 2016, 71–92.

[22] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 51.

that artists were deeply religious beings who dedicated their artistic labour not for profit but as service to the divine.[23]

However, despite Kramrisch's best intentions to remain close to the text, an unreliable reading could nudge her towards the transcendentalist framework – possibly a default position in this case. At this point, the text lists a number of causes that may spoil a painting while it is getting executed. Kramrisch translates:

> Bad seat, thirst, inattentiveness, and *bad conduct* are the root evils (in the painter) that destroy painting.[24]

It is Kramrisch's emendation of V's reading of *durānītan* to *duranītim* which turns "bad posture", involving artist's crouching uncomfortably over a painting, into "bad conduct" and introduces a moral sense when the text was only listing certain practical reasons that may lead to an unsuccessful execution of a painting.[25] Coomaraswamy follows Kramrisch's interpretation in his article on this chapter and expands on the moral stature of a traditional artist:

> *Durānītam*, possibly for *durānatam*, 'lack of patience or humility', must refer in any case to some moral defect in the painter; there are innumerable texts in which it is insisted that the *Śilpin* must be of good moral character, and even require from him particular abstinences as a preparation for his work.[26]

My edition, on the other hand, accepts *durālīnam*, which refers to the awkward way of crouching by the artist as one of the factors that can mar a painting.[27] Morality has little place in this verse, which is interested in underlining certain basic pragmatic conditions for a successful completion of a painting.

23
See Coomaraswamy, Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI, 13; ead., The Transformation of Nature in Art, 8, 25, 31, 80, 120. Also see Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra and the Politics of Authenticity.

24
Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 52. My italics.

25
Ibid.

26
Coomaraswamy, Viṣṇudharmottara, Chapter XLI, 21. Coomaraswamy translates this verse as: "An uncomfortable seat, bad conduct (?) (*durānītam*), thirst and absent mindedness are regarded as the causes of failure in painting." See ibid., 14.

27
In my edition, I have discussed my reliance on MS D, which retained "*durālītam*" which I have emended to "*durālīnam*". Following are the reasons why a painting may suffer from bad execution: "uncomfortable posture, *awkward crouching*, thirst and lack of concentration". My italics. Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 183.

I.2 Contradictory Readings

In the same chapter, the text produces a list of faults that no longer pertain to the artist but now refer to the formal features in a painting that artists should avoid. By no means should the painter employ lines that are too weak or thick, or make paintings that lack variety (*avibhaktatvam*), show faces with oversized eyes, lips, and cheeks[28] (*bṛhadgaṇḍoṣṭhanetratvam*), depict inconsistency (*samvirudhatvam*) or distort correct measurements/proportions (*mānavikāratā*).[29]

In place of the last fault or "*mānav i kāratā*" or "distortion of proportion", V reads "*mānav ā karatā*" or "human shape", a reading followed by Kramrisch.[30] In a text which concentrates on the human figure in all the chapters, it is unlikely that human form or shape is to be counted as a fault. In my edition, the emendation of "*mānavak ā ratā*" to "*manav i kāratā*" restores consistency and yields the meaning "deviations from [the rules of] proportions" which fits in as one of the faults in a painting.[31]

Another example of inconsistency in translating the text concerns the last chapter. After listing auspicious themes like the depiction of treasures, celestial musicians, sages, the mythical bird *Garuda* and the monkeys, the text goes on to warn against a specific type of painting associated with "self" or *atman* about which there arises glaring variations in translation. Kramrisch translates:

> (oh) king in one's own house the *work of painting* should not be done *by oneself*.[32]

This reading contradicts a cross reference that Kramrisch herself provides to the *Kāmasūtra*, the 5th–6th-century CE text on the art of the erotic, about the role of painting in the life of the refined connoisseur of art, *nāgaraka*:

> That every cultured man had in his house a drawing board, and a vessel for holding brushes and other requisites of

[28] The Venkatesvara edition that Kramrisch was following had a misreading of *aṇḍa* in place of *gaṇḍa* which led her to read "testicles" in the place of "cheeks".

[29] Chapter 41, verses 7–8.

[30] Note that I have used italicized text to highlight what looks like a minor variation but hugely impacts the meaning.

[31] Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 161.

[32] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 61. My italics. Kramrisch follows V's reading *ātmanā* (by one's own self) in place of *ātmanaḥ* (of one's own self). Note how influential Kramrisch's interpretation was considering that Shah, who had access to MSS BCDF's better reading "*ātmanaḥ*", continued to follow V's reading. Cited in Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 262. In fact, N's "*ātmana prakṛtim gṛhe*" is clearly an interpolation that resonates with common Sanskrit phrase "*ātmapratikṛti*" or "*ātmanaḥ pratikṛti*" to mean self-portrait.

> painting is evident from Vātsyāyana's Kāmasūtra. *But one should not have a painting by one's own hand in one's house, says the Vishṇudharmottara.*[33]

In fact, it is a sound reading from N that clarifies that there is no ban on the making of a painting by oneself but on paintings made *of* oneself (*ātmanaḥ citrakarma*) and it is their display on the wall of one's home that is proscribed.[34] This interpretation is in tune with the *Kāmasūtra*, according to which every cultured *nāgaraka* or a refined/cultured city dweller must display objects associated with painting in his living quarters, perhaps to flaunt his proficiency in painting.[35]

A further contradictory reading ensues from Kramrisch's mistranslation of *kumudānām* (of many water lilies) in the singular:

> That the moon is shining should be shown by the kumuda flower in full bloom.[36]

If she discerns in the *Citrasūtra* a proclivity of Indic mimesis for symbolism, then this reading – in which a single blooming lily signifies moonlight – can be seen as paradigmatic. It is the same reading that underlies her observation that "a single object elliptically conveys a more complex natural phenomenon", to be reiterated in her Introduction:

> Yet we are told that moonshine should be shown by a Kumuda flower in full bloom, and sunshine by drawing creatures suffering from heat. In one instance, atmospheric effects are observed, while in the other, the behaviour of one object or the other, reacting to the atmospheric change is represented suggestively.[37]

Her stress on the singular forms emerges as a way to underline the cultural specificity of Indic 'naturalism':

[33] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 7. My italics.

[34] It is on the basis of N's reading *ātmana pakṛti* (*atman* in the instrumental sense rather than *ātmanaḥ* as a genitive) that I have emended the text.

[35] There is, however, no reason given by the *Citrasūtra* about why there is a ban on self-portrait (and its display) in one's own home; but given the fact that this discussion happens in the context of the auspicious and inauspicious themes, it appears that self-portraits bore association with magic.

[36] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 58.

[37] Ibid., 10.

> That seas should have water depicted instead of a halo, or that an artist should show a pitcher to suggest a tank, a conch shell in representing a conch shell, and a lotus flower in representing a lotus flower, once more points to a matter of absorbing interest namely, the single form of nature exercised on the mind of the artist.[38]

Here is the case not of an unreliable reading derailing Kramrisch's translation but her cultural unconscious guiding her preference for the singular over the plural.[39] In fact, prior to her translation project, Kramrisch had been struck by what she understood as Buddhist art's predilection for the singular in such a way that a part can stand for the whole:

> One tree, one flower, is sufficient to express and to contain the whole nature. [...] One house or citadel represents similarly a town.[40]

However, the fact that the *Citrasūtra* devoted a full chapter to the laws of foreshortening (*kṣayavṛddhi*) created a dilemma for Kramrisch about reconciling the "naturalistic" and "symbolic" aspects in visual representation, best resolved in terms of a paradoxical 'naturalism':

> Once more, one notices the same counteraction of abstraction and observation as in the case of landscape painting. A logical employment of *kṣaya* and *vṛddhi* would have implied oversecting. But the Indian artist cherishes every single form as a whole, as containing all he has to express and as containing the whole of nature. So he cannot bring himself to cover and hide one of its parts.[41]

I.3 Metaphorical

Although metaphors abound in texts like the *Citrasūtra*, they are slippery with regard to the question of naturalism in the text. Common stock metaphors compare human body parts to that of the world of flora and fauna as when human eyes are compared with lotus petals, fish's belly, cowrie shells and so on. If there is a culturally specific idea germane to 'naturalism', it is captured in the term *ānulomyam*, which is hard to translate in a single word. The closest

38
Ibid., 11.

39
Indeed, *kumudānām*, or the flower in the plural genitive, is found in all the manuscripts.

40
Kramrisch, The Representation of Nature, 9.

41
Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 15.

is "along 'natural' hair growth". Idiomatically, it means 'to go with the flow'. Here, the 'natural' hair growth on the human body and its predilection to grow in a particular direction is invoked metaphorically to stand in for normativity.

The text associates *ānulomyam* or the hair trope in opposition to the term discussed above: *sammukhatvam*, which refers to unnatural or stylized depiction of human postures and literally means "pure profiles facing each other".[42] Just as there is a natural direction to hair growth, so is there a natural vision in which pure profiles facing each other is considered unnatural in the world where bodies relate with one another at varying angles. Elsewhere, the strictly ordered juxtaposition of profiles facing each other is associated by the text with crude aesthetics commonly found in untutored village art (*grāmyasansthitam*) and therefore lacking in [visual] interest (*virasa*). Rasa here does not refer to the 8–9 aesthetic rasas related with different emotional states but simply to whatever holds our interest. *Virasa* would mean simply 'uninteresting'. In chapter 39, on foreshortening, perfect symmetry where faces confront one another in pure profile is referred to as *ardhārdhagatasārupyam*. Quarter-basedsymmetry is considered lacking in interest (*virasa*) and vulgar (literally associated with village arts or *grāmyasanthitam*).[43] Note that the term *ānulomyam* appears in the context of demand for naturalism in the representation of human bodies such that the artist must be able to draw a sleeping, breathing body as distinct from a dead body.[44] And such a skilful artist must have the dexterity to depict waves, flames, smoke, flags and garments etc. with the speed of wind (*vāyugatyā*).[45]

However, there is another facet to the hair metaphor, which is deeply imbricated in political/cultural hierarchies. Chapter 42 begins with rules of depicting members of a royal court starting with the kings who head the hierarchy. They, like the gods, are to be shown as the tallest whereas the ministers, priests, astrologers and others are to be shown relatively shorter; the shortest body type is reserved for the common folk. The hair metaphor needs to be placed in this context of political hierarchy across class and caste. However, V's incorrect reading '*rupake*' (in a painting) in place of

42
Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 251.

43
Ibid., 88–89.

44
The verse 43.30 reads: *eteṣām khalu sarveṣām ānulomyam praśasyate sammukhatvam tathā teṣām, chitre yatnād vivarjayet*. My translation: In all these cases, conformity with the natural order (*ānulomyam*) is recommended. The placement of figures facing one another [in strict profile] should be carefully avoided. Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 250–251.

45
Ibid. Note that this verse on artist's skill to depict objects caught in the wind (Vishnudharmottara, Ch. 43, V. 28) is selected by Kramrisch as one of the opening quotes to her introduction to the translation: "He who paints waves, flames, smoke and streamers fluttering in the air, according to the movement of the wind, should be considered a great painter." Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 2.

'*kupake*' (in the body pore from which hair grows) leads Kramrisch to the following translation:

> A king (ruler of the earth) is to be depicted just like a god. In the case of kings (however), the hair on the body should be drawn one by one.[46]

This injunction to the artist is less about the literal depiction of body hair than a reminder to conform to social hierarchy while representing different characters in a painting. As mentioned, at the top are the gods and kings who are not only to be shown in the *Haṃsa* mode of proportion with a height of 108 *aṇgulas* (the highest) but there should be only *one* hair sprouting from each pore on their bodies. Here, body hair is a marker of differentiation – the higher the hierarchy, the fewer number of hairs grow from the body pores.

My edition follow's N's '*kūpake*' (in the pore for the body hair) in place of '*rūpake*' (in a painting). This reading clarifies that in the case of depicting kings, the artist is not expected to paint body hair one by one, as assumed by Kramrisch, but that there should not be more than a single hair in each pore (*kūpake*).[47] Thefewer number of hairs sprouting from hair follicles implies more power, as the energy does not get split into many points on the body. Such details had less to do with visual representation than with political hierarchy and prognostication.

I.4 Imaginative

Often, the biggest challenge posed to a translator is a text that has undergone serious scribal mistranscriptions. At such times, the translator either acknowledges this fact and refrains from translating it, or wrestles hard with the given reading to draw out a plausible sense. Kramrisch, being the very first translator, may have felt a greater sense of responsibility to make the text fully comprehensible and went for the second option. The concluding chapter of the *Citrasūtra*, apart from stressing the skill of the artist to depict naturalism, makes a distinction between auspicious and inauspicious themes of painting. While the auspicious themes may be shown anywhere including in one's home and public places like temples and royal assembly halls, the latter are strictly forbidden in private spaces and living quarters. At this point, the text elaborates on negative/inauspicious subject matter, which the painter must refrain from painting by all means. Kramrisch translates:

46
Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 53.

47
That the *Viṣṇudharmottara* drew from the text on astronomy, the *Bṛhatsamhitā*, was known by Kramrisch as she cites from the latter in chapter 35 while dealing with five male prototypes; these have direct parallels in the text on astronomy. It is *Bṛhatsamhitā*'s commentator, Bhaṭṭa Utpala, who explains that kings have only one hair in the pore: *romaika kūpake parthivānām* (cited from *Bṛhatsamhitā*, 67.5). See Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 42.

> Except in assembly halls of kings and in temples, the inauspicious, (as for instance) *bulls with horns (immersed) in the sea, and men with their horns (sticking out of) the sea (whilst their) body (is) bent (under water),* men with ugly features, or those inflicted by sorrow due to death and pity, war and the burning ground, should never be depicted.[48]

It may be noted that none of the manuscripts preserves a reliable reading and the problematic part of the verse shows:

> *Nidhiś*ṛngān vṛşānnājan*nidhi*hastān *matengajān*
> *Treasure* horns bull *treasure* hands xxx[49]

Guided by the context and the rules of *anuṣṭubh* meter of eight syllables in which all the verses in the text are composed, I have made the following emendation, which involved minimal intervention:

> *Niḥ*śṛngāńśca vṛşānrājan *nir*hastān sca *mataṇ*gajān

Since this line is about the list of inauspicious themes or motifs, which are forbidden from being painted in one's own home, the emended text means:

> Images of bulls without horns and elephants without trunks [are considered inauspicious themes for painting][50]

What makes these depictions objectionable is the incompleteness caused by the absence of the most characteristic features of creatures by which they are recognized: absence of horns in bulls and trunks in elephants, for example, deprive them of their recognizability, aesthetics and therefore auspiciousness.

It is the point at which the text is at its most garbled that the translator's compulsion to make sense of it takes over and gives free rein to her cultural unconscious. In fact, it is to solve the riddle posed by the slippery text that Kramrisch falls back upon the familiar terrain of comparativism with European art history in which "men with horns" supply the iconography of satyrs common in Greek and Renaissance art.

[48] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 60. Cf. Dave Mukherji's text and translation, The Citrasūtra, 244–245.

[49] "xxx" stands for an indecipherably corrupt section of the manuscript.

[50] These inauspicious themes are listed with other inauspicious themes like battles, funeral grounds, etc., in the next line.

II. Theorizing Indic 'Naturalism'

Since 'naturalism' as a concept metaphor offered her minimum common ground to make sense of a culturally alien text, it seems that comparativism was built into Kramrisch's project as an inevitable condition. As a pioneer, Kramrisch faced many challenges while translating the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa*. This task not only involved exploring a new cultural terrain but also cultivating an ethics of listening. In fact, if there is an overarching framework that she constructs on the basis of her translation of this text, it is clearly that of theorizing what can be termed as Indic 'naturalism'. The translation project involved a complex negotiation between her European scholarship and non-European object of study. This particularly comes to the fore in the previous reference to the figure of the satyr; as she struggles to glean meaning from the most 'corrupt' parts of the text, the familiar frame of reference from European art looms in her conceptual horizon.

There is nothing reproachable about the exigency of making sense of the culturally unfamiliar through the familiar; it in fact informs any transcultural negotiation of meaning making. Despite Kramrisch's deep commitment to listen to the text, V's unreliable readings introduced a hermeneutic barrier, so to speak, steering her towards certain postulates such as the 'paradoxical' nature of 'naturalism'.

On the lookout for emic terms in order to capture Indic 'naturalism' as oscillating across the poles of naturalism and abstraction, she turns her attention to another key term: *dṛṣṭa* or "visible". While this term acts as a direct correlate to naturalism, she needed another that could correspond with abstraction and therefore coined "*adṛṣṭa*". While the text clearly articulates the first category, she in fact deduces the latter as the logical opposite of *dṛṣṭa*. This is a rare example of Kramrisch making the text echo her assumptions:

> The Vishnudharmottara *clearly distinguishes* between *dṛṣṭa* and *adṛṣṭa*, the latter comprising things invisible or rarely to be seen.[51]

To Kramrisch, *dṛṣṭa* offers itself as one of the several native categories for naturalism, which is explained via a comparative naturalism connecting the Indian and the Dutch modes:

> The *dṛshṭa*, things that are seen easily by ordinary mortals, excel in what we call landscape-painting. The hours of day and night, the seasons are described (Ch. 42). There we find a close connection of mood and time, which reached its height in the Ragmala pictures, where season, hour, emotion and music became fused as painting. At the same time

[51] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 10. My italics.

> details are observed with such sincerity as we find in the pictures of Dutch masters, for instance, in the description of the drinking place. The light effects sought to be produced show a very sensitive reaction to optic effects as the faded light of the candle in the morning dawn.[52]

It is with the help of the *dṛṣṭa* and *adṛṣṭa* dyad that she proceeds to theorize a 'paradoxical naturalism':

> The *dṛshṭa* and *adṛshṭa* hold their sway; symbol and illustration are amalgamated into an expressive language, keenly alive to all those visual impressions that are on a small scale, obtrusively finite, and seem to carry their meaning expanded within their outlines, as local colour.[53]

Thus, ironically in her quest for emic meanings of representation, Kramrisch ends up operating in an etic framework based on a dichotomy between abstraction and naturalism. Take, for example, the representation of the sky. Following V's reading, she assumes that sky must be shown without any colour (*vivarṇa*) but signified by birds. The colour of the sky as proposed by V is *vivarṇa* or colourless, against *svavarṇa* or "its own colour" found in the rest of the manuscripts. Her reliance on the corrupt passage in V would impact Kramrisch's formulation.[54]

> But this ambiguity of the colour in its suggestive and descriptive faculty was clearly kept apart. Taken in a naturalistic and descriptive sense, the sky or the atmosphere has to be painted as almost without any special colour. The sky, on the other hand, is of the colour of the blue lotus and wears a garment of that colour, if represented as a statue, when it should carry the sun and the moon in its hands.[55]

While Kramrisch's observation about the coexistence of the naturalistic and the allegorical is confirmed by the text, her understanding of the "symbolic" nature of representation in Indic 'naturalism' does not find adequate support from the same. Take, for instance, the question of the placement of figures which centrally addresses naturalism and is captured by the technical term *sammukhatvam*, which literally means the state of figures facing each other in strict profile

52
Ibid.

53
Ibid., 18.

54
See my translation of the verse: *ākāśam darśayed vidvān /vivarṇam/ svavarṇam khagamākulam*. The learned painter must show the sky without any colour/with its own colour, full of birds. Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 206–207.

55
Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 18.

– an arrangement strictly disallowed for its unnatural representation.[56] However, Kramrisch translates it as:

> In painting (one) should carefully avoid, in the case of all these, placing one (figure) in front of another.[57]

Such a translation of *sammukhatvam* would not only contradict the Ajanta murals [Fig. 1], where no such prohibition is followed, but also Kramrisch's own active use of the *Citrasūtra* to explain the painterly traditions of ancient India.[58] If this way of arranging figures is disallowed by the text, this prohibition counters the kind of figure grouping that is commonly seen on Ajanta murals, which she had already accepted as being contemporary to the *Citrasūtra*.[59] This proscription not only accords with figural placement on the walls of Ajanta caves where most figures are shown in three-quarters. More seriously, this misreading of *sammukhatvam* also impinged upon Kramrisch's understanding of the laws of foreshortening (*kṣayavṛddhi*), which can only work if the figures are allowed to overlap with each other.

No wonder Kramrisch is perplexed by the meaning conveyed by her translation as it would, in her own words, "counter the basis of foreshortening in which figures are to be shown from varying angles". Hence, the paradox that Kramrisch notes between naturalism conveyed by the stress on foreshortening and the misleading prohibition of overlapping figures is best captured by her use of 'Yet':

> How much observation and technical experience is needed to state their results in such clear terms will be understood. Yet 'whatever the artist represents he should avoid placing one figure in front of another' (Ch. 43).[60]

According full visibility to Indic 'naturalism' and assigning it a symbolic function not only rests on mistranslation but also underlies Kramrisch's ascription of different temporalities to its inner and

[56] Dave Mukherji, The Citrasūtra, 251. My translation reads: "In all these cases, conformity with the natural order (*ānulomyam*) is recommended. The placement of figures facing each other [in a strict profile] should be carefully avoided."

[57] Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 62.

[58] For instance, this translation contradicts the very basis of laws of foreshortening (*kṣayavṛddhi*) to which a full chapter (39) of the *Citrasūtra* is devoted.

[59] "The chapters of the Vishṇudharmottara dealing with painting must have been compiled in the seventh century, contemporary with the latest paintings of Ajantā". Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 5.

[60] Ibid., 15.

[Fig. 1]
Unnamed Artists, A painted mural scene from the 'Mahajanaka Jataka' showing King Janaka and his wife Sivali, circa 5th century CE, Fresco at Cave 1, Ajanta caves, Maharashtra, Western India © Y. S. Alone.

outer levels, or to an unchanging inner core and its time-bound surface:

> The abstract and the realistic vision, which, as a rule, *we* [my italics] hold apart as poles in the evolution of art, isolated from one another by gradual steps of development or by the sudden gap of reaction, are but the two sides of Indian art, contemporary and organic, for the obverse is turned towards that which lies outside, changeable, alluring in its variety and provoking observation, whilst the reverse faces the within, essentially unchangeable, because continually stirred up by emotions, of which *chetana*, the life-movement, is the common source. To do justice to them a language of symbols comprises colours and measurements in solemn hierarchy.[61]

However, it is in a section of the *Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa* outside of the *Citrasūtra* that her openness to naturalism in a non-western art context expresses itself most compellingly. It is in the dialogue between the King and the Sage on the use of colour in painting that captures her attention:

> Vajra said: my curiosity (runs) high, and I wish to hear (more) about the true and untrue colours of water, mentioned by you.
> Markandeya replied: The untrue colour of water resembles that of lapis lazuli. It is the effect of the reflexion of the sky in water. But the natural colour of water is seen in the falling down of water-falls; it resembles moonlight.[62]

This remarkable exchange invokes the *Satya* type of painting discussed in chapter 41, over which Kramrisch and Coomaraswamy offered conflicting interpretations. On the one hand, Kramrisch – whose main agenda as the first translator was to hear the text closely – interprets *Satya* or "truthful" along the register of visual verisimilitude. On the other hand, Coomaraswamy, under his cultural-nationalistic compulsions, accepts "truth" as a moral category in which artistic practice bypasses any engagement with the world of visual perception. Markandeya's reply to Vajra's query about the colour of water definitely validates Kramrisch's model of "visual truth".[63]

61
Ibid., 20. This polarization between outer changeable naturalism and inner changeless abstraction invokes her famous binary between ageless and timed variations of terracotta. See her Indian Terracottas, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 7, 1939, 89–110.

62
Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Chapter 52, verses 10–12, as quoted by Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 19.

63
Kramrisch gleans from this dialogue that: "The expressionism of colours visualizes a temperamental attitude and is concerned with the wide range of emotions. Yet side by side with it, colour in its descriptive quality was made use of to a large extent. It was not only

Despite the fact that there is not a single Sanskrit word which can translate naturalism, its sense remains scattered across a variety of terms such as *Satya* (true to life), *Ānulomyam* (along the direction of hair growth), *Kṣayavṛddhi* (laws of foreshortening), *Sādṛśya* (resemblance) and *cetanā* (consciousness). It is Kramrisch's take on Indic 'naturalism' that oriented me eventually to explore this aspect of visual representation further in the theory of *Anukṛtivāda*, an overlooked discourse on visual representation, preserved in the 10th-century commentary on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by a Kashmiri aesthete, *Abhinavabhāratī*.

Almost half a century following her translation project, Kramrisch grew sceptical about the text's claim of naturalism, as becomes evident in her foreword to her student Calambur Sivaramamurti's commentary on the *Citrasūtra*.

> The realism is in the eye of the beholder and pious stories told, though not in the Citrasūtra...[64]

The U-turn in her position on Indic 'naturalism' during postcolonial times is quite perplexing considering that her "naturalistic" reading of the *Citrasūtra* arose during the era of colonialism at a time when nationalistic art history had programmatically rejected naturalism in Indian art.

It is Kramrisch's against-the-grain reclamation of 'naturalism' as a frame for exploring Indian art that opens up a productive terrain for future research. I conclude by invoking ethics of listening as a way to compare different engagement with the same text by Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch. While Coomaraswamy was more of a South Asian than Kramrisch in his Eurasian racial identity, it was Kramrisch, the European Jew, who 'heard' and paid heed to 'another naturalism' despite the daunting task of navigating the error-ridden first printed edition of the text. It is Kramrisch who opens the way further pursued by Sivaramamurti, who was to bring out an annotated translation of the *Citrasūtra* in 1978.

Almost a century after Kramrisch's first English translation of the *Citrasūtra*, today there is a growing recognition that the 'naturalism' that the *Citrasūtra* had professed was not one of its kind but a part of a larger discourse of *Anukṛtivāda* or performative mimesis [Fig. 2].[65] In this respect, Kramrisch enables another take on 'naturalism' in line with decolonizing art history. Here decolonizing art history hardly implies returning to some golden authentic past

known as local colour, distinctive of, and unchanging with, the various objects, but also its modifications due to light and surroundings were considered." Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 19.

64
Calambur Sivaramamurti, *Chitrasutra of the Vishnudharmottara*, New Delhi 1978, p. X.

65
For 'performative mimesis' or mimesis in a performative sense, see Parul Dave Mukherji, Who Is Afraid of Mimesis?, 77; and also for discussion on *sādṛśya* or resemblance, id., Life and Afterlife of Sādṛśya. Revisiting the Citrasūtra through the Nationalism-Naturalism Debate, in: *Saivism and the Tantric Traditions. Essays in Honour of Alexis G. J. S. Sanderson*, Leiden/Boston 2020, 569–587.

[Fig. 2]
Unnamed Artists, A cropped detail from the 'Mahajanaka Jataka' story painted on an inner cave wall, circa 5th century CE, Fresco, Cave 1, Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra, Western India

interpreted by a 'native' scholar but a non-Eurocentric rethinking of the very project of representation. Deeply steeped in a comparativist project, Kramrisch's take on Indic 'naturalism' was not only facilitated by a close 'listening' to the old Sanskrit text but also by her embrace of modernism.

While Kramrisch's paradoxical Indic 'naturalism' unfolded within a binary framework, her modern, *avant-garde* take on representation also questioned the oppositions between abstraction and observation, and more importantly, between representation and performance. If Ruskin expressed his unabashed contempt for the lack of naturalism in Indian art, Kramrisch emptied naturalism itself of its Victorian prestige of superior cultural power and demoted it to almost a mindless seeing of nature: "This versatility in visualizing abstraction and actual action replaces the mere observation of nature."[66] Just as the Cubist *avant-garde* artists overturned the revered conventions of European naturalism by embracing the fragment and the collage, the Indian artists of early times, for Kramrisch, "never took the world at a sweeping glance".[67]

Parul Dave Mukherji is professor at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. Her publications span global art history, comparative aesthetics and contemporary Indian art. She is the author of *Ebrahim Alkazi. Directing Art – The Making of a Modern Indian Art World*, Ahmedabad / New Delhi 2016; and Whither Art History in a Globalizing World, in: *The Art Bulletin* 96 / 2, 2014, 151–155. Her most recent publications are: *20th Century Indian Art*, co-edited with Partha Mitter and Rakhee Balaram, London 2022; Decolonizing Art History, in: Beate Söntgen and Julia Voss (eds.), *Why Art Criticism? A Reader*, Berlin 2022, 97–98; Artistic Labour in Dance and Painting. Revisiting the Theory-Practice Debate via Mimesis (Anukrti) and the Abject Body, in: *South Asian History and Culture* 14 / 2, 2023, 140–152; Aesthetic Repose (*Viśrānti*), Self and the Emerging Figure of the Rasika in Early Medieval India, in: Prasanta Chakravarty (ed.), *Assured Self, Restive Self. Encounters with Crisis*, New Delhi / London / Oxford 2023, 67–82.

66
Kramrisch, The Vishnudharmottara, 11.

67
Ibid.

FROM FIELD TO MUSEUM

PLACING KRAMRISCH AND HER COLLECTION IN POSTWAR UNITED STATES

Brinda Kumar

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 925–965

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.107514

ABSTRACT

By 1956, the Philadelphia Museum of Art had acquired a major collection of Indian sculpture from Stella Kramrisch and appointed her as the Curator for Indian art. In postwar United States the institutional emplacement of Kramrisch and her collection represented (as Ananda Coomaraswamy was for a preceding generation) a deepening engagement with Indian art at museums at a time of widening interest in Asian cultures, including through university Area Studies Programs. This article examines the significance of Kramrisch and her collection, tracing the intertwining of her collecting and research activities during her early fieldwork, which contributed to the elevation of medieval sculpture within the field of Indian art history, and the way the acquisition and appointment relied on the alignment of multiple priorities and collective efforts.

KEYWORDS

Collectors and collecting; Stella Kramrisch; Indian sculpture; Art museums.

In her 1957 article on the newly acquired collection of Indian sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (henceforth PMA) published in the *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin*, Stella Kramrisch described the group of sculptures as having been "an anonymous loan since 1950" that represented "about fifteen hundred years of Indian sculpture", and added that its acquisition placed the PMA "in the forefront of this field". Kramrisch acknowledged the role played by W. Norman Brown, the noted Sanskritist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, observing at the outset that "the Museum is indebted for his successful efforts leading to the original showing of the collection and its ultimate acquisition".[1] The tenor of the article, however, did not let on that the anonymous collection being referenced was in fact Kramrisch's own, and that its purchase marked the culmination of several years of strategic alignments and deft negotiations. This paper considers the significance of Kramrisch's collection formation alongside her early scholarly activities in India in the 1920s and 1930s, in relation to the subsequent arrival of both scholar and collection in the United States in the 1950s – from Kramrisch's initial appointment at the University of Pennsylvania and the inaugural display of her collection at the PMA in 1950, to her eventual position as curator at, and the formal acquisition of forty-nine of her sculptures by, the PMA. The peregrinations of collection and scholar across continents relied on personal and professional networks as well as the navigation of institutional structures at a time of a deepening interest in Indian culture in postwar America, and particularly in the collecting and understanding of Indian sculpture.

I. First Steps. Piecing Together a Collection of Scholarly Significance

It is challenging to establish the details of how Kramrisch assembled the collection of Indian sculpture that would be so key to her life in the United States. Her writings scarcely acknowledged her ownership of the works, and by all accounts, Kramrisch preferred to keep the matter of the formation and sale of her collection to the PMA discreet, insisting on remaining anonymous in public arenas.[2] From her biography, however, one can determine that it was when

1
Stella Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture Newly Acquired, in: *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 52/252, 1957, 30–38, here 31 (December 10, 2024).

2
In a letter to W. Norman Brown from April 1950, when her collection of sculptures was first on loan to the PMA, in response to a request to sell photographs of her collection, she wrote: "I received a letter from Jean Gordon Lee, Curator of Chinese Art, Philadelphia Museum, asking my permission to photograph the sculptures and sell them to the public. They should remain copyright of the Philadelphia Museums is my request and the Museum's as well as my own permission would have to be given should they be required for reproduction. I must insist that this loan collection remain anonymous." Stella Kramrisch to W. Norman Brown, April 5, 1950, W. Norman Brown Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives. The PMA now acknowledges the pieces from the 1956 sale as having been "Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection".

Kramrisch was residing in India, in the decades after her first arrival in 1922, that in addition to teaching at the University of Calcutta, she would spend many weeks every year traveling to historic sites. It was during these travels that she gradually amassed a significant personal collection [Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3]. The only known time she specifically described the process was years later in December 1956, when, likely necessitated by the sale of her collection to the PMA that year, she carefully recounted the formation of her collection in a private letter to the tax attorney Fred L. Rosenbloom:

> For the major ones I worked, and for the rest I paid. Those for which I worked, I asked for in lieu of my honorarium when in charge of surveying a definite region, organising a local museum and cataloging the sculptures. For this purpose, I was granted leave from the University. The honorarium for the work varied according to the length of time spent on it. When I loved a particular sculpture to the extent that I want it to be with me forever, I suggested that in lieu of payment this sculpture should be my own.[3]

The field trips Kramrisch described presumably took place in the late 1920s and through the 1930s, but by the 1950s she was careful to not provide any transactional details, specifications of sites and locations of sources, or prices paid, couching her descriptions in broad terms, and explaining the absence of receipts to a matter of time elapsed since their purchase.[4] The generality of Kramrisch's account, and her breezy suggestion that some sculptures were simply given to her "in lieu of payment", may today strike one as a calculated elision of details to gloss over any query about the terms of procurement, and one that conveniently sidestepped any questions about the transfer of pieces from archaeological sites that might technically have been deposited with the local archaeological museums and their authorities. At the same time, she recognized that her mode of acquiring her sculptures was enabled by her "unique opportunities as a scholar and explorer". One can, however, discern larger contexts and motivations for her collecting in her published works. In her article for the *PMA Bulletin*, she alluded to preexisting spoliation, and added that the gathering, collecting, and organizing of the "fragments" [Fig. 4] were a part of the process of recovery:

> Time and decay, neglect and wars brought damage and destruction to many of these monuments. Though broken and scattered, their impact survives in some of their

[3] For the pieces that she detailed as being given to her in lieu of an honorarium, she estimated that the twelve sculptures that she acquired in this manner would be worth about $50,820. Stella Kramrisch to Fred L. Rosenbloom, December 3, 1956, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

[4] In the same letter to Rosenbloom, she simply stated that she never kept receipts for more than one year.

[Fig. 1]
Yakshi (Female Nature Spirit) with Hands Together in the Honoring Posture, 2nd century, sandstone, 16 1/2 × 6 1/4 × 3 1/4 inches (41.9 × 15.9 × 8.3 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-2 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 2]
The Goddess Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon (Mahishasuramardini), c. late 8th century, sandstone, 27 1/4 × 16 7/8 × 9 1/2 inches (69.2 × 42.9 × 24.1 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-7 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 3]
Maithuna, mid-13th century, black talc, 14 3/4 × 7 1/4 × 5 inches (37.5 × 18.4 × 12.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-18 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 4]
Male Warrior, early 11th century, sandstone, 12 3/4 × 7 1/2 × 9 1/2 inches (32.4 × 19.1 × 24.1 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-19 (December 10, 2024).

> fragments. [...] The power vested in the monument was present in its parts. The entire surface was charged with meaning. [...] a particular image shines forth infused with illuminating intensity and imparts, even though it is severed from its original context, the essential impact.[5]

In her letter to Rosenbloom, Kramrisch acknowledged her work for local museums, and indeed her scholarship from this period was based on the careful salvage, organization, and study of material that had long been neglected by scholars. In articles in journals such as *Rupam* and later in the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, she systematically analyzed this sculptural material, delineating in greater detail the rough categorization of archaeological material that had begun in the colonial era. While she was a scholar first and a collector second, her fellow authors in the journals in which she published included the likes of B. N. Treasurywalla, P. S. Nahar, and Ajit Ghose, who also built personal collections in tandem with their scholarly areas of interest. But in an early instance of a comparison that would prove enduring, Kramrisch was perhaps most akin to Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) who set out to write about Indian art and built a collection along the way. When Coomaraswamy had been collecting in India, he had been a man of means (his financial circumstances had altered by the time he arrived in the United States), and was able to build a collection initially for his own pleasure, and later for the purposes of institution building. Kramrisch had less disposable income to build a vast collection. In terms of the number of objects, hers was relatively small, but it nevertheless included important pieces collected by a discerning eye for quality and that dovetailed with her research interests. This was evidenced in her writings from the 1920s and 1930s. For instance, in her long and profusely illustrated 1929 article on "Pala and Sena Sculpture" in *Rupam*, although none of the included images are from her own collection, nevertheless some objects from her collection now at the PMA bear striking parallels to those referred to in the text [Fig. 5, Fig. 6].[6]

In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* (*JISOA*) of which Kramrisch was the editor, Umaprasad Mookherji's essay on "Sculptures from Candravati" included the illustration of a "Fragment of a Salabhanjika from the Harsiddhi

5
Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture Newly Acquired, 13.

6
Her article included images of fifty-five works, mainly from the Indian Museum, Calcutta, the Dacca Museum, and the Rajshahi Museums. Works that were in her collection that relate to the ones she refers to in her text include a votive tablet with Vishnu and the Dashavatars (PMA Acc. No. 1994-148-30), Lalita (PMA Acc. No. 1956-75-15), and an image of Buddha Subduing the Raging Elephant Nalagiri (PMA Acc. No. 1956-75-49). Stella Kramrisch, Pala and Sena Sculpture, in: *Rupam* 40, 1929, 107–126.

[Fig. 5]
Buddha Subduing the Raging Elephant Nalagiri, c. 9th century, schist, 23 1/8 × 12 1/2 × 5 1/2 inches (58.7 × 31.8 × 14 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-49 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 6]
Lalita, c. 1050–1075, phyllite, 22 1/4 × 10 5/8 × 3 1/2 inches (56.5 × 27 × 8.9 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-15 (December 10, 2024).

Temple".[7] Although the piece itself was not credited as being from her collection, the author acknowledged his indebtedness to Kramrisch in providing him with the photographs for his essay. That the photographs included views of the temple *mandapam*, as well as sculptures not only from the temples at Candravati, but also from the local museum at Jhalrapatan and finally one of Kramrisch's own, suggest that in the preceding years, Kramrisch had traveled to Candravati for research and had presumably picked up a piece or two at that time [Fig. 7, Fig. 8].[8] She would go on to publish the same Salabhanjika in her magnum opus *The Hindu Temple* (1946), although once again the source was not mentioned.[9] In the second issue of the *JISOA*, in her essay on "Kalinga Temples", Kramrisch included images from her own collection, then listed as "Private Collection, London". These were the image of Kartikeya from Puri, a fragment of a *maithuna* couple from Bhubaneswar, and an image of Kicaka or Squatting Gana [Fig. 9, Fig. 10, Fig. 11].[10]

The examples above evidence that Kramrisch formed her collection as she went about her research, with pieces often directly related to her scholarly interests. Nevertheless, in a practice that would continue, her decision not to acknowledge the illustrations used in her own articles as being from the "Author's collection", as for instance Coomaraswamy had done in his seminal writings on Rajput paintings, raises the question of her deliberate preference to remain anonymous.[11] Perhaps she felt that anonymity accorded an objective distance between author and object of study, which would bolster the reception of her scholarly analysis. Such an interpretation about her motivations can only remain speculative, however, as Kramrisch left no record of her intentions in this regard. The preference for anonymity may also have been a matter of personality, for by all accounts Kramrisch was an intensely private person and discreet about her collection throughout her life.

7
Plate XIII in the article, now PMA Acc. No. 1956-75-10. Umaprasad Mookherjee, Sculptures from Candravati, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 1/1, 1933, 59–62.

8
These include PMA Acc. Nos. 1956-75-10 and 1956-75-11.

9
Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, vol. 2, Calcutta 1946, 399.

10
Plates XIX, XX, and XXIII correspond to PMA Acc. Nos. 1956-75-14, 1956-75-17, and 1956-75-40. Stella Kramrisch, Kalinga Temples, in: *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* 2/1, 1934, 43–60.

11
With some exceptions. In Coomaraswamy's early publications, of the forty-one items that he published in *Indian Drawings* (London 1910), thirteen belonged to the author, and of the thirty-seven items that he published in *Indian Drawings. Second Series, Chiefly Rājput* (London 1912), all but one belonged to the author. Finally, of the 105 items that Coomaraswamy published in *Rajput Paintings* (1916), eighty-one belonged to the author. While Kramrisch did not rely on her own collection to quite the same degree to illustrate her arguments, she also did not acknowledge the pieces from her collection in her scholarly essays. Pieces from her collection were, however, acknowledged in the catalogues for the exhibitions for the Burlington Fine Arts Club, London in 1931 and later for the Royal Academy exhibition in 1947.

[Fig. 7]
Celestial Woman Making a Mango Tree Bear Fruit, c. 10th century, sandstone, 17 × 19 1/2 × 10 1/2 inches (43.2 × 49.5 × 26.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-10 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 8]
Worshiping Goddess, c. 10th century, sandstone, 27 1/4 × 10 3/8 × 7 inches (69.2 × 26.4 × 17.8 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-11 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 9]
The God Karttikeya, 975–1025, schist, 22 1/2 × 12 × 4 5/8 inches (57.2 × 30.5 × 11.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-14 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 10]
Mithuna (Lovers in an Erotic Position), c. 1000–1010, sandstone, 11 1/2 × 8 × 3 1/4 inches (29.2 × 20.3 × 8.3 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-17 (December 10, 2024).

[Fig. 11]
Gana, c. mid- to late 13th century, khondalite, 14 1/4 × 9 × 7 3/4 inches (36.2 × 22.9 × 19.7 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-40 (December 10, 2024).

II. A Collection Worth Exhibiting

Nevertheless, among the field of scholars invested in Indian art, Kramrisch's collection was becoming known, as pieces not only were being requested for publications but were also being sought out for exhibition. Indeed, by the early 1930s there is evidence that works from her collection had found their way to London, as the earliest record of her sculpture being on display are from the Burlington Fine Arts Club's exhibition of Indian art in June 1931.[12] Organized by K. de B. Codrington, sixteen pieces from Kramrisch's collection were included, and were explicitly acknowledged as such in the accompanying catalogue. Indeed, "Dr. Stella Kramrisch" was listed as one of three women among the mostly male or institutional lenders to the exhibition.[13] An analysis of the works included in the catalogue further reveals that while the exhibition covered both paintings and sculpture, and brought together pieces from government and private collections, among the latter only Kramrisch had lent a substantial collection of Indian sculpture.

At this stage, private collectors with interests in Indian art, such as Ajit Ghosh, P. C. Manuk, A. Chester Beatty and others, largely focused on Indian paintings, and rarely collected stone sculptures, in part because sculptural fragments from religious sites were still regarded as the domain of the archaeological museum, and less a site for connoisseurly endeavors, a view that would change in the decades to come. Collecting sculpture at the time also entailed challenges of access and did not typically enter the established antiquarian market networks for the circulation of pictures, jewelry, carpets and textiles, and small objects, in other words the realm of luxury items that were invariably objects loosened from royal treasuries, or from the ancestral collections of wealthy families. If a stray "idol" occasionally found its way into an antique shop in one of the larger Indian cities, little was known about its history or source location, and early ascriptions could often be erroneous. Stone sculpture, typically made for temples, had been associated more with the archaeological and museum contexts since the 19th century. It was in these milieux that stone sculptures from archaeological sites were studied and organized by scholars but were seldom collected in the manner of paintings or even bronze sculpture. Even Coomaraswamy – whose collection had notably entered the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston in 1917 – primarily collected paintings, and when he *did* acquire stone sculpture, he had done so on behalf of the museum, and that too on dedicated buying trips in 1921 and 1924.

12
Brinda Kumar, "Exciting a Wider Interest in the Art of India". The 1931 Burlington Fine Arts Club Exhibition, in: *British Art Studies* 13, 2019, n.p.

13
List of Contributors, in: *Catalogue of an Exhibition of the Art of India* (exh. cat. London, Burlington Fine Arts Club), ed. by the Burlington Fine Arts Club, London 1931.

That is not to say that stone sculptures did not enter the market at all. However, they were typically intended for, or expected to be sold to, a museum whose collecting mandates extended to Indian sculpture. Padma Kaimal has discussed Jouveau Dubreuil's procurement of a set of seventeen sculptures from a site in Kanchi in southern India for the Paris-based dealer C. T. Loo in the 1920s. Kaimal observes that Dubreuil's procurement and export of the pieces was enabled by the complicity, or at least tacit awareness of, British officials, including F. H. Gravely, Superintendent of the Government Museum of Madras.[14] Loo's primary interest was in placing the sculptures sourced through Dubreuil in prominent museum collections, not only to add to their prestige, but presumably also because individual collectors were less interested in purchasing such pieces for private use or placement at that time. In a significant coincidence, fifteen sculptures from this group were exhibited at the PMA in 1927.[15] Even though the museum did not purchase works from the group, Loo's early sales and bequests of sculptures from this set (apart from a couple of sculptures to Baron Edward von der Heydt in the 1930s) were all made to museums in Paris and Boston. This would change after the war, for although he continued to sell to museums, individual collectors in the US, such as Avery Brundage and Christian Humann, finally began to take an interest in Indian sculpture.[16] Brundage would later go on to buy a sculpture from Kramrisch.[17]

During the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, Stella Kramrisch's collecting of sculpture was exceptional, and clearly born from a combination of her interests in the subject of medieval temple sculpture and her field work, which entailed travel to sites where she had unique access to collectable material. In contrast to many of her peers, and indeed as she had herself done for her doctoral work, once Kramrisch was in India, she no longer solely relied on photographs taken by others for research, but instead took every opportunity to travel to sites that she wished to study. As such it was a distinctive collection, and she would years later recount the process

14
For a detailed account of the dispersal of the Kanchi yoginis from South India see Padma A. Kaimal, *Scattered Goddesses. Travels with the Yoginis*, Ann Arbor, MI 2012, ch. 4, How They Left. Dispersing the Kanchi Goddesses and Their Companions, 139–142.

15
"Superlative examples of Indian art are the most difficult of all the oriental arts to find and study – apart from the notable collections in England, and naturally the monuments preserved *in situ* in India. No complete group of sculpture has ever before been shown in America with the exception of the museum's own temple colonnade which is of considerably later date. The opportunity to view these splendid examples of medieval Indian sculpture is, therefore, a rare one." Horace H. F. Jayne, Mediæval Indian Sculpture, in: *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania Museum* 23/116, 1927, 15–17 (December 10, 2024).

16
Kaimal, Scattered Goddesses, 142.

17
The sculpture is a fragment of a Kushan-period Buddha image now in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, Object ID: B65S10.

of how it was built, in a manner not untouched by the romantic, emphasizing the arduousness of its assembly:

> Works of art of the quality of those now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art are very rare, one scarcely can find one in a thousand sculptures [...] I travelled by the general means of transport, but also a great deal by bullock carts, on elephants and camels to the remotest places for the purposes of knowing all the monuments and discovering some which had been unknown so far [...] If, on these expeditions, I badly wanted one or the other sculpture, I paid for it the price which the local priests or the village head men demanded. This required careful negotiations, repeated visits by myself or by my Indian, Brahmin assistants whom I had to engage for this purpose. On many occasions I failed to obtain the object and the money paid for travelling and in salaries and my time were lost. On the whole, I spent about as much in getting the sculptures for which I paid as I did by exchanging my honorarium for the others. I bought only four pieces in towns, one from a collection and the others from dealers. The artistic quality which alone interests me is scarcely ever to be found on the market in antique shops.[18]

Indeed, most collections containing pieces like hers were to be found in museums. This was evident in the famous exhibition of art from India and Pakistan held at the Royal Academy in London which took place in 1947–1948. While there were many private lenders to the painting section, most lenders of the 373 pieces in the sculpture sections of the exhibition were museums mainly in India but also abroad. Although there were some exceptional loans from private sources in this section too, the manner in which such pieces had been collected can be gauged from the fact that the "Gandhara and Minor Antiquities section", which was the largest section by far, had loans from former British officers who had worked in the region, while the only section where Indian private collectors such as Gautam Sarabhai and Sir Cowasji Jehangir had contributed significantly was to the South Indian bronze sections. From Kramrisch's collection of over fifty pieces, although only three pieces belonging to her were picked for the exhibition, in the section under which her objects were classified – that is, "Medieval 7th–17th century" – of the sixty-seven pieces on display, only three others were from different private sources [Fig. 12].[19]

18
Stella Kramrisch to Fred L. Rosenbloom, December 3, 1956, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

19
K. de B. Codrington, who was the organizer of the exhibition, was critical of Kramrisch's work and methodology, having given a lukewarm review of her first book *Indian Sculpture* (1933), which may explain in part his exclusion of some important pieces from her collection by the time of the 1947 exhibition at the Royal Academy of Art in London, even though many more works from her collection had been included in the 1931 Burlington

[Fig. 12]
A Celestial Woman Attendant with a Vina (Stringed Instrument), 956–973, sandstone, 25 1/8 × 10 1/2 × 7 1/4 inches (63.8 × 26.7 × 18.4 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-12 (December 10, 2024).

The 1947 Royal Academy exhibition, celebrating the art of the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan, had garnered much interest among curators and museums in the United States as well, and there were rumors that it might even travel across the Atlantic.[20] Although this did not happen, an alignment of interests led the Metropolitan Museum of Art to organize an exhibition of photographs of Indian sculpture in 1949. Titled *Medieval Indian Sculpture*, the exhibition featured photographs by Raymond Burnier and opened in New York under the patronage of the Government of India in October 1949. The press release quoted the curator Alan Priest's observations of the exhibition:

> while most of the larger American museums have examples of Indian sculpture [...] never in this country has there been anything like this photographic display to convey to the public the experience of visiting an Indian temple.[21]

The exhibition consisted of a series of large photographs, mostly of single figures and details from temples at Bhubaneshwar, Khajuraho, and Mahoba. In a notable overlap, Burnier's photographs had been used by Kramrisch extensively – she had included them in the exhibition she organized at the Warburg Institute in London in 1940, and also used his photographs to illustrate *The Hindu Temple*. The two had also collaborated on Burnier's volume *Surasundari* (1944), published by the Indian Society of Oriental Art, which was focused on the celestial female figures from Khajuraho's temples. Thus, the initial exhibition of Burnier's photographs can be understood in the context of a burgeoning interest in Indian sculpture in America, spurred in part by the prominence accorded to sculpture in the 1947 Royal Academy exhibition, and was a timely foreshadowing of Kramrisch's collection that would soon be exhibited at the PMA. Indeed, the New York exhibition was on the radar of the curators at the PMA, and would later travel to Philadelphia in 1951, opening alongside the first installation of the Kramrisch collection at the museum.[22]

Fine Arts Club (BFAC) exhibition in which Codrington had played a role on the organizing committee.

20
"[T]he other day I was in New York and heard through C. T. Loo that the Indian show which is at Burlington House in London now is coming to this country [...]. From articles in various English publications I have seen, it looks to be a fine thing, and I was just wondering whether it were true that it was coming here, and if so where." Jean Gordon Lee to W. Norman Brown, December 29, 1947, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

21
Exhibition of Photographs of Medieval Hindu Temple Sculpture Opens Today at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, October 6, 1949, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Press Kits and Press Releases, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives (December 10, 2024).

22
The notice in the section "Exhibitions and Events" read "Opens March 11 – INDIAN SCULPTURE – 60 works from Oxford, London and Museum Collections. 100 photographic enlargements of Indian Sculpture by Raymond Burnier", in: *The Philadelphia Museum Bulletin* 45/224, 1950, 74.

III. Peregrinations. Kramrisch and Her Collection in the US

In 1935, W. Norman Brown [Fig. 13], the Sanskrit scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, who also served as the curator for Indian art at the PMA, wrote in an article titled *Indian Art in America*:

> With but one distinguished exception there is no city in America where it is possible to get a complete conspectus of Indian art. The one exception is Boston, where the Museum of Fine Arts, with the guidance of Dr. Coomaraswamy, has assembled a collection of Indian art that is one of the world's foremost.[23]

As I have argued elsewhere, Coomaraswamy had played a formative role in fostering interest in Indian art among museum curators in the United States, at the same time as the role of art in the study of Indian culture was being increasingly appreciated by scholars such as W. Norman Brown, with whom Coomaraswamy maintained a collegial relationship.[24] At the PMA too, Coomaraswamy had advised on the first installation of the famous South Indian pillared temple hall at the museum as early as 1919. While the aforementioned *South Indian Sculpture of the Medieval Period* exhibition from 1927 that featured works from the collection of C. T. Loo, and a gift of twenty-nine sculptures from the dealer Nasli Heeramaneck in 1931, served to further affirm the museum's growing interest in Indian art, the PMA was not one of the museums to purchase Indian sculpture from Loo, while the Heeramaneck gift included works that were mostly modest in scale and often quite weathered. Therefore, the chance to exhibit and potentially acquire high-quality examples, such as those in the Kramrisch collection, was a rare opportunity that the PMA did not want to pass up.

Brown and Kramrisch had first gotten to know one another in the 1930s, and when she was in India, teaching at Calcutta. The two had maintained a correspondence, with Brown submitting articles to the *JISOA*, which Kramrisch edited, including for a special volume on Coomaraswamy.[25] Brown, in his capacity as curator at the PMA, along with Jean Gordon Lee, who was the Curator for Chinese Art, had closely followed the progress of the 1947 Royal Academy show and had also learned that only a handful of Kramrisch's sculptures were in that special exhibition, while the larger part of her col-

23
W. Norman Brown, Indian Art in America, in: *Parnassus* 7/6, 1935, 16–19.

24
For more on Coomaraswamy's early role in shaping collections of Indian art in the United States see Brinda Kumar, Collecting with Éclat. Coomaraswamy and the Framing of Indian Art in American Museums, in: Katherine Paul and Allysa Peyton (eds.), *Arts of South Asia. Cultures of Collecting*, Gainesville, FL 2019, 129–150.

25
Kramrisch herself may have only met Coomaraswamy once in Calcutta, although they corresponded in the 1930s. By the time of Kramrisch's arrival in the United States for the first time, Coomaraswamy had passed away, a few years earlier in 1947.

[Fig. 13]
William Norman Brown (1892–1975), March 15, 1961, 6 × 4 inches (15 × 10 cm), UPF 1.9 AR, Alumni Records Collection, Box 290, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania (December 10, 2024).

lection was on loan to other museums in England. In 1948 Brown's personal relationship with Kramrisch allowed him to approach her with an offer to have her collection shipped to the United States to be exhibited at the PMA. Until then Kramrisch's collection had been loaned to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and Oxford in England. The correspondence between Kramrisch and Brown from 1948–1949 reveals that at the time, Kramrisch was increasingly uncertain about her prospects in newly independent India, and was clearly conflicted about the matter, confessing that

> Since we met I have been thinking many times about the possibility of my going to U.S.A. Material conditions and prospects for me here in India are not good. At times I am very depressed – but I cannot tear myself away from India.[26]

Barbara Stoler Miller, in her biographical essay, and others who also knew Kramrisch personally, suggest that she was reticent to talk about her Calcutta days. In the early years, she had faced some difficulty as a woman in the male-dominated field of Indian academics and intellectuals that comprised her milieu in Calcutta. After independence, in the wake of prevailing nationalist sentiment, compounded by the fact that her husband Laszlo Nemény, had decided to work for the newly formed government in Pakistan, she felt further marginalized at the University of Calcutta.[27]

Moreover, Kramrisch was also unsure of the status of her collection in England. She was loath to sell it piecemeal, and in the postwar economic climate in Europe, it was unlikely that any museum would purchase the collection in its entirety. She was therefore quite amenable to a loan to the PMA. The V&A, on the other hand, was reluctant to comply, particularly since they feared that Kramrisch may be tempted to sell the collection in America and wanted to be able to retain it in England. In his letters to Fiske Kimball about the collection, Leigh Ashton, then director of the V&A, revealed this unease and was discouraging of the collection's onward loan for exhibition, noting:

> I assume you have received photographs of the collection as, despite the very high quality, a large proportion of the groups represent couples engaged in the sexual act. While the quality is of the very highest order the public has complained a good deal about its exhibition and I am merely underlining this in order that you may be perfectly clear as to what you are getting [...] I have also written to Dr. Kramrisch saying that I assume she is not going to sell the collec-

[26] Stella Kramrisch to W. Norman Brown, August 4, 1948, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

[27] Maryanne Conheim, Art Expert's Jewel of a Life. Feast, Famine, Love, Death, in: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 4, 1978, 1–2H.

> tion, otherwise I should oppose an Export License as the quality is of exceptional standard.[28]

After repeated reassurances from both Kimball and Kramrisch, the Export License was procured, and by the summer of 1949, plans for a spring exhibition of the collection were penciled into the PMA calendar.[29] The sculptures arrived in Philadelphia for exhibition for a loan period of five years. Jean Gordon Lee and W. Norman Brown oversaw the installation of the exhibition, which was opened in the spring of 1950 by Vijay Lakshmi Pandit, the Indian Ambassador to the United States.[30]

Nevertheless Ashton's fears had not been unfounded, for barely a month after the opening of the exhibition, to warm reviews by both the public and museum, Brown broached the subject of the collection's acquisition with Kramrisch.[31] The timing of his missive was fortuitous, as Kramrisch's life was in sudden flux – the very day before Brown wrote to her, Kramrisch's husband had been discovered shot dead on a beach in Karachi in an apparent suicide. Although they had not been close or cohabited for many years, with Neményi's death Kramrisch felt her position in India to be even more vulnerable. In his negotiations with her, Brown needed to manage his personal friendship and his professional interests and ended up being the go-between for the museum and Kramrisch

28
Leigh Ashton to Fiske Kimball, November 8, 1948, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

29
"Over a month ago I sent you a letter in which I copied the contents of a letter to me by Sir Leigh Ashton. Should it not have reached you I repeat its contents: "...I hope this does not mean that Philadelphia is going to buy your collection. If this is so, it seriously affects the question as to whether we can give you an Export License as we should wish in view of the long relationship between this country and India, that this museum should have the chance of purchasing this collection..." I reassured Sir Leigh Ashton that the collection was going to Philadelphia on loan as it had been in the V&A Museum." Stella Kramrisch to Fiske Kimball, January 9, 1949, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

30
"In early spring the Galleries adjoining the Indian Temple were installed with an anonymous loan collection of Indian sculpture and our own treasures in that field." R. Sturgis Ingersoll, A Review of the Year. Presented at the Annual Meeting on June 12, 1950, in: *The Philadelphia Museum Bulletin* 45/226, 1950, 107–119, here 107 (December 10, 2024).

31
"At last the exhibition is up and has been received with a great deal of interest and admiration. I think that the general public's eyes have been opened to the beauty of Indian Sculpture more by your pieces than anything they have seen for a long time." Jean Gordon Lee to Stella Kramrisch, March 26, 1950, Stella Kramrisch Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives. "Your pieces are being highly appreciated at the Museum, the President of the Museum Board and the Director have a feeling that it would be advantageous to the Museum to try to acquire them as a whole. As you can well imagine, that would suit me since I would like to see them kept here in Philadelphia. Of course, the immediate question is at what price you would sell them [...]. Since I am on the Museum staff, but at the same time your personal friend, I hesitate to give you any very strongly worded advice. It would, of course, be a simple transaction from your point of view to sell the collection as a whole, and be a convenience to do so." W. Norman Brown to Stella Kramrisch, April 28, 1950, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives. The copy of the letter among Fiske Kimball's papers also contained a handwritten note referring to the initial price of $50,000 offered, as a reminder, but the note says, "She says these figures were before her husband's suicide now collection is her only resource, wants minimum of 60. I phoned."

from 1949, when the subject of the loan of the collection first came up, until its final acquisition in 1956.

On learning of Kramrisch's willingness to sell, Fiske Kimball seized upon the opportunity to rally support for the purchase of the collection, and impressed upon the president of the museum, R. Sturgis Ingersoll, the need to do so. The two men recognized Kramrisch's desire to keep the collection whole, and in his annual report in 1951, Ingersoll advocated for its retention at the PMA since Philadelphia was home to a major center in the study of the arts and languages and literature of India, and hence the museum would be a fitting home for the collection.[32] As an architectural historian, Kimball too had a deep regard for Kramrisch's work on *The Hindu Temple*, and understood the relationship between the individual sculptures and the whole temple form, which Kramrisch highlighted in her work. He no doubt saw the addition of a collection like Kramrisch's as an ideal complement to the setting of the PMA with its preexisting temple hall (even though it was from a different region to most of Kramrisch's pieces) and understood that the addition of this group of works would boost the overall status of the PMA's collection. In his letters to Ingersoll, Kimball highlighted the uniqueness and range of the Kramrisch collection, as well as its prestige. Having been formed by the preeminent scholar on Indian sculpture, the quality of the pieces, he argued, were second to none and compared particularly favorably with the collections to be found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or the MFA in Boston.[33]

Kimball also argued that the reputation of the collection was further enhanced by the fact some pieces had been part of the London show and had even been illustrated there.

> We now have the illustrated volume on the Burlington House exhibition of 1947–1948, of the Art of India, edited by [Leigh] Ashton, and I have looked it over with Miss [Jean Gordon] Lee [...]. Of 300 numbers in sculpture listed (including many great ones from the Indian government), three were lent by Dr. Stella Kramrisch, and those illustrated (say 150) included one of hers [Fig. 14]. This is very creditable to

32
"The loan collection of Indian sculpture continues with us. It is available to the Museum for purchase at what is considered by all who have given thought to the matter a modest price. The owner desires the collection to be kept intact and believes that its final home should be in Philadelphia, the city in America regarded as pre-eminent in the study of the arts and languages and literature of India. It is my hope that during the ensuing months, members of the Museum will examine that extraordinary collection and that eventually a donor or donors will be found to present it to the Museum". Ingersoll, Review of the Year, 60.

33
"What Leigh Ashton wrote about the Kramrisch collection was: 'The quality is of the very highest order.' [...] I called Norman Brown to ask what book would be best on the mediaeval sculpture, and he said Dr. Kramrisch's own on that topic – although naturally it deals mostly with the major monuments in place in India [...]. He said Coomaraswamy's general book on Indian sculpture stresses more the earlier stuff. Boston is stronger in that. He volunteered that, for quality, the group here outdoes New York – I am sure for quantity also." Fiske Kimball to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, May 3, 1951, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

[Fig. 14]
Serpent Pillar (Nagastambha), c. late 9th–10th century, gneiss, 41 1/4 × 18 × 9 3/4 inches (104.8 × 45.7 × 24.8 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art. Purchased from the Stella Kramrisch Collection with funds contributed by R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, and other generous donors, the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, the Popular Subscription Fund, and proceeds from the sale of deaccessioned works of art, Acc. No. 1956-75-45 (December 10, 2024).

> the collection. These three pieces are here, and it surely adds to their value and interest that they were in the London show [...]. The Boston Museum, which is the richest over here in the field, lent two pieces of sculpture, one illustrated (among seven works of art lent by them) and the Metropolitan lent no sculpture (two paintings, one illustrated).[34]

The correspondence underscores the PMA's ambitions as well as its sense of rivalry with other US museums in striving for the collection's acquisition, even though it would take some years still before this would come to pass.

At the same time as Kimball and Ingersoll's correspondence, Brown also undertook extensive efforts to source funds to establish Kramrisch as a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania, which began offering its first full program on South Asian Studies in the academic year 1949–1950. He succeeded in securing funding initially through the Bollingen Foundation and later through the Rockefeller Foundation, that enabled Kramrisch to teach at the University of Pennsylvania, which was becoming the leading center for the study of India in the United States in no small measure due to Brown's own efforts. Yet Kramrisch's continued appointment was far from certain, and she was required to return to Calcutta, where the university had only granted her a leave of absence for her guest appointment at the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1952, as she was about to embark for India for a period of research and to complete work on a new book, Kramrisch met Chadbourne Gilpatric, an officer for the humanities division at the Rockefeller Foundation, and was subsequently given a grant-in-aid for $500. The memorandum that accompanied the grant stated:

> Dr. Stella Kramrisch is one of the outstanding authorities on Indian art [...]. Her interests and knowledge range through Indian architecture, painting, music, dance and drama, both classical and contemporary, and her studies have taken her to practically all the important art centers in India and have given her acquaintance with leading artists, art critics, and cultural leaders. [...] In view of her many contacts and perceptiveness, it would be useful to have her survey and report on promising artists and art critics in India, and also investigate possibilities of a systematic study in the role of festivals in Indian life today. Information of this character would be submitted to the Humanities officers for their planning purposes in the area, and it is understood that she would not

[34] Fiske Kimball to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, September 13, 1951, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

> make known to Indians any RF [Rockefeller Foundation] interest.[35]

In Kramrisch's seventeen-page confidential and wide-ranging report that followed from May 1953, she covered several topics, including an assessment of the state of literature, poetry, the burgeoning film industry, dance, and music. Singling out the visual arts for critical review, her observations were scathing:

> If the literary scene in Bengal is bright this can hardly be said about the visual arts. The younger generation of painters are spell-bound by Jamini Roy or they are hypnotized by any or several of the phases of Western painting which lie between post impressionism and abstract art. The latter has as yet but a few practitioners in India (and Bengal) and strangely enough these are young women painters [...]. It would require years of visual education to bring into existence in India a public who can see art [...]. The practicing artist has his public in the Western-educated intellectuals in towns amongst whom they [there] are hardly any patrons, although pictures are being bought occasionally. The Indian Government too is now giving scholarships though one would ask to what purpose for there is little scope in the 'artist' themselves and in facilities or opportunities in India for a serious quest in art, or for a place of its results in the life of the country [...]. The names of many of the well-known artists in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Delhi could be strung together on a brittle chain of contemporary fame.[36]

She dismissed the work of Indian artists as derivative of Western art and decried the lack of any criticism whatsoever, concluding her appraisal with a biting summation: "For all practical purposes visual art is dead and being murdered in modern India."[37] Continuing in her report, Kramrisch did, however, elaborate on what in her estimation could be remedies to the dire situation in the form of proper training with adequately paid teachers, and the awakening

35
Grant-In-Aid Authorization, Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

36
Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

37
"Everyone [sic] of the Western art movements of individual artists can be recognized in their diminished selves in Indian fancy dress, in the innumerable exhibitions which are held throughout the years in the large towns of India [...]. There is no standard of criticism, no sense of quality amongst the "educated," i.e., Westernised Indian nor had it time to develop amongst those who turned away from Westernization. Gandhian "simplicity" protects the worst offenders, "Khadi" homespun and woven fabrics, are disfigured by virulent, clashing colors in effete patterns. The average home of the "educated" and or well-to-do man about town would give the measure of the incomparably poor standard of "taste." It is far below the level of the low standing of "living" of the masses." Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

of the need for art through patronage, which she identified in the burgeoning interest by Marwari collectors such as Radha Krishna Jalan and Gopi Krishna Kanoria. Nevertheless, she noted that as connoisseurs and discerning patrons, they could not find the quality that matched their interest should it have extended to contemporary art.[38] Her subsequent remarks on the state of Indian sculpture were no less charitable:

> In comparison to the masses of painted canvases and paper on view exhibitions which are part of the make believe cultural activities of the Indian towns, sculptures occupy a fraction of space and attention. This is more disheartening if one looks back [to] the five thousand years of Indian art which had found in sculpture their truest medium.

Kramrisch's indisputably negative report on the state of Indian painting and sculpture was likely symptomatic of many factors; by this stage not only was she evidently bitter from the hostilities she had experienced at the University of Calcutta, but also her priorities had diverged from exponents of modern Indian art, the center of which was shifting away from Calcutta to other cities. For although when she had first arrived in India in the 1920s, Kramrisch had been at the forefront of modern Indian art criticism in Calcutta, had been instrumental in the exhibition of Bauhaus works in India, and had championed the works of Gaganendranath Tagore, by the 1950s her interests lay squarely in the traditional arts of India and in temple sculpture. Thus, it is conceivable that as she felt her influence and importance slipping in India, she found a more sympathetic and supportive environment for her priorities in the United States.

IV. "Making Friends and Influencing People." The Case for Kramrisch and Indian Sculpture

Upon her return to Philadelphia, thanks to the efforts of Brown, Kramrisch was able to resume her position at the University of Pennsylvania. Brown also advocated for her appointment as Curator of Indian Art at the PMA – till this moment he had held the position, but in an unpaid capacity, and was willing to step down in favor of Kramrisch. Once again Fiske Kimball was energetic in his efforts to find money for this endeavor and approached Nelson and John D. Rockefeller 3rd. As part of their larger diplomatic and developmental initiatives of the 1950s, the Rockefeller brothers were active in the postwar period in promoting awareness of Asian culture among Americans. In a letter to John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Kimball humorously noted, "Stella Kramrisch is quite a wonderful bird to put salt on the tail of. She will also make good relations

38 "[T]hey begin to look – in vain – for contemporary art worthy of their attention." Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

between U.S. and India."[39] Consequently, the PMA made an application for a grant to the Rockefeller Foundation to fund Kramrisch's curatorial position at the museum and for her to continue her teaching activities at the University of Pennsylvania for a period of five years. Advocating on her behalf, Kimball observed:

> The main position of Dr. Kramrisch for the next five years would be Professor (not Visiting Professor) at the University of Pennsylvania, but she would also take over anything that may need to be done here in relation to Indian art [...]. Dr. Kramrisch, besides being a very attractive woman "of uncertain age", is a demon scholar. There is not the smallest doubt that if she lives five years, as she should, she will go on with her teaching, her publications, and her curatorship, as well as making friends and influencing people in favour of India.[40]

Once again Kimball argued for Kramrisch's international reputation; he highlighted her connection to Coomaraswamy and presented her as his intellectual successor, while noting that the older scholar had been a promoter of her during his lifetime. The comparison would not end there, for Kimball also observed, "The limitation is that the private collections of Indian art in America are few",[41] alluding to the fact that Coomaraswamy had not only sold his own collection to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and negotiated a position as its keeper but had been instrumental in building the collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Freer Gallery in the 1920s and 1930s. In the American context, he presented a clear precedent for the purchase of Kramrisch's collection and her appointment at the PMA. In some quarters, however, the parallels were interpreted less advantageously. While evaluating the appli-

39
Fiske Kimball to John D. Rockefeller 3rd, March 10, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

40
"We are making our application wholly on behalf of Dr. Norman Brown, who is head of the Department of South Asia Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He has built up a wonderful department of studies of the language and culture of India, Pakistan and other Southeast Asia regions. He has had Dr. Stella Kramrisch on his staff for several years – the supporting grant for her (I believe from the Old Dominion or Avalon Foundation) expires this June. Over there, she is Visiting Professor in the Art of South Asia, but she does way beyond art and has indeed made endless friends for India in Philadelphia and in the University. Norman Brown has acted without salary as Curator of Indian Art here for many years, and he is prepared to step down from that title in her favour. The University Museum, of the University of Pennsylvania, itself has fine collections of Indian art, but here we have more, especially with the inclusion of 250 [sic] pieces of Indian sculpture, all of it formerly on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and to Oxford University. (At the beginning of the war, we paid to have all this brought over here, and it has been here ever since, very magnificently installed and much admired along with our own Indian things) [...]. I cannot predict for you the future of the Indian collection in this Museum, except that like every other department we shall push it to the limit of our means and try to keep and improve our relative position in this country." Fiske Kimball to Charles B. Fahs, April 7, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

41
Fiske Kimball to Chadbourne Gilpatrick, The Rockefeller Foundation, May 10, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

cation, the Rockefeller Foundation sought the opinions of other experts in the field including Benjamin Rowland and Joseph Campbell, who shared their assessments of Kramrisch. Rowland, for his part, while affirming his regard for Kramrisch as "one of the most distinguished scholars of Indian art", was nevertheless cautious about the precedent established by Coomaraswamy, who, he noted upon the sale of his collection to the MFA Boston, became increasingly indifferent to his curatorial responsibilities, preferring instead to devote his time to theoretical scholarly activities. As such, given her reputation as an academic scholar, Rowland expressed some reservations about Kramrisch's commitment to museum work.[42] As further part of their due diligence, the Rockefeller Foundation also checked Kramrisch's name against the public record to ensure she had no known Communist affiliations, a matter of heightened concern for American organizations operating in the McCarthy era.[43] Once Kramrisch had cleared the necessary background checks, the Rockefeller Foundation confirmed the grant for "Intercultural Understanding" to the PMA supporting Kramrisch's appointments in June 1954.[44]

At the PMA, Kramrisch's position as curator would be the sweetener in her negotiations to sell the collection to the museum, for unlike in Coomaraswamy's time, when he had been fortunate to find a supporter in Denman Ross for his collection's purchase in 1917 by the MFA Boston, by the 1950s, Kramrisch's collection was garnering interest among the growing proponents of Indian art, and especially of Indian sculpture, among certain collectors and museums in the US. At the time of the PMA's initial negotia-

42
"From the Museum's point of view I am rather dubious as to whether Miss Kramrisch would be very much interested in curating or adding to the collection. It is apparent, of course, from her own collection, now on exhibit in the Philadelphia Museum, that she is certainly a person of great taste and discrimination, but I must also point out to you as a parallel that once the late Dr. Coomaraswamy was appointed Research Fellow in the Boston Museum, his interest in the improvement of and arrangement of the collections completely vanished. My point is that if the Philadelphia museum wants a research scholar in residence, there is no one I could recommend more highly than Miss Kramrisch. If the museum also wants an active curator, I have my doubts." Benjamin Rowland to Chadbourne Gilpatrick, May 21, 1954 Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

43
A couple of years earlier in 1952, at the time of her confidential grant-in-aid from the Rockefeller Foundation, the notes from a conversation Kramrisch had with Chadbourne Gilpatric on June 8 reference the case of the economic historian Daniel Thorner who lost his academic position upon refusing to cooperate with McCarthy: "Miss K reports there has been something of a hubbub at the University of Pennsylvania concerning Daniel Thorner. About a month ago the University administration indicated that it did not wish to continue Thorner's appointment. This was protested by [W.N.B] Brown, and no final decision has been reached. In the meantime, Thorner has modest outside help to work for a year in India." Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center. Thorner would end up living in India till 1960.

44
In the Humanities grant for Intercultural Understanding under which the funds were disbursed, it was noted that "In the present Humanities program, emphasis is placed on the significance of art in gaining a fuller understanding of major cultures. The recent grant to Cornell University for Miss Holt's study of Indonesian art is paralleled to the new interpretations Dr. Kramrisch will give to the role of the arts in Indian culture." Rockefeller Foundation records, Projects (Grants) RG 1.2, Series 200R, Rockefeller Archive Center.

tions with Kramrisch, Norman Brown had tried to interest George P. Bickford, the Cleveland-based industrialist and art collector, in the Kramrisch collection.[45] Bickford himself was a patron of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and had been responsible for supporting curator Sherman Lee's efforts in building the museum collections of Asian art there. Lee and Bickford had broached the subject of her collection's purchase with Kramrisch, a matter that she seriously considered, until the PMA was able to match the offer and retain the collection. Nevertheless, Bickford's interest in Indian art would persist and he would build an impressive personal collection that would find its way into the Cleveland Museum of Art.[46] Drawing largely from his own experiences, Lee's observations in his introduction to the catalogue of the Bickford Collection were telling when he noted that,

> The war [WWII] in the Pacific and South Asian theatres changed all this and exposed hundreds of thousands to the 'mystery' and excitement of Indian art and society. The earlier writings of Coomarsawamy were now read in the light of fresh and direct experience.[47]

For others like John D. Rockefeller 3rd it was through an extensive trip through South and Southeast Asia that he found himself very drawn to Asia and its cultures, motivating him to found both the Asia Society and its Asia House Gallery, not to mention building a fine personal collection also dominated by Indian sculpture.[48]

Tapati Guha-Thakurta has argued that by the mid-century and following the 1947 exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, the reliance on and adoption of art historical frameworks that valorized Indian sculpture above all other art forms could be seen in the early decades following independence in India, but also in the US. This

45
"When the pieces were brought to this country, they were meant only for exhibition at the Museum on a five-year loan. The question of purchase did not arise. Dr. Kramrisch's feeling is that she would like these pieces housed in a museum where they would be available for the public to see. This corresponds to the Museum's own desires. Since seeing you I have received word that the University has received the funds to continue Dr. Kramrisch on its staff at least a year. While she is here she makes regular use of those pieces in her teaching." W. Norman Brown to George P. Bickford, May 3, 1951, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Archives.

46
Until the December 2013 announcement of the acquisition of the Benkaim collection of Indian paintings, the Cleveland Museum of Art was primarily known for its strengths in Indian sculpture, in no small measure due to George P. Bickford's collection.

47
Sherman Lee, Preface, in: *Indian Art from the George P. Bickford Collection. Catalog* (exh. cat. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art), ed. by Stanislaw J. Czuma, Cleveland 1975, v.

48
"Our collecting has always been closely related to our feeling for these Asian friends. It also expresses our hope of gaining a deeper understanding and appreciation of these older civilizations." Sherman E. Lee, *Asian Art. Selections from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd*, New York 1970, 8. Speaking of the Rockefeller collection, Sherman Lee wrote: "[It] is rich in Indian sculpture and in Chinese and Japanese porcelain, categories we now recognize as two areas of prime innovation and creation in Eastern Asia." Ibid., 9.

emphasis, which especially highlighted sculpture, and particularly ancient and medieval stone sculpture, to forward "a new art history" had been developed since the 1920s and 1930s and foregrounded sculpture as "the prime genre of India's 'great art' heritage".[49] Stella Kramrisch played no small role in this process, for in her writings from the 1920s onwards, and particularly in her seminal volume *Indian Sculpture* (1933), she argued for a system of internal aesthetic coherence in the appreciation of Indian sculpture. Her preface to the book opened with:

> Anyone with an understanding of art in general and a knowledge, however slight, of Indian things, will, on being shown a work of Indian sculpture, unfailingly label it Indian. Differences in age and origin, however clearly marked to the discerning eye, when pointed out to the outsider, will be apprehended only with more or less difficulty. There is something so strange, and at the same time unique, in any Indian work of art that its 'Indianness' is felt first of all, and what it is, is seen only on second thought.[50]

This emphasis on the essential and felt qualities of art took forward Ananda Coomaraswamy's project in the study of Indian art, where the spiritual and the transcendental became the defining marks of India's fine arts heritage. Indeed, in spite of different intellectual lineages, and arguably differences in the trajectories of their scholarship, there was a broad congruency in Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch's interpretations of Indian art, as evident in the former's largely positive review of the latter's book.[51] Kramrisch's interpretation that "'classically Indian' refers more to the quality than to the chronology of art in India", resonated with Coomaraswamy's own ahistorical analysis, while his conclusion would forecast Kramrisch's own later assessment of the state of the visual arts in India when he wrote: "only the folk arts are now 'classically Indian,' while the bourgeois and even the aristocratic milieus have broken with the

49
Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories. Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*, New York 2004, 188.

50
Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture, ix.

51
Ratan Parimoo has discussed this contrast in his essay: Stella Kramrisch. Indian Art History and German Art-Historical Studies (Including the Vienna School), in: id. (ed.), *Essays in New Art History. Studies in Indian Sculpture. Regional Genres and Interpretations*, New Delhi 2000. While Coomaraswamy differed with Kramrisch's use of the terms "form" and "motifs", he nevertheless endorsed the book by saying that "Dr. Kramrisch's clearly written, well illustrated and well documented volume is nevertheless within its chosen limits probably the best existing introduction to the subject". A. K. Coomaraswamy, Review of: Stella Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54/2, 1934, 219.

past".[52] Thus by the mid-century the preponderant understanding of Indian art was premised on its distinction from all Western aesthetic frameworks, and Kramrisch's scholarship signaled this shift away from the prevailing primacy of stylistic difference in the writing of art history. As Guha-Thakurta has observed,

> Indian art could come into its own only through posing of a sharp East-West dichotomy in aesthetics: through a construed opposition between Western 'realism' and Indian 'idealism,' [...] Henceforth, the spiritual and the transcendental became the defining marks of India's fine arts heritage, the code that could reduce and compress its complex history around a common essence.[53]

Kramrisch's writings from the 1930s and 1940s all contributed to the center staging of Indian sculpture as the primary expression of the spiritual essence at the heart of Indian art.[54]

However, not all reviews of Kramrisch's *Indian Sculpture* were as complimentary, and some scholars decried her emphasis on abstract ideas and philosophy, which sidestepped aesthetic judgment or the assessment of a formalist evolution of artistic forms.[55] This vein of critique would continue in reviews of some of Kramrisch's later publications as well, when W. G. Archer and Benjamin Rowland would take issue with her abstruse prose, and her eschewal of art historical methods such as stylistic analysis.[56] For Kramrisch,

52
Coomaraswamy, Review of: Stella Kramrisch, Indian Sculpture, 221. Such an assessment also anticipated Kramrisch's groundbreaking contributions later in her life in the organization of the exhibition *Unknown India. Ritual Art in Tribe and Village* (1968). On *Unknown India*, see Darielle Mason, Timing the Timeless. Stella Kramrisch's "Unknown India", in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual – Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 5/4, 2024, 813–861.

53
Guha-Thakurta, Monuments, Objects, Histories, 186.

54
Kramrisch continued this project in her writings in America, principally *The Art of India* (London 1954) and *Indian Sculpture in the Philadelphia Museum of Art* (Philadelphia 1960), the latter of which catalogued the holdings at the PMA, including her own recently accessioned collection.

55
K. de B. Codrington, in his review for *The Burlington Magazine*, took issue with Kramrisch's approach on several counts, from her reliance on archaeology to trace the development of form, her choice of examples, to her grounding her interpretations in Indian philosophy as the basis for an aesthetics that was distinct from that of the West. Codrington further suggested that methodologically, Kramrisch's metaphysical framework could not contribute to art history: "It may be pointed out, both with regard to such a philosophy and western modernism, that there is a tendency on the part of such critics to substitute a rather indefinite appreciation of the artist's state of mind, for a definite appreciation of the works of art in question. It is, after all, the business of art-criticism to discuss works of art." Id., Review of: Indian Sculpture by St. Kramrisch, in: *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 64/375, 1934, 291–92, here 292.

56
Rowland, in his review of Kramrisch's *The Art of India*, wrote: "In the present book the fault seems to lie in such a uniformity of metaphysical interpretation that the reader is unable to gain any real sense of development or change other than that conditioned by the requirements of iconography [...]. However admirable Dr. Kramrisch's condensation of the subtleties of the Indian philosophy of art may be, one wonders just how far even this bril-

in contrast to Rowland for instance, the explanation of the style along a historical trajectory was of secondary importance to a far more important need to understand the ideas and philosophies that led to the emergence of forms. Yet if some art historians lamented Kramrisch's overemphasis on the metaphysical frameworks and symbolic aspects of Indian art, it was precisely these elements that she believed were important to foreground in the study of Indian art, and she often found sympathetic audiences for her views in other quarters. When the Warburg Institute approached the India Society in London to organize an exhibition on photographs of Indian art and culture in a bid to highlight India's importance and acknowledge India's contribution to the war effort, Kramrisch was invited to organize the exhibition in 1940.[57] The note written by Kramrisch in a memorandum outlined that the exhibition intended "to show how the Indian builder and craftsman have given shape to the religious ideas of the Indian people [...] the monuments convey, by their form and contents, the essential conceptions of the Indian mind".[58]

Later in the 1940s, she built upon her earlier work in her two-volume magnum opus *The Hindu Temple* (1946), in which she approached the temple as a symbolic form, often basing her analysis on religious texts and architectural canons, her interpretation of Indian sculpture and architecture was a break from colonial archaeological readings of the structures. As demonstrated in *The Hindu Temple*, Kramrisch's interest in the religious symbolism underlying Indian art and thought was in sympathy with the Bollingen Foundation's mandate that had been founded in 1945 for the dissemination of Carl Jung's ideas in the scholarly field, and the foundation provided initial funding for her to lecture at the University of Pennsylvania when she first arrived in America in 1950.

The timing was propitious, for at the same time in public institutions such as universities and museums in the United States there was a more concerted turn to studying India and collecting Indian

liant performance can really lead Western readers to a formal and aesthetic appreciation, without at least some systematized analysis from a stylistic point of view and within a frame of reference that has some familiarity for them." Benjamin Rowland Jr., Review of: Stella Kramrisch, The Art of India, in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75/2, 1955, 138.

57
"[W]e of the India Society, have been approached by the Warburg Institute with a proposal for arrangements to be made for an Exhibition of specially prepared photographs illustrating the great contributions to art and culture of the people of India. [...] It is felt that a time when India's unreserved cooperation in the War is a matter of vital importance no opportunity should be lost in this country of making known to a wider public than that which is already interested the variety and extent of Indian contributions in this way to human progress, and her worthiness to fill a great place in the future of our Empire [...] It is proposed that the organization of the Exhibition should be in the hands of Dr. Kramrisch, a lecturer in Indian Art both in the Post-Graduate Department and at the Courtauld Institute of the University of London." India Office Papers, British Library, MSS EUR/F147/78. For more on the 1940 Warburg Institute exhibition, see Sarah Victoria Turner, 'Alive and Significant'. 'Aspects of Indian Art'. Stella Kramrisch and Dora Gordine in South Kensington c. 1940, in: *Wasafiri* 27/2, 2012, 40–51.

58
As quoted in Barbara Stoler Miller, Stella Kramrisch. A Biographical Essay, in: ead. (ed.) *Exploring India's Sacred Art. Selected Writings of Stella* Kramrisch, Philadelphia 1983, 3–29, here 18.

art. Articulating the mandate for "South Asia Studies in the University of Pennsylvania", W. Norman Brown emphasized "America's national need for knowledge of South Asia" in which art history was also being envisaged as a key component for the postwar project of Area Studies.[59] As Fredrick Asher has pointed out, it was in mid-century America that "Indian art, as part of the disciplinary practice of art history, entered the academy".[60] As for museums, by the mid-century, collections of Indian art in America were to be found principally in large museums in Boston, New York, Washington DC, and Philadelphia. Since their founding in the 19th century, many of these museums vied for prestigious collections, initially over their holdings of Western art, but the competitiveness often carried over into other fields as well. Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, however, stood at the forefront of Indian art in America, primarily aided by the collection and position of Ananda Coomaraswamy at the museum for three decades, from 1917 till his death in 1947. After Coomaraswamy there was no museum appointee who specialized in Indian art, and it was often the East Asian or Islamic art specialists whose curatorial duties extended to any Indian collections, as was the case with Jean Gordon Lee at the PMA. Nevertheless, in the decades preceding World War II concerted efforts had been made to expand the American public's understanding of India through institutions such as the Watumull Foundation (which funded Indian students to study in the US), the Institute of Pacific Relations, and the American Oriental Society.[61] By 1935, Brown had observed, with reference to an excavation then just commencing and being led by the American School of Indic and Iranian Studies and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts at a site in the Indus Valley, that "we might consider further evidences of America's interest in the culture of India".[62] The potential was considered that as a consequence of this

59
W. Norman Brown in his capacity as Chairman of South Asia Regional Studies provided an account of the program at the University of Pennsylvania, and listing the resources then available to students, noted that there were fifteen museums in America containing "fair to excellent collections of South Asian art or ethnographic material", adding in the following sentence that "clearly these resources are not enough to meet America's national need for knowledge of South Asia". Further on in the same paper he added that "Art history too is of interest to us. We want to know the people's aesthetic stimuli and responses. What are the theories of art, whether in architecture, sculpture, painting, literature, drama, music? In every South Asian country the arts are changing today. The surviving tradition of sculpture and handicraft is important. New developments demand our attention as well. Hence the University of Pennsylvania program has a separate appointment for South Asian art." South Asia Studies in the University of Pennsylvania, 1949, in: W. Norman Brown Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

60
In his essay Asher lays greater emphasis on the roles of Ludwig Bachhofer, Alfred Salmony, and Benjamin Rowland in creating a place for Indian art within their respective academic institutions. Fredrick Asher, The Shape of Indian Art History, in: Vishakha Desai (ed.), *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century*, New Haven, CT 2007, 3–14, here 5–6.

61
Among W. Norman Brown's papers at the University of Pennsylvania archives is a 1944 paper titled "Program to Promote the Study of India in the United States" in: W. Norman Brown Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

62
Brown, Indian Art in America, 16–19.

American interest in Indian archaeology, there existed a greater awareness of the plastic art traditions, and their continuation in subsequent centuries.

V. Endgame. A Legacy at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Thus, by the time of Kramrisch's arrival in the United States, the groundwork had been laid for the positive reception of both her collection and her scholarship. Kramrisch always saw herself principally as a scholar, and while reluctant to acknowledge herself as a collector, was nevertheless keenly aware of the value of her collection and was astute in leveraging her placement of it. That it was *her* collection was what in part made its initial exhibition and eventual acquisition by the PMA especially desirable. The initial loan period of five years for the Kramrisch collection's exhibition and her appointment as curator at the PMA coincided in 1954, and by the end of the year the matter of the collection's purchase came to a head. On account of interest expressed by a rival museum, Kramrisch asked for the insurance valuation for her collection to be doubled.[63] Henri Marceau, Kimball's successor and then acting director at the PMA, in a letter to R. Sturgis Ingersoll noted:

> I am sorry to hear that the Kramrisch Collection is being considered by another museum. Of course, that seems inevitable in view of the importance of the material. All the same, I hope that we don't lose it![64]

By March of the following year, the case was pressed when the Cleveland Museum of Art expressed a formal desire to explore the matter of the purchase of the Kramrisch collection, but required assurances that they would not be competing with another museum and that they would have the right of first refusal.[65] Compelled to

63
"Dr. Kramrisch has just left the office. I have acted as her attorney in certain matters. She informs me that she has been offered $120,000, for the Collection of Indian Sculpture now in our custody. She says that to disclose the name of the Museum making the offer would require her to obtain the permission of that museum. I did not press the point. She said that in view of the amount of the offer she feels that the insurance on the collection should be increased from $60,000 to $120,000." R. Sturgis Ingersoll to Henri Marceau, December 20, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

64
Henri Marceau (Acting Director) to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, December 27, 1954, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

65
"She [Stella Kramrisch] has had considerable contacts with the Cleveland Museum. Apparently eighteen months or so ago a director – or the Head of the Department of Oriental Art – I do not know which, told her that the Cleveland Museum would buy her collection of sculpture. They suggested the figure of $120,000. This was the origin of the increased insurance value. Dr. Kramrisch showed me this morning a letter she had just received from the Oriental Art man at Cleveland, whose name I stupidly forgot to note, and that letter in substance stated: "The Director desires to acquire the collection, there are complications because we are in the midst of a building program, – but a Mr. George Bickford (apparently a patron of the Museum) is much interested and on his trip to Philadelphia in April would like to discuss the matter with you". There then followed the final paragraph of the letter which read, – somewhat as follows: "Before such discussion we would ask you to inform

"meet the problem", Marceau and Ingersoll had to act swiftly.[66] They acknowledged this necessity in a memorandum about the collection's importance:

> To Dr. Stella Kramrisch will go unending credit for gathering a collection with the knowledge of a savant and the eye of an artist – a rare and refreshing combination.
> We are required to act fairly quickly. Dr. Kramrisch has a high regard for the Museum, and is fully appreciative of the sensitive way in which the pieces are presently installed, but as the collection is her major possession and the security of her future depends upon disposing of it advantageously, she cannot keep it indefinitely. And another museum is eyeing it with sharp interest realizing no doubt as keenly as we do that the collection will never be duplicated or a like opportunity present itself. The market value of good Indian sculpture has increased more than perceptibly in the past year or two, and it is destined to go very much higher as the supply diminishes. A conservative valuation of the Kramrisch collection piece by piece indicates that the sum she asks is quite in line with today's prices for example of far less artistic importance.[67]

Within the year, through the efforts of Ingersoll, the PMA and Stella Kramrisch had come to an understanding that the Museum would raise $120,000 to buy the collection by June 1956. Then followed a period of fundraising ultimately resulting in monies for the purchase sourced from a variety of individual and collective funds, including not only Ingersoll himself but also Nelson Rockefeller.[68] The acquisition marked a culmination of not only several years of particular interest in Indian art at the PMA, but also signaled the

us that you are not negotiating with any other museum and that we would have the first refusal." [...] Dr. Kramrisch told me that she wanted the collection to remain in our Museum but that she needed economic security and dreaded the thought of a present income of $6000 from the foundations coming to an end and then finding that there was an uncertain or no market for Indian sculpture as of that time. She wants me to present to her some proposition where under she would attain economic security. She is fifty-eight years old [...]. I think the collection is an immensely important one for us to own." R. Sturgis Ingersoll to Henri Marceau, March 10, 1955, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

66
"[I]n principle it makes me a little mad to feel that the Cleveland Museum people have been around here looking over the collection and making offers without first talking to us. This is not cricket. But, in any case, we must meet the problem [...]. I do believe that it is extremely important to keep the collection here." Henri Marceau to R. Sturgis Ingersoll, March 11, 1955, Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

67
The Kramrisch Collection, 2. Fiske Kimball Papers, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Library and Archives.

68
The funding sources included Miss Anna Warren Ingersoll, Nelson Rockefeller, R. Sturgis Ingersoll, Mrs. Rodolphe Meyer de Schauensee, Dr. I. S. Ravdin, Mrs. Stella Elkins Tyler, Louis E. Stern, Mr. and Mrs. Lionel Levy, Mrs. Flagler Harris, and with funds from the bequest of Sophia Cadwalader, funds from the proceeds of the sale of deaccessioned works of art, the George W. B. Taylor Fund, the John T. Morris Fund, the John H. McFadden, Jr., Fund, the Popular Subscription Fund, and the Lisa Norris Elkins Fund.

growing interest in Indian sculpture among American collectors and museums. Thus, in the decade following its Diamond Jubilee in 1950, the inclusion of the Kramrisch collection bolstered the PMA's ambitions, especially relative to rivals in New York (by 1960 the Metropolitan Museum of Art had opened its first permanent gallery of Indian sculpture) and Boston and strengthened its holdings into the first dedicated department of Indian art in an American museum, with arguably the leading Indian art scholar of the day at its helm.

Brinda Kumar is an Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where her curatorial projects have included monographic exhibitions on the work of Nasreen Mohamedi, Gerhard Richter, Charles Ray, and Philip Guston as well as thematic exhibitions including *Like Life. Sculpture, Color, and the Body* (2018) and *Home Is a Foreign Place. Recent Acquisitions in Context* (2019–2020). She is part of the curatorial team working toward the Oscar L. Tang and H. M. Agnes Hsu-Tang Wing at The Met. Kumar is the author of several essays for museum catalogues and has published articles from her doctoral research on the history of collecting Indian art in the United States.

ARCHIVAL DOSSIER

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION OF INDIAN ART AT THE WARBURG INSTITUTE, 1940

Jo Ziebritzki, Matthew Vollgraff & Sarah Victoria Turner

Introduction

On November 14, 1940, amidst the turmoil of the Second World War, the Warburg Institute in London welcomed visitors to a *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art*. Organized by the art historian Stella Kramrisch, the exhibition showcased around 250 black-and-white photographs of Hindu temples, Buddhist monuments, and traces of cultural exchange between "East" and "West". The photographs, mounted on large panels with descriptive captions, formed a striking visual essay that captivated and educated its London audience. In a turbulent time marked by the influx of Jewish refugees into Britain, the rain of German bombs on England, and rising resistance to the British Raj in India, the exhibition stood out as an unlikely cultural triumph. It not only attracted large numbers of visitors, but also received enthusiastic reviews from critics. Its success marked it as the most celebrated of the Warburg Institute's photographic exhibitions during the 1930s and 1940s, offering a rare moment of artistic and intellectual engagement to a city gripped by war.

The *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* not only represented a unique collaboration between Stella Kramrisch and two major London institutions – the Warburg Institute and the India Society – but also marked a pivotal moment in Kramrisch's career in England. Even before organizing the exhibition, Kramrisch had established multiple connections in London. Part of her collection was on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), and she had previously published with the India Society. In addition, she taught Indian art history at the Courtauld Institute during the summer term from 1937 to 1940. During these years she also collaborated with Fritz Saxl, director of the Warburg Institute, gathering reproductions of Gandharan sculptures for the institute's photographic collection.

This archival dossier presents a selection of archival materials that illuminate the exhibition's key themes, photographic techniques, and context in wartime London. Among the subjects dis-

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 967–1001

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.107819

cussed in its fourteen image commentaries are the motivations behind the exhibition, the public and critical responses, and the exhibition's subsequent tour across Great Britain. Given the 1940 exhibition's collaborative nature, relevant archival sources are found dispersed across multiple institutions: the Warburg Institute's archive and photographic collection (London), the Philadelphia Museum of Art Library and Archives (which house Stella Kramrisch's papers) and the British Library (London), which holds the papers of the India Society. We extend our thanks to Eckart Marchand, assistant archivist, and Paul Taylor, curator of the photographic collection at the Warburg Institute, as well as Kristen Regina, Director of the Library and Archives at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, for their invaluable support in locating and digitizing these materials.

I. The Exhibition Setup [Fig. 1a and Fig. 1b]

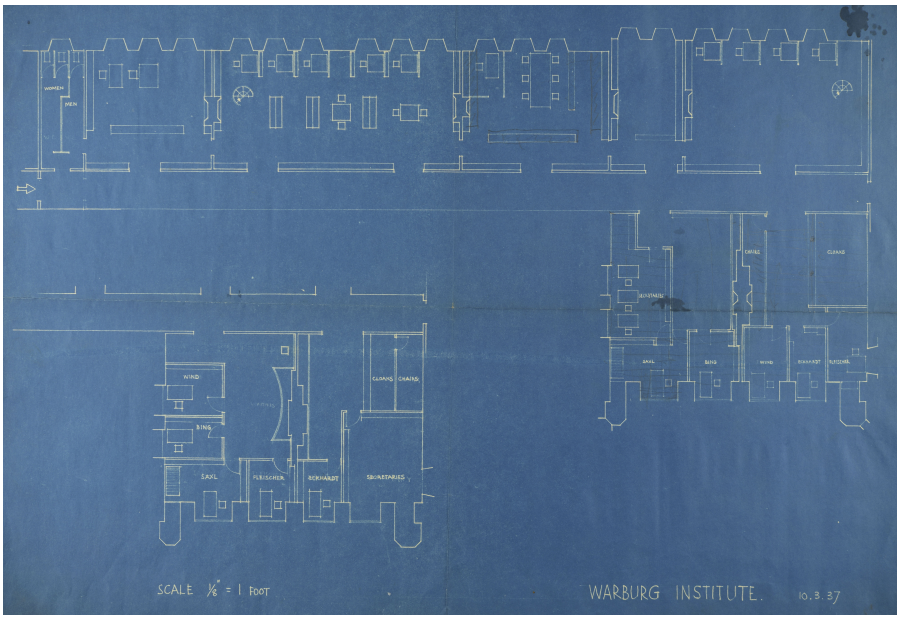
The 1940 exhibition was not only an institutional collaboration; it was also an intellectual one. The selection of images and narratives that made up its first two sections – on Hindu temples and Buddhist architecture and art, respectively – unmistakably reflected the perspectives of Kramrisch's scholarship. The third section, by contrast, examined Gandharan art through the quintessentially Warburgian lens of cultural exchange.

In this view of the section on "Images of the Main Hindu Deities", a central panel devoted to representations of Śiva is flanked by two side panels on Śakti and Viṣṇu. These panels and others like it were installed in front of empty library shelves, stretching across the reading rooms of the Warburg Institute, then located in the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, London. The arrangement of photographs on upright cloth panels was fully in keeping with the Warburg's in-house style. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Warburg Institute had produced several photographic exhibitions, beginning with *The Visual Approach to the Classics* (1939) and culminating with *English Art in the Mediterranean* (1941) and *Portrait and Character* (1943).[1] These exhibitions embodied the Warburg Institute's ambition to demonstrate the relevance of its art and cultural-historical scholarship to British society. The 1939 *Visual Approach to the Classics* show, for example, toured museums and schools across the UK, serving as a model for the following year's exhibition on Indian art.

Such outreach efforts were critical for the institute and its staff, all of whom were exiles from Nazi Germany, as their funding and future in Britain were far from secure. By the winter of 1940, when the exhibition was held, the Warburg – like other cultural institu-

1 Johannes von Müller, "Under the Most Difficult Circumstances". Exhibitions at the Warburg Institute 1933–45, in: id., Joanne W. Anderson, and Mick Finsch (eds.), *Image Journeys. The Warburg Institute and a British Art History*, Passau 2019, 29–42. In the same edited collection, see also Joanne W. Anderson, Cultural Life and Politics in Wartime London, 43–51.

[Fig. 1a]
Exhibition view of panel "VII. Images of the Main Hindu Divinities", in the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute, Warburg Institute Archive (WIA), I.24, Exhibition catalogue containing fifty-four photographs of the screens, fol. 17, photo: The Warburg Institute, London.



[Fig. 1b]
WIA, I.6.2, Blueprint of Warburg Institute, Imperial Institute Floor Plan, Cox & Partners, 1937, photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

tions, including museums – had already moved its most valuable holdings out of London due to the intense bombing during the Blitz. If the photographic exhibition owed its success to the rarity of cultural activities in the wartime capital, another, more important reason was the theme of Indian art itself.

II. Warburg Institute Exhibition Leaflet [Fig. 2a and Fig. 2b]

The exhibition leaflet not only bears the imprint of its author, Stella Kramrisch, but also attests to the research priorities of the Warburg Institute.[2] Kramrisch's emphasis on the "essential conceptions of the Indian mind", "the unbroken tradition of India", and "the consistency of Indian thought [...] through thousands of years" reflects her deeply entrenched conception of the transcendental and timeless nature of Indian art. By contrast, the text's assertion that the meaning of Indian artistic traditions "cannot be verified by logical and reflective thought alone", but "must be tested and made concrete by practice and a training in which all the faculties of mind and body are engaged" distinctly evokes the Warburg Institute director Fritz Saxl's emphasis on visual education as a form of popular education. Recapitulating the methodological argument of the institute's photographic exhibition of Greek and Roman art from the previous year, the leaflet text expounds on the rationale of its didactic approach, which guides the viewer from "aesthetic appreciation to intellectual understanding".

Interestingly, the text attributes a dual power to photography, which can both isolate sculptures, detaching them "from the setting in which they appear", while also helping "to visualize the original context to which they belong", among other things by reproducing atmospheric light and darkness. While critics like Iqbal Singh would fault the Warburg exhibition for decontextualizing and dehistoricizing Indian art, it can be argued that this was only one of the exhibition's strategies.[3]

It is possible that Saxl's pedagogical method of curating photographic exhibitions – first honed in the milieu of socialist Vienna and refined through his ongoing collaboration with Aby Warburg, the institute's founder – even made an impression on Kramrisch's curatorial style. On November 13, 1940, as she was about to depart to Calcutta, she wrote to Saxl:

2
In a letter to the India Society secretary, who was responsible for printing the leaflet, Saxl explicitly requested that Kramrisch's initials at its end should be deleted. Warburg Institute Archive, Associations, India Society, Fritz Saxl to Frederick J. P. Richter, November 30, 1940.

3
On Singh's critique, see Jo Ziebritzki and Matthew Vollgraff, Editorial. Stella Kramrisch and the Transculturation of Art History, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual. Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 4, 2024, 787–809.

Exhibition of Indian Art

AT THE WARBURG INSTITUTE, NOVEMBER 1940

THIS present photographic exhibition of Indian art has been planned to show how the Indian builder and craftsman have given shape to the religious ideas of the Indian people. The monuments convey, by their form and contents, the essential conceptions of the Indian mind.

A proper understanding of Indian tradition requires a closer and a different kind of study than the generally educated public can give. Its meaning cannot be verified by logical and reflective thought alone. It must be tested and made concrete by practice and a training in which all the faculties of mind and body are engaged. The visual approach introduces the student to the monuments from the perceptible and the intelligible side. The monuments guide him from æsthetic appreciation to intellectual understanding.

Indian sculptures in museum collections are only fragments of a whole. They are detached from the body of the temple to which they belong, detached also from the setting in which they appear, from the light which envelops them and is reflected from them. The photographs show the light, or the darkness, in which the sculptures dwell on the walls and in the interior of the Indian temples, and help to visualize the original context to which they belong. They illustrate, in their juxtaposition, the consistency of Indian thought underlying the variety of the forms in which it has been clad through thousands of years in the many regional schools of the Indian continent.

The exhibition is devoted to works that illustrate the unbroken tradition of India, based on the Vedas and known as Hinduism. It also includes works of the

[Fig. 2a]
WIA, I.24.1, n.p., photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

religious reform movements of Buddhism and Jainism. Both are rooted in the same tradition. A later exhibition will show in a similar manner the achievements of Islam in India.

The exhibition is divided into three sections. They illustrate (1) a millennium of temple-building from the seventh to the seventeenth century A.D. and beyond, (2) a millennium of the 'cave' or rock-cut monuments of India, from the second century B.C. to the eighth century A.D., and (3) almost half a millennium of contacts and exchanges with the classical art of the West, in the northern border regions (Gandhara, Afghanistan), and in various Indian schools, including the south of India.

In all its manifestations Indian art serves the purpose of leading from appearance to reality. It uses the abundance of life of which it is a part as support and symbol of an ultimate state which comprises and transcends life. In this function the work of art is instrumental in the same way as is the human body. By its training and mastery neither its physical perfection alone nor its subjugation are attempted in India. The human body is made the place wherein and by means of which man achieves union with the absolute.

The exhibition has been prepared by Dr. S. Kramrisch, and is held under the joint auspices of the Warburg Institute and the India Society.

[Fig. 2b]
WIA, I.24.1, n.p., photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

> You have made real to me a world in which I always believed and of which I had come to think as unattainable. In the sustained ceremony of opening the eye which you have performed on me during these months you have made me see and know the kindness which comes from understanding, the thoroughness of application which comes from consistent thought – and their results. [...] Perhaps I shall be able to contribute to them. This is how it should be when a Bodhisatva is near and a Vidyadhara passes by.[4]

III. The Hindu Temple and Raymond Burnier's Photography [Fig. 3]

Around 1940, after authoring major monographs on both sculpture (*Indian Sculpture*, 1933) and painting (*Survey of Painting in the Deccan*, 1937), Kramrisch turned her attention decisively toward the study of Hindu temples. The exhibition, in particular its first section, was an important milestone on that research journey; from it stem both this reproduction of panel "II. The Spire of the Temple Represents the World Mountain" and the exhibition view showing a *Krishna Lila* scroll hung between two panels. The Hindu temple section of the exhibition foreshadowed the culmination of her in-depth research in the richly illustrated, two-volume study on *The Hindu Temple* (1946).

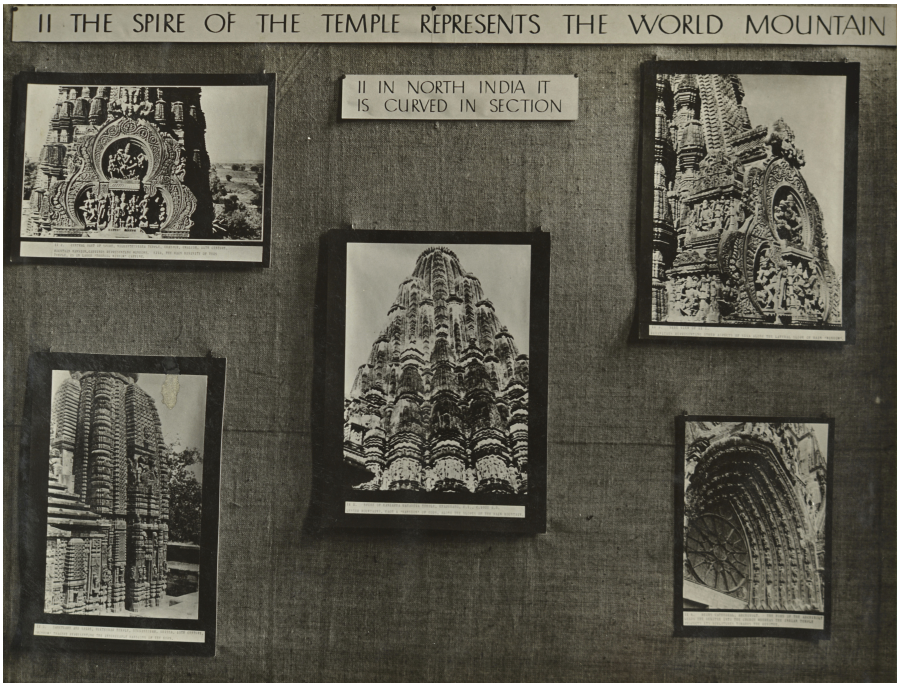
Various photographic sources were used when assembling the images to be shown to the London audience. When proposing the exhibition to the India Society, Saxl emphasized that it was "essential that photographs chosen should be modern and appeal to the wide public which has now grown accustomed to the latest photography through the daily press".[5] As was typical for photographic exhibitions at the Warburg Institute, where photographs were treated as tools for visual analysis rather than as autonomous works of art, photographers and image sources were not credited.[6] This practice extended to the exhibition of Indian art, where the artistic merit of the photographers was similarly downplayed.

Kramrisch, however, had collaborated with renowned photographer Raymond Burnier, whose expressive photographs of Indian sculptures and temples possessed undeniable artistic qualities. She actively resisted the Warburg Institute's policy of leaving professional photographers unacknowledged, advocating for Burnier's work to be credited. Ironically, while pushing for Burnier's recognition,

[4] Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch, Stella Kramrisch to Fritz Saxl, November 13, 1940.

[5] British Library, MSS EUR F 147/78, Fritz Saxl, Aspects of Indian Art, A Series of Exhibitions, undated typescript.

[6] We thank Johannes von Müller for his insightful research on this point.



[Fig. 3]
Exhibition view of panel "II. The Spire of the Temple Represents the World Mountain", in the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute, WIA, I.24.1, fol. 2, photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

Kramrisch herself chose to remain anonymous as the collector of over a dozen sculptures featured in reproductions in the same exhibition.

This panel on northern Indian temples illustrates Kramrisch's twofold strategy for making monumental temple structures more accessible to European viewers. First, she relied on Burnier's high-contrast, almost expressionist photographs: here Burnier's images dominate the top left, top right, and central sections. The captions identified the temple's name, location, date, and sometimes the deity depicted – for example, the two top images name Śiva. Some captions also offered symbolic interpretations, such as the description for the top-left image: "Central Part of the Spire, Nilkanthesvara Temple, Udaypur, Gwalior, 11th century. Mountain mansion, carvings represent windows. Śiva, the main Divinity of this Temple, is in large 'Trefoil Window' carving." However, these explanations could still seem cryptic without prior knowledge.

Hence Kramrisch's second strategy was to provide comparative examples more familiar to European visitors. For instance, the bottom-right photograph shows the entrance arch of a Gothic cathedral, accompanied by a caption reading: "The form of the Archivolt leads the devotee into the church, whereas the Indian temple projects its sculptures towards the devotee" – a reference to the "reverse perspective" Kramrisch had studied in the murals of Ajanta.[7] Previously, Kramrisch had argued for an "inner affinity" between Gothic cathedrals and Hindu temples, noting how both express spirituality through form and architecture.[8] In this 1940 exhibition, by contrast, this parallel was primarily a didactic tool intended to engage and accommodate the cultural expectations of a European audience.

IV. *Patas* (Scroll Paintings) in the Photographic Exhibition [Fig. 4]

The *Krishna Lila* scroll, displayed between two panels in the first section, was one of the five *patas* (scroll paintings) Kramrisch added to the photographic exhibition. *Patas* are a Bengali narrative art form that depict folkloric and religious stories. The scrolls featured in the exhibition were all from West Bengal and dated to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Interestingly, they were neither mentioned in the exhibition leaflet, nor were they reproduced in the systematic photographic documentation of the entire exhibition now held in the archive of the Warburg Institute, suggesting that they were added spontaneously to inject color and vibrancy into

7
See Sylvia Houghteling's article in this issue: Another Perspective as Symbolic Form. Stella Kramrisch's Writings on the Ajanta Paintings, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual – Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 4, 2024, 863–900.

8
Stella Kramrisch, Indian Art and Europe, in: *Rupam* 11, 1922, 81–86.

[Fig. 4]
Left: Exhibition view of photographic panels and a scroll in the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute. Right: *Krishna Lila Pat*, 19th century, Indian, artist unknown, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art: Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994-148-548a,b.

the exhibition, rather than as integral components of its narrative. While these folk art pieces were merely supplementary to the Warburg exhibition, almost three decades later Kramrisch would dedicate the major exhibition *Unknown India* entirely to Indian folk art.[9]

The scrolls came from Kramrisch's private collection, and likely represented a practical means of including original artworks in the exhibition. Their inclusion, despite the risk of destruction from bombing, suggests that she did not consider them as valuable as other items in her collection. In 1945, Kramrisch wrote to Frederick J.P. Richter, honorable secretary of the India Society, to inquire about the whereabouts of some of her items, including the *patas*: "I do want to get them back. Does anyone come to India and could bring them?"[10] When she finally retrieved them is unclear, but she eventually did, as the *Krishna Lila* scroll and other *patas* from the exhibition now form part of the Stella Kramrisch collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.[11]

V. Exhibition View [Fig. 5]

The building that housed the exhibition was neither the first nor the last of the Warburg Institute's London locations. After a temporary stay at Thames House from 1934 to 1937, the refugee German research library moved into the Imperial Institute Buildings in South Kensington, where it remained until 1958. As Tim Anstey describes, the space "consisted of a suite of heavily moulded, double-height rooms within a stylistically eclectic building with monstrous flying stone staircases and monumental corridors".[12] It was in this occasionally challenging space that all of the institute's major photographic exhibitions were held.[13]

In this photograph of the exhibition's first section, four panels are visible. The first, panel "XII. The Animal as Seat of the Divine Presence 'Vahana' and the Anthropomorphic Image of Divinity", explores the iconographic representation of animals as divine

9
See Darielle Mason's article in this issue: Timing the Timeless. Stella Kramrisch's "Unknown India", in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual – Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 4, 2024, 813–861.

10
British Library, MSS EUR F 147/70, Stella Kramrisch to Frederick Richter, September 4, 1945.

11
See Stella Kramrisch collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (October 15, 2024).

12
Tim Ainsworth Anstey, Moving Memory. The Buildings of the Warburg Institute, in: *Kunst og Kultur* 103/3, 2020, 172–185, here 179.

13
See Anderson, Finch, and von Müller, Image Journeys.

[Fig. 5]
Exhibition view of the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute, PMA, Library and Archives, Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art at the Warburg Institute.

mounts, as well as anthropomorphic deities like Ganesha.[14] The two central panels fall under the heading "XI. Recurrent Themes of Reliefs", with subtopics "XIA. The Royal Duty of Combat as a Means of Attaining Truth" and "XIB. 'Mithuna', The Union of the Male and Female Bodies as the Symbol of the Supreme Union".[15] The photograph conveys a sense of the intellectual, visual, and spatial density that confronted the visiting public.

VI. Report of the Opening Reception, in *Indian Arts and Letters* [Fig. 6]

This press agency photograph of Leo Amery (left), the Secretary of State for India, and Sir Francis Younghusband (right), the Chairman of the India Society, was taken at the opening of the exhibition. The India Society, represented by Younghusband, had originally been planning a major loan exhibition of Indian art at the Royal Academy, the organization of which was already well underway when the outbreak of the Second World War prevented the show from opening. That exhibition eventually took place, after long delays, between 1947 and 1948. This kind of disruption became a common feature of cultural life in the British capital during the war as many of the national museums and galleries were gradually emptied of their collections for safe storage. Smaller and private galleries continued to stage exhibitions, but the logistics and funding of such events were unsurprisingly difficult during the war. A photographic exhibition like the one on Indian art was much easier to arrange and assemble under these difficult circumstances, although certainly not without logistical challenges which Kramrisch, the Warburg, and the India Society worked hard to overcome.

Founded in 1910 by a group of cultural campaigners and activists, including some prominent anti-imperialists, based predominantly in the UK and India, the India Society was dedicated to the promotion of the fine arts of the Subcontinent.[16] By the time of this collaboration, the society had settled into a more establishment phase; it would go on to receive royal patronage in 1944. Younghusband was a prominent and well-known figure to appoint as chair of the India Society. As a British Army officer, he led a

14
To the right of Panel XII, for instance, one can see an 11th-century sculpture of Ganesha and his Consort made in Madhya Pradesh. The sculpture formed part of Kramrisch's personal collection and is now held by the Philadelphia Museum of Art (October 15, 2024).

15
Other sculptures from Kramrisch's personal collection are likewise visible in this photo, including the northwestern Indian sculpture of *Two Warriors in Discussion* from the Chahamana Dynasty Period (Panel XIA) and the 13th-century *Maithuna* sculpture from Odisha (Panel XIB) (October 15, 2024).

16
Sarah Victoria Turner, Crafting Connections. The India Society and Inter-imperial Artistic Networks in Edwardian Britain, in: Susheila Nasta (ed.), *India in Britain. South Asian Networks and Connections, 1858–1950*, Basingstoke 2012, 96–114.

[Fig. 6]
Leo Amery (left) and Francis Younghusband (right) at the opening of the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute, in: Anon., *Indian Arts and Letters*, 1940, Plate I.

much publicized expedition to Tibet in 1903 and held the post of British Resident in Kashmir. By the 1930s, however, he had become a leading figure in religious and spiritual matters, helping to organize the World Fellowship of Faith's congress in London in 1936 and published books with titles such as *Modern Mystics* (1935). He would have undoubtedly been supportive of Kramrisch's curatorial approach, emphasizing the aesthetic power of the religious art of Hinduism and Buddhism – in both its ancient contexts and its contemporary significance.

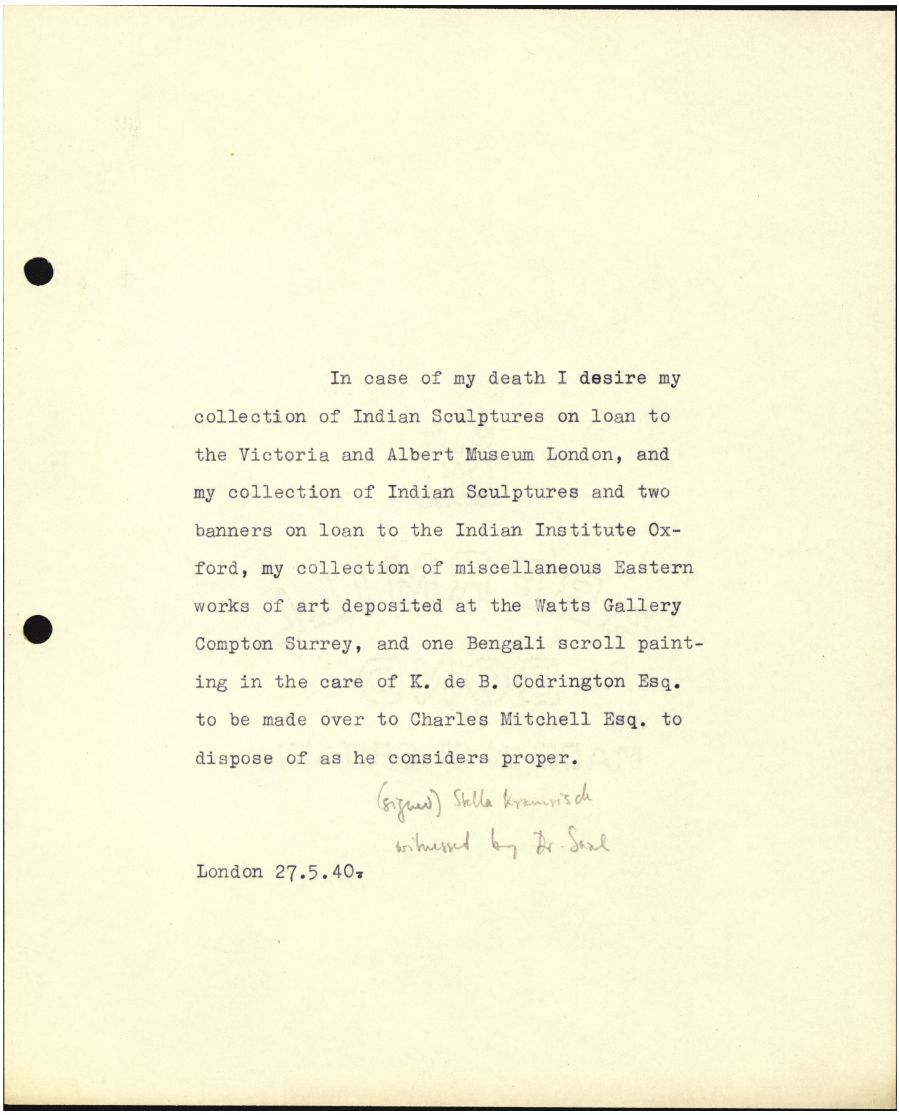
VII. Stella Kramrisch's Testament (1940) [Fig. 7]

The war's impact not only permeated all aspects of British cultural life, but was also felt by many on a profoundly personal level. On the eve of the exhibition's opening, Kramrisch wrote to the Warburg Institute's chief librarian, Gertrud Bing: "I wish I could mobilize some of the protecting forces on view in your exhibition to act against the noise of guns and bombs. They will do it in their own way, I am sure, 'merely by being looked at'."[17] Imagining the photographs as talismanic protectors against the Blitz may have been wishful thinking, but it provided a much-needed sense of solace. Acutely aware that her life was at risk in the UK, Kramrisch put her affairs in order as she prepared to board a ship to Calcutta, a journey that could have been her last. On May 27, 1940, she recorded her will, with fellow Viennese Jewish exile Fritz Saxl serving as witness.

Kramrisch's one-sentence will focused on safeguarding her scattered collections, which were then housed in various locations across the UK – at the V&A, the Indian Institute in Oxford, the Watts Gallery in Compton, and in the care of British archaeologist Kenneth de Burgh Codrington, then Keeper of the Indian Section at the V&A. At the time she drafted her will, her mother, Berta Kramrisch – her only direct relative – had been forcibly relocated from Vienna to the Łódź ghetto, where she would perish in 1942.[18] In her will, Kramrisch named twenty-eight-year-old Renaissance art historian Charles Mitchell as the executor of her estate. Mitchell, who was then serving on the civilian staff of the British Admiralty, had completed his BLitt thesis on Grünewald's Isenheim Altar at Oxford in 1939, under the informal supervision of Fritz Saxl. After the war, he joined the Warburg Institute as a lecturer, where he

17
Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch, Stella Kramrisch to Gertrud Bing, November 13, 1940.

18
See Darielle Mason, Interwoven in the Pattern of Time. Stella Kramrisch and the Kanthas, in: *Kantha. The Embroidered Quilts of Bengal* (exh. cat. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art), ed. by ead., Philadelphia 2010, 158–168, here 166–167.



In case of my death I desire my collection of Indian Sculptures on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum London, and my collection of Indian Sculptures and two banners on loan to the Indian Institute Oxford, my collection of miscellaneous Eastern works of art deposited at the Watts Gallery Compton Surrey, and one Bengali scroll painting in the care of K. de B. Codrington Esq. to be made over to Charles Mitchell Esq. to dispose of as he considers proper.

(signed) Stella Kramrisch
witnessed by Dr. Saxl

London 27.5.40.

[Fig. 7]
WIA, GC Kramrisch, Testament, May 27, 1940, photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

remained until 1960.[19] Given the urgency of wartime, Mitchell's lack of expertise in Indian art may have seemed less significant than his youth, trustworthiness, and naval credentials, which likely made him a dependable choice in uncertain times.

VIII. Kramrisch's Collection of Temple Fragments [Fig. 8]

Among the items kept at the V&A in 1940 were Kramrisch's collection of sandstone temple and sculpture fragments. The panel titled "XB. Types of Physiognomies of Gods" featured images of sculpted heads of various deities, including five reproductions of pieces from her collection.[20] As Brinda Kumar has noted, Kramrisch was a deeply private collector who often left reproductions of her own pieces unacknowledged, both in this exhibition and in her publications.[21] The inclusion of photographs of her items highlights the exceptional quality of her collection, yet it also suggests that Kramrisch deliberately chose not to expose these valuable sculptures to the dangers of bombing – a risk she was more willing to take with the painted scrolls [see Fig. 4]. This distinction makes it clear that, despite her personal appreciation for various art forms, she was acutely aware of the market value of the pieces in her collection and acted accordingly. Indeed, as she organized the London exhibition during the summer of 1940, Kramrisch showed a greater willingness to risk her own life than to put her prized collection at risk [see Fig. 7].

IX. Activating the Exhibition [Fig. 9]

A lecture series was organized to run alongside the exhibition under the title "Lectures on Cultural Relations Between East and West", aligning closely with the Warburgian interest in cross-cultural associations. The first lecture in the series was given by Professor Paul Kahle, a German scholar who had taken up a post at the University of Oxford after being forced to leave Bonn University due to his employing a Polish rabbi as an assistant and to his family's support of Jewish neighbors. The second lecture, on "Mughal Painting", was

19
Jaynie Anderson, Obituary: Professor Charles Mitchell, in: *The Independent*, October 31, 1995.

20
These are: X.B.2 (upper left image): *Nimbate Head of Attendant Divinity*, c. 10th–11th century, Khajuraho; X.B.1 (upper middle images): *Male Head*, c. 10th century, India; X.B.3 (upper right image): *Nimbate Head of Deity*, c. 10th century, Madhya Pradesh; X.B.4 (lower middle image): *Upper Portion of a Male Warrior*, early 11th century, Kiradu, Barmer District, Rajasthan; X.B.6 (lower right image): *Gana*, mid-to late 13th century, Odisha, India (October 15, 2024).

21
See Brinda Kumar's article in this issue: From Field to Museum. Placing Kramrisch and her Collection in Postwar United States, in: *21: Inquiries into Art, History, and the Visual – Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte und visuellen Kultur* 4, 2024, 925–965.

[Fig. 8]
Exhibition view of panel "XB. Types of Physiognomies of Gods", in the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute, WIA, I.24.1, fol. 23, photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

THE WARBURG INSTITUTE

IMPERIAL INSTITUTE BUILDINGS, SOUTH KENSINGTON
LONDON, S.W.7.

LECTURES ON CULTURAL RELATIONS BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

at 2.30 p.m.

December 3 — PROFESSOR P. KAHLE: ISLAM AND FAR EAST IN THE TIMES OF THE MUGHAL RULERS.

Under the joint auspices of the India Society and the Warburg Institute:

December 10 — MR. BASIL GRAY: MUGHAL PAINTING AS AN INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ART.

Under the joint auspices of the Royal Asiatic Society and the Warburg Institute:

December 17 — DORA GORDINE (MRS. RICHARD HARE): THE BEAUTY OF ASIATIC SCULPTURE.

Further lectures in this series will be announced at a later date.

[Fig. 9]
WIA, I.24.4, Leaflet of *Lectures on Cultural Relations between East and West*, December 1940.

co-organized with the India Society and given by the art historian and British Museum curator, Basil Gray. The third lecture was provided by the Latvian-born, London-based sculptor Dora Gordine at the Royal Asiatic Society. Kramrisch's name is missing from this list of lectureres because by the time the exhibition opened, she had traveled back to India. Gordine was a high-profile speaker, with the art critic Jan Gordon writing in 1938 that she was "very possibly becoming the finest woman sculptor in the world".[22] Gordine and Kramrisch certainly knew one another and presumably Kramrisch would have approved of the choice of a sculptor to talk about her exhibition because, as she claimed, "it is in sculpture that India has made her greatest artistic contribution to the world [...] the whole temple is conceived as a work of sculpture".[23] Gordine wrote of Kramrisch: "Few people have done more than Stella Kramrisch to reveal the beauty of Indian sculpture to Great Britain."[24]

Gordine, like Kramrisch, had traveled extensively in Asia (although not India).[25] She had lived in Johor Bahru (now in Malaysia but then part of the Sultanate of Johore) from 1930 to 1935 with her first husband Dr. George Herbert Garlick, who worked for the Malay Medical Service. While in Malaysia, Gordine had become friends with the eminent scholar and president of the Royal Asiatic Society, Sir Richard Winstedt, who invited her to give the lecture entitled "The Beauty of Asiatic Sculpture" (published as "The Beauty of Indian Sculpture" in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*) to coincide with Kramrisch's exhibition.[26] Selecting a wide range of sculptures to discuss, Gordine articulated a very personal response to the works in the exhibition. "My appreciation of Indian sculpture", she stressed, "is not that of an art historian but that of a living sculptor". She continued:

> I shall not therefore attempt to say anything about historical developments or to compare and criticise the characteristics of different periods, but I shall concentrate instead on trying to show some of the great and timeless qualities of Asiatic

22
Jan Gordon, Dora Gordine at the Leicester Galleries, in: *Observer*, November 6, 1938, 14.

23
Stella Kramrisch, Medieval Indian Sculpture, in: *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 87/4535, 1939, 1180–1195, here 1181–1183.

24
Letter by Dora Gordine, n.p., quoted in Jonathan Black and Brenda Martin (eds.), *Dora Gordine. Sculptor, Artist, Designer*, London 2007, 54.

25
For more on Kramrisch and Gordine, see Turner, Crafting Connections.

26
Dora Gordine, The Beauty of Indian Sculpture, in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 73, 1941, 42–48.

> sculpture which makes it as alive and significant for us today as it was to its unknown creators.[27]

To have such a response by a leading female sculptor to an exhibition organized by a leading female art historian and curator from this point in the twentieth century is unusual. The exhibition thus becomes a metaphorical meeting place – a site not only of scholarship, but of creative inspiration. Whatever we now might think of Gordine's universalizing tropes for the "timeless qualities" of the Hindu and Buddhist works she was responding to, her plea was for her contemporaries to look carefully at these works, to find meaning for them as "alive and significant" in the troubled world of the start of the new decade feels genuine in its call for cultural openness and curiosity.

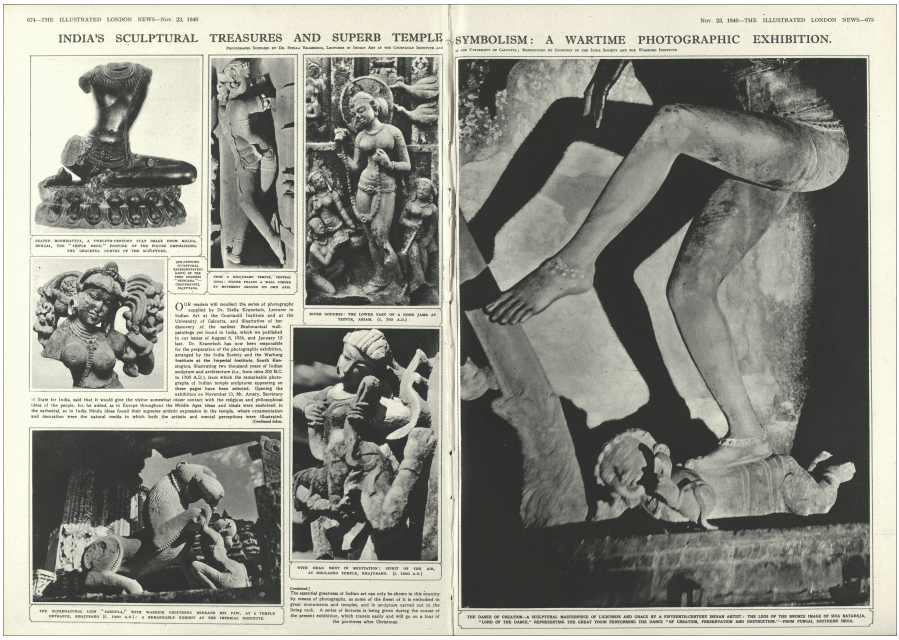
X. Close Encounters through Photography [Fig. 10]

Under the heading "India's Sculptural Treasures and Superb Temple Symbolism. A Wartime Photographic Exhibition", the *Illustrated London News* noted that "the essential greatness of Indian art can only be shown in this country by means of photographs, as some of the finest of it is embodied in great monuments and temples, and in sculpture carved out in the living rock".[28] The implication here is that the photographs showed *living* sculpture; sculpture which was still *in situ* in contrast to the examples which populated the halls of the Indian Museum in South Kensington, such as the *Sanchi Torso*, a body in fragments which visibly bore the scars of its removal. India's sculpture was made present in this London exhibition through the powerful visual, indexical presence of the photographic image. The photographer Raymond Burnier created particularly dramatic images of Indian sculpture, making the most of the light effects created by the shadows of the sun on the stone of the sculpture and architecture [see Fig. 3]. His photographs often showed the sculpture in extreme close-up, so close that the smallest of details, such as the naturally occurring pits in the stone, could be easily seen. Burnier's photographic technique had the result of collapsing distance; sculpture rendered in such exacting detail seemed suddenly close enough to touch.

Fritz Saxl was not only committed to facing the challenges of organizing exhibitions at the Warburg Institute during wartime, but he also provided leadership on the educative and aesthetic possibilities of using photographic images for such a purpose. He

27
Ibid., 42.

28
Anon., India's Sculptural Treasures and Superb Temple Symbolism. A Wartime Photographic Exhibition, in: *Illustrated London News*, November 23, 1940, 674–675, here 674.



674—THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS—Nov. 23, 1940

INDIA'S SCULPTURAL TREASURES AND SUPERB TEMPLE

Nov. 23, 1940—THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS—675

SYMBOLISM: A WARTIME PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION.

[Fig. 10]
Anon., India's Sculptural Treasures and Superb Temple Symbolism. A Wartime Photographic Exhibition, in: *Illustrated London News*, November 23, 1940, 674–675.

commented on these circumstances at the opening of the Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art, saying:

> In these days, when museums are closed and libraries inaccessible, a photographic exhibition can perform an important task. It can present new ideas and new aesthetic values. It can lead to a deeper understanding of the life and thought of another race. It is our hope that Miss Kramrisch's work will produce such fruit and be helpful to all those who seek for a better understanding of the great living tradition of Hindu thought.[29]

Through the medium of the photograph, Saxl imagined a different and "deeper" encounter with India through Indian art; one which was not simply connoisseurial or passive, but productive. Saxl envisioned the exhibition as a kind of conduit; a site of encounter generating "new ideas and new aesthetic values" about Indian, and specifically Hindu, art in Europe.

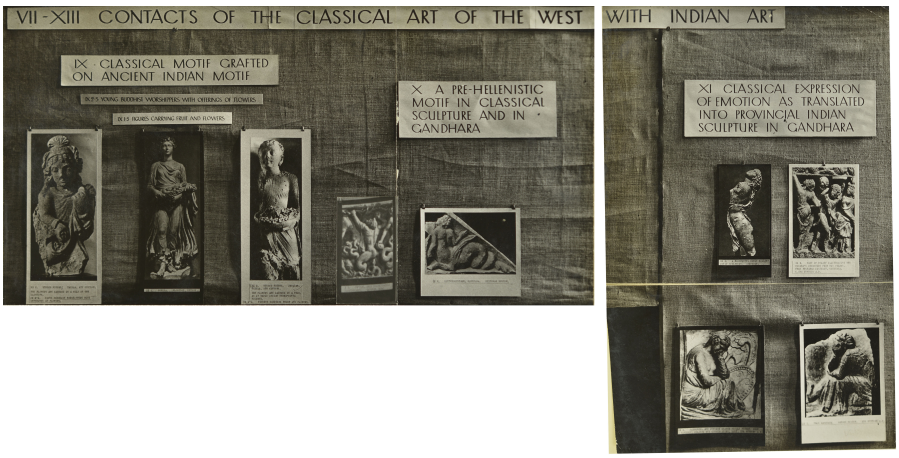
This was an exhibition of 1,000 years of historic sculpture and architecture (from 200 BC to 1700 AD), but Saxl was keen to stress the importance of "the great living tradition of Hindu thought" for war-torn present times. Here, through the modern technology of the photograph, what the Warburg director describes as "the visual approach of our period", India's historic sites were rendered more immediate and present for the exhibition's visitors in 1940.

XI. Cultural Exchange [Fig. 11]

The panels of the exhibition in the third section, and especially panels VII–XII, tackled a theme with distinctively Warburgian resonances: the "Contacts of the Classical Art of the West with Indian Art". This exhibition marked the first and only time in its exhibition history that the Warburg Institute expanded its horizons to include Asian art. This third thematic section strongly reflects the long-standing interest of its director, Fritz Saxl, in Gandharan art.[30] From the mid-1930s, at Saxl's request, Stella Kramrisch had collected photographs and glass negatives of Gandharan sculptures for the Warburg Institute's photo collection. After her final departure in the winter of 1940, Saxl commissioned Hugo Buchthal, a medievalist by training who also worked at the Warburg, to study the Gandharan material. Despite some reluctance, Buchthal presented

29 Fritz Saxl, Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art, in: *Indian Art & Letters* 14/2, 1940, 114–117, here 116. See also British Library, MSS EUR F 147/78, Fritz Saxl, Aspects of Indian Art, A Series of Exhibitions, undated typescript.

30 See Kramrisch's discussion of Gandhara art in Stella Kramrisch, Die indische Kunst, in: Curt Glaser (ed.), *Die aussereuropäische Kunst* (Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte 6), Leipzig 1929, 252–268.



[Fig. 11]
Exhibition view of panel "VII-XIII. Contacts of the Classical Art of the West with Indian Art", in the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1940), London, The Warburg Institute. WIA, I.24.1, fol. 52 (left) and fol. 50 (right), photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

and published on the topic throughout the 1940s, culminating in his book *The Western Aspects of Gandhara Sculpture* (1947).[31]

Archaeological interest in the art of the Gandhara region – located in present-day northern Pakistan – was deeply shaped by imperial perspectives. Western scholars such as Alfred Foucher, Albert Grünwedel, James Fergusson, and Alexander Cunningham attributed the so-called "Greco-Buddhist" style of Gandhara to the influence of Greek sculptors following Alexander the Great's eastern campaign. This theory, though lacking solid evidence, remained dominant in Western scholarship for some time.[32] It faced sharp resistance from the art historian Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, who argued that Gandharan art's significance and aesthetic quality had been entirely overstated.[33]

Kramrisch shared Coomaraswamy's skepticism about the relevance of the Greek influence on Gandhara's provincial Buddhist art for the development of Indian art. In a 1923 article, she wrote:

> We need not fight against the windmills of Gandhara which appear to European eyes so huge because their Greek features are so near to cherished reminiscences. The question for the present moment is: What did Indian art contribute to the International school of Gandhara for such it was, as Indian, Parthian, Scythian and Roman colonial workmen and traditions met there. It gave its plastic conception, not at once yet in the course of time, and in this way the syncretistic Gandhara sculpture became Indianised. Buddhism and mythology moreover supplied the sculptors with Indian themes. The most ardent problem, however, involved in Gandharan production is whether, as it is held up, the pictorial type of the Buddha originated in Gandhara or not. The question still has to remain open.[34]

However, when it came to the 1940 exhibition and its section on "Contacts of the Classical Art of the West with Indian Art", Kramrisch's focus shifted away from the contested issue of the "origin

31
Hugo Buchthal, *The Western Aspects of Gandhara Sculpture. Annual Lecture on Aspects of Art, Henriette Hertz Trust of the British Academy*, London 1947. Buchthal joined the Warburg Institute as librarian from 1941 to 1943. The lecture upon which the book was based was delivered in 1945.

32
See Michael Falser, The *Graeco-Buddhist Style of Gandhara* – a 'Storia ideologica', or: How a Discourse Makes a Global History of Art, in: *Journal of Art Historiography* 13/2, 2015, 1–52 (October 15, 2024); Robert Bracey, The Gandharan Problem, in: Jaś Elsner (ed.), *Empires of Faith in Late Antiquity. Histories of Art and Religion from India to Ireland*, Cambridge 2020, 27–50.

33
Juhyung Rhi, Reading Coomaraswamy on the Origin of the Buddha Image, in: *Artibus Asiae* 70/1, 2010, 151–172.

34
Stella Kramrisch, The Contact of Indian Art with the Art of Other Civilisations, in: *Calcutta Review*, 1923, 514–530, here 523.

of the Buddha image" (in Coomaraswamy's phrase) to the transmission of motifs and gestures from Greek and Roman art to Gandhara – subsumed in this case to an anachronistic geographical idea of "India".[35] The photographic panels emphasized specific emotive gestures, or what Aby Warburg had termed "pathos formulas" – including many of the very same motifs that had once preoccupied Warburg himself.

For example, Panel IX, "Classical Motif Grafted onto Ancient Indian Motif", compared three flower- and fruit-bearing figures. The panel featured a Roman sculpture of Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruits (1st century AD, Uffizi, Florence), flanked by two stucco reliefs of "Young Buddhist Worshippers with Offerings of Flowers" from 5th- and 6th-century Taxila. The relevance of this comparison for Saxl becomes clear if we recall that Aby Warburg, in his 1893 dissertation, had linked this same Roman statue to the figure of Flora in Botticelli's *Primavera*.[36] Similarly, Panel XI, "Classical Expression of Emotion as Translated into Provincial Indian Sculpture in Gandhara", focused on another of Warburg's favorite pathos formulas: the ecstatic maenad. This panel juxtaposed an early Hellenistic sculpture of a bacchante with a similarly posed female figure in a 2nd century AD Gandharan relief illustrating the "Great Renunciation" (Buddha's departure from his palace). Warburg viewed the enraptured gestures of the bacchante as a survival of "pagan" emotional expression that had, almost of its own accord, resurfaced in the art of the Italian Renaissance – where the classical maenad, he believed, could even be found disguised as Mary Magdalene grieving under the cross.[37] In the Gandharan relief, by contrast, the "bacchante" figure is likely a musician from Siddhartha Gautama's palace.

With this comparative display of Gandharan art, and with Kramrisch's input, Saxl thus sought to forge intellectual continuity between Warburg's legacy and the institute's uncertain future in Britain, extending the study of classical reception to Indian art – if still within a constricted framework of asymmetrical "influence" and "contact".

35
Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Origin of the Buddha Image, in: *The Art Bulletin* 9/4, 1927, 287–329.

36
Aby Warburg, Sandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Spring* [1893], in: id., *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity. Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, transl. by David Britt, Los Angeles 1999, 89–156, here 126.

37
See Edgar Wind, The Maenad under the Cross. I. Comments on an Observation by Reynolds, in: *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, 1937, 70–71.

XII. Cultural-Political Relevance of the Exhibition [Fig. 12]

Writing a review in *The Listener*, Herbert Read commented that the exhibition was "of the greatest interest, both intrinsically, as a display of the beauty and significance of Indian Art, and incidentally, as a demonstration of what might be called exhibition technique".[38] The arrangement of photographs, according to Read, not only allowed for a "continuous narrative series" but also "the contacts and exchanges which Indian art (particularly in the northern border regions of Gandhara and Afghanistan) has had with the classical art of the West". "In this section", Read wrote about the third section of the exhibition, "the Warburg Institute is in its special element, and some remarkable parallels are shown" [see Fig. 11].[39]

Read also used his review to critique the display of South Asian art in the collections of London's prestigious museums. According to Read, the Indian collections in London "remained a standing insult to one of the greatest phases of art the world has ever seen", with their cluttered arrangement and "archaeological" approach.[40] The art historian Robert Skelton confirms this in his article on the Indian collections at the V&A, describing them as in "a pathetic state of deterioration and confusion" in this period.[41] Read took aim at the authorities for this sorry state:

> The neglect of cultural values which is characteristic of our whole colonial administration has been mitigated by the enterprise of private bodies such as the India Society. It is the India Society which has co-operated with the Warburg Institute in a photographic exhibition of Indian Art now being held at the Imperial Institute buildings, South Kensington.[42]

Read understood this exhibition as a curatorial intervention – critique, even – at the very heart of London's imperial geography. Housed in the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, a building which had been erected for the contents of the "Colonial and Indian Exhibition" of 1886, the exhibition was organized in a space that was physically placed at what Tim Barringer has evocatively

38
Herbert Read, Indian Art, in: *The Listener* 24/619, 1940, 729–730, here 730.

39
Ibid., 730.

40
Ibid., 729.

41
Robert Skelton, The Indian Collections, 1788–1978, in: *Burlington Magazine* 120/902, 1978, 297–304, here 303.

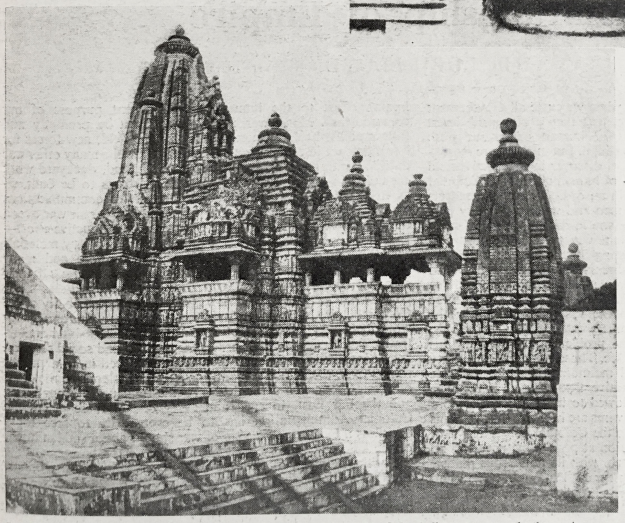
42
Read, Indian Art, 729.

Indian Art

By HERBERT READ

THE English have been established in India for more than three centuries; for more than eighty years that vast country and its civilisation have been under the direct rule of the British Crown. But the average Englishman remains completely ignorant and—what is worse—incurious or sceptical, about the ancient culture of the Indian people. For this neglect our Government must be held largely responsible. It is true that we maintain an archæological mission in India, and that there is an Indian Section at the Victoria and Albert Museum; but the archæological mission is concerned with the survey and recording of monuments in India, and has no educative function in this country; and the Indian Section at South Kensington, far from serving its purpose, has remained a standing insult to one of the greatest phases of art the world has ever seen. Tribute must be paid to the energy of the present Keeper of that department, Mr. K. de B. Codrington; he has purged the junk-shop of its rubbish and introduced some order and intelligence into the arrangement; but he and the Director of the Museum have had to contend with a hideous and unsuitable building, and with authorities (the Board of Education, the Treasury and the India Office) completely lacking in any imaginative grasp of the situation. It is no exaggeration to say that if we as a nation had shown a real sympathy for the culture of this great imperial possession, and a genuine appreciation of its manifestations in architecture, sculpture, painting, music and dance, we should not now be at such political loggerheads. Our imperial policy, as advertised to the outside world, aims at the creation of a democratic commonwealth of nations. But the only sure basis of a commonwealth

Siva, the union of the male and female principles: an eleventh-century statue from Ardhanarisvara Murti, Kumbhakonam, Southern India. The two natures of Siva, male and female, are shown as the right and left halves of his body



Caturbhuja Temple, Khajuraho (*c.* A.D. 1000). The diagonal ascent of the hall-towers towards the main tower symbolises the pilgrim's progress to the sanctuary below the highest peak

is mutual understanding. Unless a commonwealth is bound together by spiritual values—by a mutual understanding of each other's religion, art and literature—it remains nothing but an economic and therefore a dead conception, ready to break at the first impact of external force.

This neglect of cultural values which is characteristic of our whole colonial administration has been mitigated by the enterprise of private bodies such as the India Society. It is the India Society which has co-operated with the Warburg Institute in a photographic exhibition of Indian Art now being held in the Imperial Institute buildings, South Kensington. It is an exhibition of the greatest interest, both intrinsically, as a display of the beauty and significance of Indian Art, and incidentally, as a demonstration of what

[Fig. 12]
Herbert Read, Indian Art, in: *The Listener*, November 21, 1940, 729.

described as the "intersection between empire and scholarship, between learning and display, education and entertainment".[43]

Read emphasized the educative rather than the entertaining aspect of Kramrisch's approach. This was not, he warned readers, an exhibition which "can be skimmed casually". Instead, "to get any real benefit from it, the visitor must *read* it patiently, but read it in a new manner". Again, it was the visual relationship between the photographs and the viewer that Read stressed. He continued:

> Art is a language, and though we may at first need the symbols of our written language to initiate us into its secrets, essentially it is a language with its own symbols, and it cannot be properly understood unless we learn to read these symbols directly, with our eyes.[44]

In other words, this photographic exhibition of the religious art of South Asia required new, serious and dedicated ways of looking. It was supported in this motivation by its host, the Warburg Institute, an institution that emphasized transcultural and historical image-work. Read's review was published in *The Listener*, which also devoted its front cover to a full-page reproduction of one of the photographs in the exhibition, a twelfth-century sculpture from Kiradu, Jodhpur.

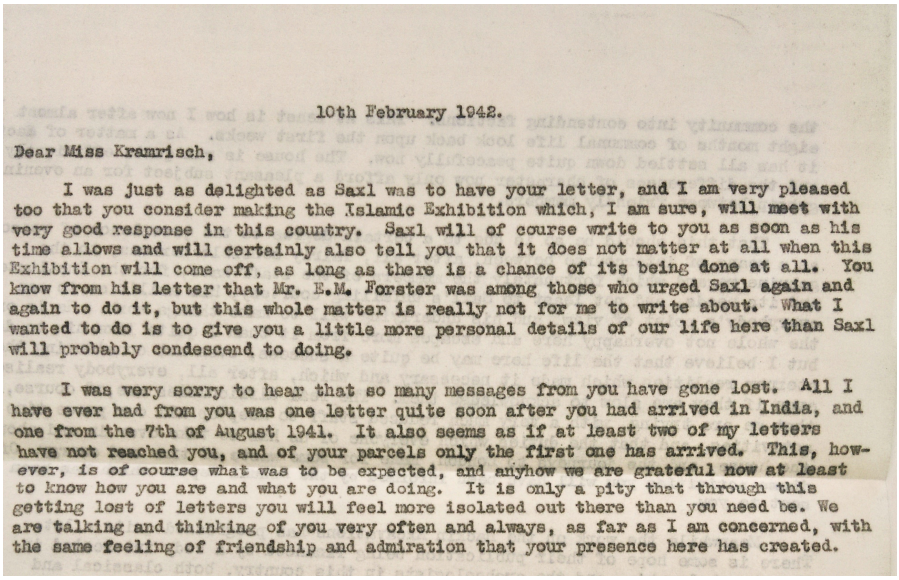
XIII. The Unrealized Sequel. Islamic Art in India [Fig. 13]

Saxl had always envisioned the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* as the first in a planned series of exhibitions exploring different "Aspects of Indian Art". The projected second exhibition would deal with "the characteristics of Indian Islamic Art", with a potential third examining the "expansion of Indian art to the Further East".[45] In November 1941, a year after the opening of the first exhibition, Saxl approached Kramrisch to curate the second, dedicated to Islamic art in India. Again, as had been the case with Gandharan sculpture, the Warburg Institute's interest lay in artforms that bore witness to processes of transculturation. Kramrisch, on the other hand, was more interested in the visual expressions of Vedic philosophy. Like Coomaraswamy before her, she had largely ignored Mughal miniatures in her writings – likely just what Saxl had in mind for the Islamic Indian art exhibition. Despite her limited

43
Tim Barringer, The South Kensington Museum and the Colonial Project, in: id. and Tom Flynn (eds.), *Colonialism and the Object. Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, London/New York 1998, 11–27, here 26.

44
Read, Indian Art, 730.

45
British Library, MSS EUR F 147/78, Fritz Saxl, Aspects of Indian Art, A Series of Exhibitions, undated typescript.



10th February 1942.

Dear Miss Kramrisch,

I was just as delighted as Saxl was to have your letter, and I am very pleased too that you consider making the Islamic Exhibition which, I am sure, will meet with very good response in this country. Saxl will of course write to you as soon as his time allows and will certainly also tell you that it does not matter at all when this Exhibition will come off, as long as there is a chance of its being done at all. You know from his letter that Mr. E.M. Forster was among those who urged Saxl again and again to do it, but this whole matter is really not for me to write about. What I wanted to do is to give you a little more personal details of our life here than Saxl will probably condescend to doing.

I was very sorry to hear that so many messages from you have gone lost. All I have ever had from you was one letter quite soon after you had arrived in India, and one from the 7th of August 1941. It also seems as if at least two of my letters have not reached you, and of your parcels only the first one has arrived. This, however, is of course what was to be expected, and anyhow we are grateful now at least to know how you are and what you are doing. It is only a pity that through this getting lost of letters you will feel more isolated out there than you need be. We are talking and thinking of you very often and always, as far as I am concerned, with the same feeling of friendship and admiration that your presence here has created.

[Fig. 13]
WIA, GC Stella Kramrisch, Stella Kramrisch to Fritz Saxl, May 3, 1942, photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

interest in this field, Kramrisch initially expressed cautious enthusiasm about the collaboration. This prompted a positive response from Gertrud Bing, who, in February 1942, wrote that she was "very pleased" that Kramrisch was considering "making the Islamic Exhibition which, I am sure, will meet with very good response in this country".[46]

However, just a month later, Kramrisch informed Saxl that she had to withdraw from the project, since the photographic negatives it required had been sent to more secure locations – just as the artworks in London had been when she prepared the exhibition there. Although she assured the Warburg's director that she "hopes to resume work" once the material was accessible again, Kramrisch was at the time deeply immersed in writing her book about Hindu temples, and probably never planned to return to a subject distant from her scholarly interests.[47] The claim of inaccessible materials may well have been a convenient excuse.

Her withdrawal effectively marked the end of the planned exhibition on Islamic art in India. This was a disappointment not only to the Warburg Institute but also to the India Society, both of which had shown great interest in the project. As a result, the exhibition was indefinitely postponed, and with it, the broader vision of a series exploring multiple aspects of Indian art was quietly abandoned.[48]

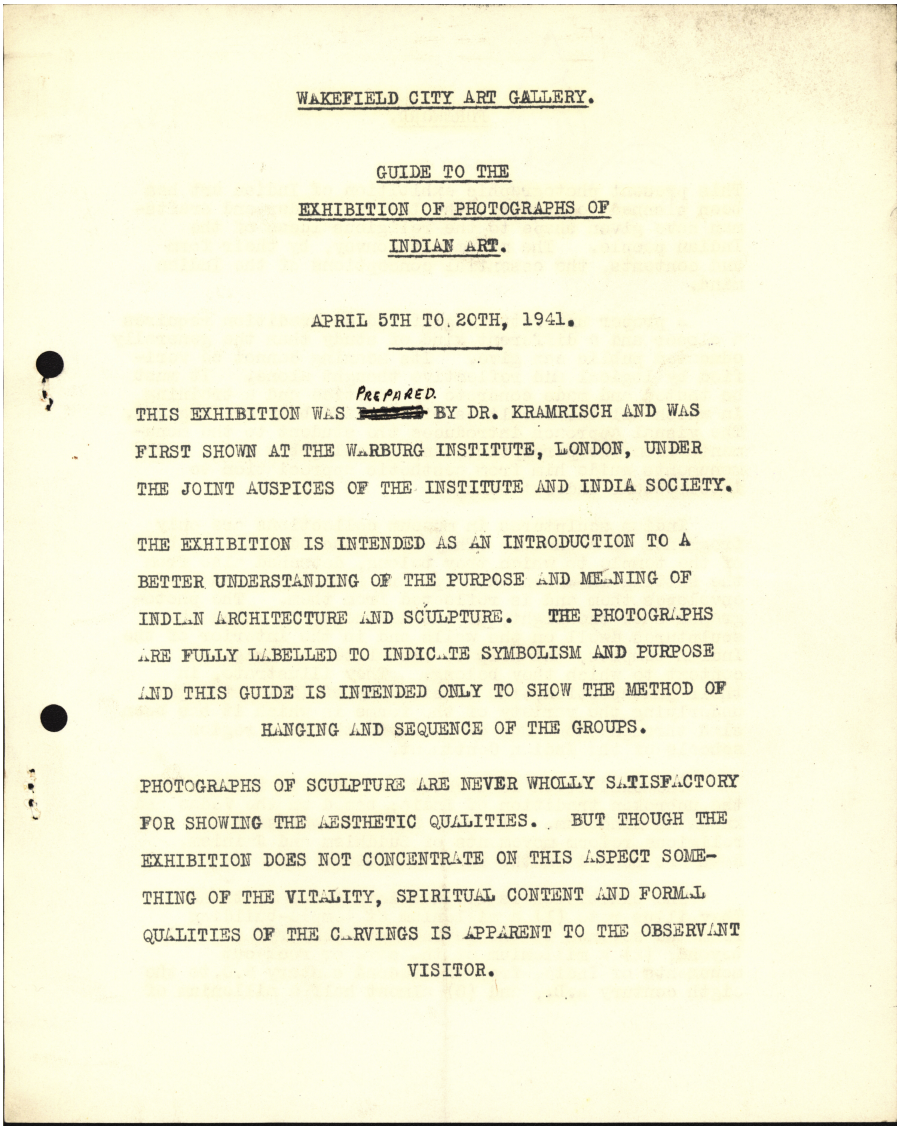
XIV. The Exhibition on Tour [Fig. 14]

After the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* had captivated audiences in London, it embarked on a nationwide tour, visiting museums and educational institutions across Great Britain. This was in keeping with the Warburg Institute's practice of circulating its photographic exhibitions. The tour began promptly in January 1941, and over the course of the year, the exhibition traveled to art galleries and museums in nine cities, including Manchester, Cambridge, Sunderland, and Brighton. Ann-Marie Meyer, the Warburg Institute's secretary, coordinated the tour from London, ensuring that the exhibition moved without delay from one location to the next. The exhibition package included photographs, captions, and a photographic reproduction of the original London setup to assist

46
Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch, Gertrud Bing to Stella Kramrisch, February 2, 1942.

47
Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch, Stella Kramrisch to Fritz Saxl, May 3, 1942.

48
Warburg Institute Archive, Associations, India Society, Frederick Richter to Fritz Saxl, November 17, 1942 and Frederick Richter to Gertrud Bing, March 16, 1943.



WAKEFIELD CITY ART GALLERY.

GUIDE TO THE
EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF
INDIAN ART.

APRIL 5TH TO 20TH, 1941.

THIS EXHIBITION WAS PREPARED BY DR. KRAMRISCH AND WAS FIRST SHOWN AT THE WARBURG INSTITUTE, LONDON, UNDER THE JOINT AUSPICES OF THE INSTITUTE AND INDIA SOCIETY.

THE EXHIBITION IS INTENDED AS AN INTRODUCTION TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PURPOSE AND MEANING OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE AND SCULPTURE. THE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE FULLY LABELLED TO INDICATE SYMBOLISM AND PURPOSE AND THIS GUIDE IS INTENDED ONLY TO SHOW THE METHOD OF HANGING AND SEQUENCE OF THE GROUPS.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF SCULPTURE ARE NEVER WHOLLY SATISFACTORY FOR SHOWING THE AESTHETIC QUALITIES. BUT THOUGH THE EXHIBITION DOES NOT CONCENTRATE ON THIS ASPECT SOMETHING OF THE VITALITY, SPIRITUAL CONTENT AND FORMAL QUALITIES OF THE CARVINGS IS APPARENT TO THE OBSERVANT VISITOR.

[Fig. 14]
WIA, I.24.8, fol. 1, Wakefield City Art Gallery, Guide to the *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* (1941), photo: The Warburg Institute, London.

local institutions in staging the exhibit, though Saxl noted that these guidelines were only followed about half of the time.[49]

Saxl's occasional frustrations with the varied local setups were offset by instances in which the exhibition was enriched by local expertise and collections. For example, at the Wakefield Art Gallery, Director Ernest Musgrave added his own foreword to the exhibition leaflet originally authored by Kramrisch [Fig. 2a and Fig. 2b] and published an overview of the panels. Musgrave also included six small Indian carvings lent by Baron Eduard von der Heydt, a prominent collector of Indian and Chinese art in Europe, just as Kramrisch had included the *patas* in London [Fig. 4]. The inclusion of carvings from von der Heydt's collection in the exhibition at the Wakefield Art Gallery highlights the broad network of interest in Oriental and Asian art, a network that included figures like Kramrisch, the Warburg Institute, and the India Society, as well as politicians like Leopold Stennett Amery and the sculptor Dora Gordine [Fig. 6 and Fig. 9], and widened its scope to involve numerous directors of art galleries and collectors like Musgrave and von der Heydt during the tour.

The traveling exhibition was not only well-received by institutions but also attracted significant public attention. James Crawley, director of the Sunderland Art Gallery, reported an impressive daily average of 610 visitors, amounting to 14,645 attendees over the 24 days the exhibition was on view.[50] The Brighton Art Gallery experienced a similar surge of interest, prompting it to host the exhibition twice in 1941 – first from May to June, and again in December – due to popular demand. Positive reviews and word-of-mouth spread news of the exhibition's aesthetic, historical, and political significance, eliciting interest from institutions in Canada, the USA, and Australia by the summer of 1941. However, it does not appear that any of these international prospects came to fruition.[51]

From May to December 1942, the exhibition continued its tour in England, visiting colleges and schools. It made its final appearance in the summer of 1943, at the Workers Educational Association in Bradford. Thus, the exhibition not only toured extensively across England but also reached a diverse range of institutions, including art galleries, university museums, an art school, a women's college, and a workers' association. Against this background it becomes evident why Saxl wrote to Kramrisch in March 1944:

49
Warburg Institute Archive, Loans of Exhibitions 1941–1950, Fritz Saxl to R. E. J. Weber, October 10, 1947.

50
Warburg Institute Archive, Exhibitions Engl. and India, loans and photography 1940–1941, James Crawley to secretary, August 20, 1941.

51
British Library, MSS EUR F 147/70, Stella Kramrisch to Frederick Richter, July 25, 1941; and Anon. to Stella Kramrisch, September 29, 1941.

> The Indian Exhibition has been on tour until recently, and will soon go away again. It was really a surprising success, considering the general attitude to Indian art. With this exhibition you have done more for Indian art in this country than anybody has done for a long time. I am quite convinced that all this talk about the study of Eastern art is useless unless they get you here as the main teacher for India.[52]

Despite this high praise and the exhibition's popularity, the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, and the India Society in London were unable to secure funding to secure Kramrisch's teaching position in England. Instead, the by then eminent expert of Indian art was appointed Distinguished Professor at Calcutta University in the same year. The collaboration between Kramrisch and Saxl formally concluded when Kramrisch retrieved her collection the following year. The failure to retain Kramrisch – and by extension, her invaluable collection – reflects the lack of institutional commitment to establishing a permanent chair in Indian art history in Britain. However, even if Kramrisch left the UK for good, her 1940 *Photographic Exhibition of Indian Art* offered inspiration to Indophile artists and intellectuals and nourishment for voices critical of imperial rule.

Jo Ziebritzki is a postdoctoral researcher and teacher of art history at the Ruhr-University Bochum.

Matthew Vollgraff is Senior Research Fellow in the History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is a member of the NOMIS project "Depictured Worlds: The Perceptual Power of Pictures".

Sarah Victoria Turner is Director of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art in London.

52
Warburg Institute Archive, GC Stella Kramrisch, Fritz Saxl to Stella Kramrisch, March 14, 1944.

REVIEWS
REZENSIONEN

BYE-BYE BENIN BRONZES? ON PROVENANCE AS PROCESS AND RESTITUTION AS DISPLAY IN GERMAN MUSEUMS 2021 – PRESENT

Review of the exhibitions: *Benin. Geraubte Geschichte*, MARKK: Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt, Hamburg (December 17, 2021 – ongoing); *I MISS YOU. About missing, giving back and remembering*, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne (April 29, 2022 – ongoing); *Benin-Bronzen*, Humboldt Forum, Berlin (September 15, 2022 – expanded April 24, 2024 – ongoing); *In Dialogue with Benin. Art, Colonialism and Restitution*, Rietberg Museum, Zurich (August 23, 2024 – ongoing).

Reviewed by
Sasha Rossman & Jakob Weber

In Germany, in 2021 a group of objects commonly referred to as "the Benin bronzes" were catapulted into the public limelight [Fig. 1]. Looted in 1897 by British troops on a "punitive mission" to subordinate Benin's *Oba* and extend their colonial dominance in Nigeria, the so-called Benin bronzes comprise a multi-valent group of "objects" that had found their way into numerous German ethnographic collections shortly after the plunder of Benin City. The term "object", with its implications of a Western epistemological gaze and static, diffused agency, is problematic and we will, therefore, place it in "scare quotes" before returning to address it below. Though the British, and not the Germans, had taken active part in destroying Benin City and stealing its cultural heritage, German

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1005–1026

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108257

ethnographic museums nonetheless actively engaged in collecting plundered "objects" through the art market and private channels.

On April 29, 2021, the German cultural minister Monika Grütters and five German museums possessing a significant number of "objects" from Benin City agreed to restitute them to Nigeria. Shortly before, the Berlin-based art historian Bénédicte Savoy had published her book *Africa's Struggle for Its Art. History of a Postcolonial Defeat*, which detailed how old, in fact, Africa's fight to recover its stolen cultural heritage was.[1] And how stubbornly European museums had refused to return what Europeans had plundered. One year before that, curator Dan Hicks published his widely read *The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution*, which also put the Benin bronzes at the center of an increasingly public debate over the inheritance of empire in Western museums and the politics and process of restitution.[2] The Benin bronzes had long occupied a special status in German ethnographic collections as well as in the debates over restitution. Since their plunder, "objects" from Benin had been singled out in Germany as exceptional African cultural artifacts and were correspondingly featured prominently in German museum displays. At the same time, the circumstance of their looting left no doubt that the "objects" had been unlawfully taken, even though the German return of the Benin bronzes ultimately rested upon a perceived moral, rather than legal imperative. Perhaps as a result of their indisputably unlawful and violent appropriation by Western powers and museums as well as their unique status as "canonical objects" from Africa, the Benin bronzes thus became a focal point of public and political attention in the context of a renewed drive towards returning cultural heritage to Africa. Yet although calls for their return had been voiced since the early 20th century, it was first in 2021 and 2022 that German-speaking museums and publics not only broached the subject in an increasingly public manner, but also confronted a new question head-on: now that objects were indeed to be restituted, how was one to display this restitution and the politics and history that lay behind it? How might political decisions and museum practice overlap in the form of an exhibition? These questions cut to the bone, for they also implied a wholesale rethinking of ethnographic museums as well as "the museum" writ large.

In response to the unfolding restitution of the Benin "objects", numerous German museums staged exhibitions on the subject of their restitution. Comparing these exhibits provides a fulcrum to think through difficulties as well as solutions, and possibilities curators in these museums have been developing to confront questions

1
Bénédicte Savoy, *Afrikas Kampf um seine Kunst. Geschichte einer postkolonialen Niederlage*, Munich 2021; English version: *Africa's Struggle for Its Art. History of a Postcolonial Defeat*, Princeton, NJ 2022.

2
Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums. The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence, and Cultural Restitution*, London 2021.

[Fig. 1]
The “Ehre” stool of Oba Eresoyen was taken from its vitrine and packed up for its journey

over the display of problematic provenances, restitution as a political process, and rethinking the status of the (ethnographic) museum. Each institution that staged exhibitions on the topic faced two sets of shared circumstances: a set of historical and material contexts as well as the need to work quickly in order to keep up with current events. The debates on restitution are constantly evolving, also beyond the Benin bronzes. The situation following the transfer of ownership was, thus, an unprecedented starting point for curations in this context. The solutions that they developed to the problem of how one might exhibit looted "objects" that were to be returned (or in many cases, remain on permanent loan in the German institutions) were, nonetheless, quite different. In the following review, we examine exhibitions in Hamburg at the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK), Cologne at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, and at Berlin's Humboldt Forum with a particular eye not to the question *of* restitution, but rather how – and what – was put on display in the context of the restitution of the Benin bronzes.[3] We conclude by comparing the three German displays with an exhibition at Zurich's Rietberg Museum in order to illuminate a different German-speaking context.

I. Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) Hamburg: *Benin. Geraubte Geschichte*

Entering the exhibition at Hamburg's MARKK Museum – Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt (formerly the Museum für Völkerkunde Hamburg) – the visitor was greeted by a multi-sensorial and multi-media presentation staged against a yellow ground. One immediately could read a wall text contextualizing Benin's "looted history" as well as two bronze objects in vitrines, a video mounted on the wall, and sounds emanating from the larger room. Curated by the museum's director Barbara Plankensteiner (an expert on the arts and culture of Benin), both the experience of the display and its conceptual underpinning aimed to mobilize this multivalency to convey a polyphonic experience. Rather than offering a fully formed narrative, this exhibition put processes of multi-perspectivity and collaboration on display [Fig. 2]. Important to note: Plankensteiner's team included, among others, curatorial advisors and colleagues such as Felicity Bodenstein, Godrey Osaisonor Ekhtor, Enotie Ogbebor, Anne Luther, provenance researchers like Jamie Dau and Silke Reuther, as well as the exhibition designers Stefan Fuchs, Mitko Mitkov, and Max Guderian, not

[3] For the purposes of this review and space constraints, we have decided to limit ourselves to these four exhibitions. We have, thus, omitted the "display" of 263 Benin bronzes at the GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig in the context of a large-scale reconceptualization of their collection under the rubric REINVENTING GRASSI.SKD. In Leipzig, the museum initially decided *not* to exhibit the bronzes at all. This approach remained a radical outlier in the German museum landscape. In order to deal more fully with the larger analytical and practical frames of the Grassi approach, we plan to review its exhibition and the politics of non-display in a subsequent article not focused exclusively on the Benin bronzes.

[Fig. 2]
Exhibition view (film), 00:15, here 00:10 © *Benin. Geraubte Geschichte*, MARKK: Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt, Hamburg (December 17, 2021 – ongoing) / Jakob Weber 2024. Online resource: http://heidicon.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/#/detail/23939021.

to mention numerous contemporary artists, artisans, and cultural producers whose voices and work permeated the show in the form of discreet works of art, videos, music videos, and interviews.[4]

This multimediality took numerous forms. For instance, moving through the L-shaped entrance, having already traversed explanatory wall text, video, and "objects" within a matter of a couple of meters, one could round a bend in which a text on the looting catastrophe of 1897 was accompanied by an animated video of the events leading to the looting as well as the looting itself; this was projected onto a screen hanging freely in the space. The screen could be viewed from both sides and the audio floated freely into the exhibition. The effect was one of layering, so that multiple forms of information intersected with one another, inflecting the information conveyed through a strategy of overlap.

This was somewhat awkwardly but effectively facilitated by the room's architecture. The turn-of-the-century building's architecture cannot be altered, which meant that the team needed to somehow deal with the built-in vitrines that are part of the permanent though now outmoded interior design originally conceived for the ethnographic collection. For this exhibition, these vitrines were boarded up and transformed into more wall space, while other extant walls had in fact been altered. These had been perforated with openings so that one could look through one thematic display section into another. These thematic sections included disparate topics, some of which were related to the original functions of the Benin artifacts (e.g., *Alltag und Hierarchie*), or to their histories and the history of the museum collection (e.g. *Provenienz*). Both visually and conceptually, the wall perforations spoke to the intersecting nature of these topics. In the center of the room was a permanent glass cabinet/vitrine that one could walk through. The curatorial team repurposed this colossal transparent box into a type of media hub. There, one could follow a timeline of the restitution history (which was designed to continue into the future) and watch videos that included, for example, footage and information about artists and artisans in Benin City working in the traditional manner on contemporary bronze casts. Viewing these varieties of video footage and timeline through the transparent panes of the display case added a layer that acted on the other displays by connecting past directly to present and future. This effectively expressed both the gap in knowledge that resulted from the city's plundering and spoke simultaneously to the vitality and resilience of craft traditions. Contemporary art works on display added yet a further layer emphasizing the vibrancy and dynamism of current artistic production vs. the static character that ethnographic museums in Germany had traditionally assigned to the artifacts of non-Western cultures (the so-called *Naturvölker*).

[4] *Benin. Geraubte Geschichte* (exh. cat. Hamburg, MARKK Museum am Rothenbaum. Kulturen und Künste der Welt), ed. by Barbara Plankensteiner, Berlin 2022.

These types of overlaps presented an array of information that resembled a kind of multi-media database. This is unsurprising, since numerous collaborators on the show were also deeply involved in the Digital Benin project (also launched in 2022), which was led by the MARRK and funded by the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung. In the database, a comprehensive catalogue of "objects" is conjoined with oral histories, maps, provenance information, and *Ẹyo Otọ* (a section that flags correct Edo language terms that differ from Western museum speak, vocalized by voices speaking through the digital platform). Video, static text, various search filters, overlaps, and superpositions allow the Benin "objects" to become more like living "subjects" through the database, deploying strategies that the exhibition in Hamburg aimed to mobilize as part of an institutional display.

In a sense, this is also where the MARKK exhibition walked a tricky line. As experts on the subject, Plankensteiner and her collaborators put all the Benin "objects" in the museum collection on display and aimed to convey as much information as possible about them. The reasoning behind this was to show due appreciation and respect for the works, to problematize the history of their path into the museum (and the museum's history more generally), and to map out possibilities for future exchange and dialogue; in this regard, certain vitrines contained photographic reproductions of "objects" that had already been restituted to Nigeria and the media-hub timeline could be extended as events continued to unfold. Yet one might ask the question of whether including as much information as possible – displaying the objects and explaining them to a lay audience – did not in some ways reproduce elements of the Western ethnographic museum which have long been rightly critiqued. As polyphonic as this exhibition-cum-database is, one might interrogate the political efficacy of this manner of display. If the museum is quarrying the right of these "objects" to be in its collection, why are they still there, being explained by the museum? One might argue of course, to the contrary, that part of the restitution process means laying bare *all* of the facts so that something new can emerge. The museum's obligation is, thus, to bring together a polyphony of voices and expertise from Germany as well as Nigeria, and to present as much information as possible in order to counteract the cultural damage that was done not only in the initial looting but also by the institutional legacy of the Western museum. Information, accessibility, and collaboration thus become leitmotifs in the process of restitution, which makes itself manifest through a kind of pluralistic sharing, in which the museum, however, has not quite relinquished its authority. To a certain extent the exhibition still reproduced a historically imperial world order based on a certain knowledge about material culture(s), in which non-European, distinct cultures are characterized, delimited, and presented in the

European museum where they are explained.[5] The very fullness of the MARKK exhibition stands, thus, in radical contrast to the exhibition of the Benin bronzes staged simultaneously in Cologne. There, at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, information was strategically withheld from the visitor rather than put on display.

II. Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, Cologne: *I Miss You*

Ninety-two dramatically illuminated Benin bronzes enclosed in a black cube initially remained hidden from visitors to the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum's special exhibition *I MISS YOU. About missing, giving back and remembering*. Rather than seeing the bronzes initially, as in Hamburg, visitors to the Cologne show were invited to first reflect on the recent process of restitution and the debates in academia, media and public contexts, which were laid out in folders on a large table, as well as timelines and information hung on the wall (and in videos shown on television screens and tablets). One was reminded that the presentation of the still numerous Benin bronzes remaining in German museums must be seen in the context of decisively changed circumstances. As previously mentioned, Savoy's book documented that requests for restitution had a long history prior to 2022 when German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock publicly transferred the ownership rights of the first objects with this important provenance in German museums to the Nigerian Ministry of Culture. In Germany, this transfer was not necessarily welcomed: although curators like the Rautenstrauch-Joest's Nanette Snoep and art historians like Savoy had long voiced support for returning stolen cultural heritage, numerous voices in Germany continued to mobilize the arguments against those detailed by Savoy in her book: e.g. what would remain in European museums if they began to give things back? How could things be returned to countries "lacking" the wherewithal to preserve the objects? To whom ought one to restitute "objects" if the circumstances of ownership today were no longer the same as at the time in which the "objects" were looted?[6] Fears of loss permeate these spurious claims, prompting the question from which the Cologne exhibition title took its name: *I Miss You*. Who, the exhibition asks, misses these "objects", and who will miss them in the future?

This initial confrontation with the recent restitution process thus laid the necessary foundation for the following core question

5
Ciraj Rasool, Rethinking the Ethnographic Museum, in: Clemens Greiner, Steven Van Wolputte, and Michael Bollig (eds.), *African Futures*, Leiden/Boston 2022, 56–66. On the historical connection between imperialism and collecting in European and other contexts: Maia W. Gahtan and Eva-Maria Troelenberg (eds.), *Collecting and Empires. An Historical and Global Perspective*, London 2019.

6
Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, Benin-Bronzen gehen an den Oba. War das der Sinn der Restitution?, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, May 5, 2023 (November 22, 2024); Klaus Bachmann, Annalena Baerbock und die Benin-Bronzen. Ihre Moral bricht geltendes Recht, in: *Berliner Zeitung*, May 27, 2023 (November 22, 2024).

of the exhibition. The table of information facilitated a space of discussion and debate, by providing visitors with tools through which to unpack the various voices in the debate over the Benin bronzes' restitution. One could find out who the players in the discourse over restitution were, which critiques had been made by whom, and how the process of restitution had unfolded. This set the stage for visitors prior to beholding any "objects".

Beyond the table loomed a dark display room, but before entering it, the visitor was forced to glance into a large mirror inscribed with illuminated letters reading "I Miss You". The mirror firmly located the visitor within the debates perused on the table, as well as with the statement, which became a question since the subject "I" and the object "You" remained ambiguous. This ambiguity in the darkly lit room into which the visitor subsequently walked revealed itself as responding to the historical dislocation of the bronzes. Confronted with one's own image, the connection of museum visitors with the bronzes came to mind. Who misses the bronzes currently? Who will miss them when they are restituted? Are the bronzes themselves in a state of mourning?

The installation of the bronzes indeed consciously evoked a sense of mourning. Placed in individually lit vitrines on the walls, the bronzes sparkled in the dark, celebrating their materiality, intricate design, and their forms. Unlike in Hamburg, there were no explanatory labels or text that accompanied them. They appeared instead with a recalcitrant silence, providing no information to visitors other than the shimmer that made them appear like effigies lit from within, navigating a chasm between a colonial past and uncertain future. Without any "metadata" – any further information along the lines of museological classifications – in the scenic light the bronzes in small glass display cases thereby took on a life of their own [Fig. 3].

A video projected onto the floor in the center of the room showed the symbolic removal of the "objects" museum labels by the hands of Peju Layiwola – Nigerian visual artist, teacher, and historian, relative of Oba Akenzua II of Benin. Her careful removal of each label thereby also withdrew the objects from the grasp of the museum, its epistemological and colonial underpinnings as well as its collecting and display practices. Along with the scenography, the video reinforced the rupture with the understanding of the Benin bronzes as scientific museum exhibits – as "objects". Once their labels had been removed and the bronzes were installed in a display in which they no longer served the purpose of providing information for Western consumption, they could – the exhibition suggested – begin to regain an animated agency and *subjecthood*.

Layiwola had already collaborated with Snoep and the museum on a previous exhibit of the Benin bronzes staged at the museum

[Fig. 3]
Installation view © Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum, *I MISS YOU. About missing, giving back and remembering* / Fadi Elias.

before *I Miss You* (more on this below).[7] The video work was developed in this earlier context, but was here reinstalled alongside the glimmering display of the bronzes (which she also designed) and for which her video now provided a kind of literal groundwork. In this new display, Layiwola imbricated both her own body and that of the visitor within a process that was in part mournful, and in part liberating. Without inventory numbers and ethnographic and historical classification, the present context of the bronzes in the museum was called into question, and a new interpretation provided in which they appeared in a state of transit. As such, the Benin bronzes can be understood as more than remnants of a colonial past, in which the museum was still anchored. Unlike in Hamburg, visitors hoping to have the German museum explain the bronzes to them were going to be severely disappointed. In its radical nature, this presentation stemmed entirely from an artistic intervention that broke with established museum forms of presentation.

The dramatic staging of the Benin bronzes in Cologne was never intended as a permanent presentation. Beside the table at its entrance, a reference was made through wall text to the dynamics that unfolded between the show's opening on April 29, 2022, and the transfer of ownership of the bronzes just a few months later. The contract for the transfer of ownership was prominently displayed next to the book table at the beginning. However, in view of the federal government's earlier declaration of their plan to return German Benin collections in 2021, the curators could already assume that a framing as subjects in transit would aptly come to fruition.[8] Museum director Snoep declared that the exhibition would change, once the restitution had taken place, to offer new perspectives on the bronzes remaining at the museum, which would then be loans from Nigeria, rather than part of the museum's collection.

The themes of resistance (for instance, in the refusal to provide explanatory contextual information about the original functions of the "objects") indicate how *I Miss You* built on the preceding exhibition *Resist!* at the Rautenstrauch-Joest. Starting in early 2021, this exhibition aimed to collaboratively narrate, reflect on, and debate the long history of anticolonial resistance in the global South. For Snoep and her collaborators, a key aspect of this endeavor was moving away from an explanatory museum model to a conscious repurposing of the museum as a platform to create new networks of communication. These found an exhibition form through different fluid, overlapping "chapters" organized by a group of curators from different communities in the global South, as well as artists, activists, and local curators engaged in social movements like the

7
Resist! The Art of Resistance. Snapshot of an Exhibition at a Certain Place at a Certain Time (exh. cat. Cologne, Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum), ed. by Nanette Snoep, Ricardo Màrquez García, Lydia Hauth, and Vera Marušic, Cologne 2024.

8
Amt der Beauftragten der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien, *Erklärung zum Umgang mit den in deutschen Museen und Einrichtungen befindlichen Benin-Bronzen*, Berlin, April 29, 2021 (November 22, 2024).

BLM-protests that also took place in Cologne.[9] Layiwola was one of the artist-researchers who worked on *Resist!* in which she conceived a display featuring the Benin bronzes in a form which presaged the themes of *I Miss You*. Layiwola's contribution to *Resist!* formed just one aspect of a larger ensemble, but the later exhibition put the bronzes center-stage, drawing attention to them while simultaneously undermining attempts to objectify them.

Upon leaving the site of mourning which was *I Miss You*, the visitor needed to once again pass by the table at the entrance. On it, one might now notice a tablet, featuring a conversation between Snoep and Layiwola. The latter, here, stressed that restitution could not be lead, or understood as a conversation spearheaded and framed by European institutions: "Each decision, about our heritage, our life, has to include us [...]. We want to be able to tell our stories."[10] Through the mirror of her exhibition design, Layiwola placed not only her body into the conversation (through the vehicle of the video in which her hands reappropriated the bronzes from the museum vault), but also the bodies of the visitors into conversation with this act, and with the "objects". Who misses what or whom became an active and confrontational question through the vehicle of the display of the former museum "objects" in a state of transition. In Cologne and Hamburg, dialogue and conversation therefore emerged in entirely different constellations of exhibition design and priorities in imaging and choreographing visitor experience. This was also the case at the ethnographic museum's Benin display in Berlin's controversial Humboldt Forum.[11]

III. Humboldt Forum Berlin: Benin Bronzes

The idea of bringing multiple voices to the table to build a dialogue through which an uncertain future may be negotiated formed the basis of the Humboldt Forum's temporary exhibition on the Benin bronzes. Organized by Verena Rodatus, Maria-Antonie Ellendorff, and Kerstin Pinther, among others, the show literally foregrounded the context of debate in its installation. Entering the exhibit, the visitor was greeted by a relatively empty space, painted gray (a color of neutrality? Uncertainty? Adornian autonomy or resistance?), with a wall text labeled "The Future of the Benin Bronzes". In this space, the Benin bronzes were represented by one single "object": *Uhunmwun elao, Memorial Head of a Queen Mother (iyoba)*, from the 16th century, which was placed on a pedestal and protected by a Plexiglas cover. An orange stamp on the label marked the work

9
Ibid.

10
Ibid., 100.

11
On debates over the Humboldt Forum, see, for instance, Friedrich von Bose, *Das Humboldt-Forum. Eine Ethnografie seiner Planung*, Berlin 2016.

as a loan from Nigeria, indicating that it had been restituted. Behind the *Uhunmwun elao*, visible through the Plexiglas box if one were to look through, were a series of multiple flat screens hung on the wall. In each screen was a different person. The people on the screens turned to listen to one another as they each took turns talking: signs of respectful listening. The people speaking were a variety of experts, politicians, and art historians from Nigeria as well as from German institutions (including the curator of the MARRK show, Barbara Plankensteiner). These "voices of debate" served thus as a backdrop for the presentation of the Queen Mother and an introduction to the question how the museum was going to deal with presenting the Benin bronzes in the future. This future, the installation indicated, was necessarily going to be based on a polyphonic dialogue which made it both contingent and open.

Accordingly, upon entering the subsequent room, a wall text informed the viewer that we were in an "intermediate state" and our view was directed to a large vitrine containing "intermediate" objects, rather than the "classic" Benin bronzes that one might expect to find as a greeting to a show entitled "Benin Bronzes". Instead, the visitor was confronted with photographs of the looting in Benin City (1897), the display of Benin "objects" in the Berlin ethnographic museum in 1926, and a photograph of Oba Akenzua II and Lord Plymouth in Benin from 1935, showing the Oba wearing coral regalia that the British had returned. Beneath the photographs and explanatory texts, the vitrine contained numerous "objects". These included the 16th-century bronze throne stool of Oba Esignie (also visible in the photograph of the 1920s Berlin museum display hung directly above it); an image of the 18th-century throne stool of Oba Eresoyen, which had come through the market from England to Germany and which was donated to the Berlin museum in 1905 (the provenance was included on the label); and plaster casts of the stools, which had been made by Berlin's museums in response to restitution requests in 1936 by Oba Akenzua II for the thrones of his ancestors. The German museums kept the originals and charged Akenzua for the reproductions they sent instead. The ensemble announced not only the fraught history of the objects, but also the ongoing nature of debates over their restitution. Rather than presenting either an informative survey of the bronzes – as in Hamburg – or a dark wound and space of mourning – as in Cologne – the Berlin exhibition foregrounded the frame of debate, institutional history, and uncertainty.

A display of the Benin bronzes in the controversial Humboldt Forum had been in the works for quite a while, but Rodatus and her collaborators (who had taken over from earlier curators) worked quickly to change their predecessors' exhibition plans.[12] Their aim was to create an exhibition in which various historical-institutional framings of the bronzes came to the fore, alongside the "objects", *as*

[12] See the recent volume edited by Verena Rodatus, *From the Kingdom of Dahomey to the Postcolonial State. Case Studies on Benin's Art History*, Münster 2024.

well as to create a new collaborative framework for a collaborative exhibition that would evolve over time. In scenographic terms, this was reflected in decisions to place the gray pedestals inside of the vitrines, for instance, on spindly orange legs pointing in inconsistent directions in order to convey not only the shifting terrain of the histories of the "objects" but also the uncertain future of the museum in which visitors found themselves in that very moment [Fig. 4]. Likewise, certain vitrines were placed on diagonals that cut against the right angles of others, indicating movement and "unfinished business".

Directly adjacent to the "intermediate state" vitrine, were not the bronzes themselves but rather tables and vitrines laid out for educational purposes. One could see projects that school classes had worked on, as well as a table on which that work was done. Further vitrines featured presentations on Benin bronzes seen in a global context, on provenance and the history of the Berlin collection, on design and the deployment of imagery and text as an activist strategy in the 1960s and 1970s, and a large interactive touchscreen that allowed visitors to explore various topics such as Benin City today, or the workshops of bronze casters. Contemporary craftsmen working in the casting tradition, like Phil Omadamwen, appeared in displays towards the end of the exhibition, as well as contemporary artists and designers like Adeju Thompson, the founder of the Lagos Space Programme, whose work with fabric dying and the "reserve technique" takes up technical aspects of traditional bronze casting. Certain contemporary artists like Victor Ehikhamenor, whose work on regalia and symbols connect past and present artistic production could be found – like Omadamwen – in Berlin as well as Hamburg, creating a kind of living lingua franca between different exhibitions (and exhibition strategies).

In Berlin, unlike in Hamburg, the exhibition did not read as a database. There were fewer overlaps and less layering of screens, sounds, and images. Instead, the framing of the exhibition and its incorporation into seemingly unstable constellations served as a means of displaying "objects" whose meanings – political as well as symbolic, or artistic – have shifted so dramatically as they have moved violently through space, time, and institutions. In one display choice, for example, bronzes had been taken out of a set of vitrines and placed on various levels of a large diagonally tilted pedestal resembling both bleachers and an altar. The vitrines stood empty at the foot of the pedestal, containing only labels for the "objects" (certain of which had been restituted) that had exited their Plexiglas containers.

A photograph of an altar display of the bronzes in Benin City prior to the looting was juxtaposed with this display, encouraging the visitor to consider the contrast between the empty vestiges of Western colonial-epistemological violence in the form of museum vitrines and also to ask: who here is looking at whom? The "objects" – raised above the level of the label-containing vitrines – became challenging interlocutors [Fig. 5]. Meanwhile, the organizers incor-

[Fig. 4]
Installation view at the Humboldt Forum © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum / Pierre Adenis.

[Fig. 5]
Installation view at the Humboldt Forum © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum / Pierre Adenis.

porated a kind of built-in interlocution strategy by setting up an ongoing series of residencies in the museum for visiting artists and researchers from Nigeria. New research is to be incorporated into new and changing vitrine displays, like the spotlights installed in April 2024 addressing the Kingdom of Benin's historical relationship to slavery and its ongoing effect on restitution debates. One might say in a very concrete sense that this is an exhibition whose mode of display addresses both the subject of the Benin bronzes and restitution as well as the facilitation of processual change, drawing concerted attention to the situatedness of institution frameworks and their limits.

IV. Conclusion: "I don't know why you say goodbye, I say hello"

To return to the question with which we opened this review: what, then, was actually on display in these exhibitions? Was it the "Benin bronzes"? Was it provenance history? Was it restitution as a political process in which museums were involved? Each exhibition articulated a different set of answers to this question through the shared legacy of the looted "objects" of Benin City as they were collected in German institutions after 1897. In Hamburg, the team at the MARRK very decidedly foregrounded the Benin bronzes as "objects" and "subjects". The museum attempted to honor them by providing the most context possible through a polyphony of perspectives and voices. The result, we have suggested, was akin to an expanded database, with the digital realm's aesthetics of overlap, filter, multivalency, and multisensory input. Does this mode of pluralism and multi-perspectival viewing as display, however, imply a new form of situatedness in the wake of restitution for the Western museum? The exhibition in Cologne combined information stations (on a table) with an enclosed installation in which the removal of information implied a critique of the museum as a purveyor of European knowledge. *I Miss You* situated restitution and the museum's collection of Benin bronzes in an affective *mise-en-scène* of mourning, missing, and remembering. Here, restitution did not open up a plurality of views that provided more information, but rather the question and debate of restitution opened onto a chasm, or gap that confiscated information from the Western museum in order to show how looting had violently wrested not only objects, but also knowledge and history from Benin. Resistance, here, served as a conceptual and also scenographic building block for setting new processes into motion in which the Western museum would no longer be the authority over knowledge coded as information – however pluralistic the point of view. From the perspective of the MARKK show, however, one might ask whether the removal of contextual information about the "objects" failed to do justice to their histories and significance, transforming them into purely aesthetic experience. In Berlin, situatedness and process were expressed in a different fashion. Nods to the temporariness and contingency of the conditions of display of the Benin bronzes manifested them-

selves both in the exhibition design, as well as in the attempt to set into place mechanisms of processual development in the exhibition itself, which was designed to change and evolve over time.

The politics of restitution, in the context of the Benin bronzes, thus provided opportunities for Germany's ethnographic museums to consider their present and future status. This did not mean, however, that they necessarily shed a particularly sharp light on the politics *behind* the German Bund's decision to restitute "objects" to Benin. That is to say, while the exhibitions made clear why the *museums* had determined that restitution was important, visitors learned little about the stakes for German politics in Nigeria, or globally. Are geopolitical interests perhaps at play that exceed the morals of restitution? Likewise, the German exhibitions provided relatively little insight into the politics of restitution inside of Nigeria itself: who stood to receive the "objects"? What controversies might be associated with the distribution of artifacts and who claims to "tell their stories" in the social and political context of Nigeria? These questions were sometimes gestured towards, but hardly delved into. Likewise, what is to become of the image rights, of copies and merchandise that the German museums had been producing of the Benin bronzes for over one hundred years? To what extent does the process of restitution interplay with the legality of knowledge as constituted by the possession of copyrights and reproductions? These are questions that the visitor would need to investigate on their own.

A final comparison provides a perhaps apt way to think about the long "farewell" of German museums to the Benin bronzes (a goodbye that is less of a goodbye than one might think since a large proportion of the "objects" is indeed to remain in German institutions on permanent loan from Nigeria). In Switzerland, numerous museum displays of the Benin bronzes also provide a means of thinking through the histories of both the "objects" and Swiss museums. But the Swiss have not *yet* restituted any of these objects. At Zurich's Rietberg Museum, we thus find the exhibition *Dialogue with Benin. Art, Colonialism and Restitution* presenting "objects" from Benin City in the context of the Benin Initiative Switzerland, not explicitly in the context of restitution *per se*.

The Benin Initiative Switzerland (BIS) was founded in 2020 by eight Swiss museums with "objects" from Benin City in their collections.[13] The group aimed, then, to research the provenance of approximately a hundred "objects" and to discuss their past as well as current and future status.[14] BIS launched extensive provenance research on "objects" from Benin in Switzerland and attempted to

13
For more on the ongoing project, see the book published in conjunction with the exhibition and other presentations in the eight involved museums: Esther Tisa Francini, Alice Hertzog, Alexis Malefakis, and Michaela Oberhofer (eds.), *Mobilizing. Benin Heritage in Swiss Museums*, Zurich 2024.

14
See ibid., 5.

determine the circumstances of their acquisition, while also deepening understanding of their cultural significance. From the outset, BIS envisioned itself as a dialogic, collaborative endeavor, which would work together with researchers in Nigeria, like the historian Enibokun Uzébu-Imarhiagbe from the University of Benin. In Switzerland, Alice Hertzog (an anthropologist) took on the role of provenance researcher at the Rietberg. A series of collaborative workshops (for instance at the University of Benin in 2022) brought the BIS group – who received financial support from the Swiss Federal Office for Culture in 2020 – into further contact with the current Oba Ewuare II and other partners in Nigeria. Likewise, workshops and visits in Switzerland facilitated access, dialogue, and collaborative research for Nigerian researchers, artists, and scholars to BIS. Work that emerged from the project was made transparent and accessible through incorporation in the Digital Benin database, as well as through the series of exhibitions, which opened in 2024 throughout Switzerland, as at the Rietberg. The historical acquisition of the Benin bronzes in Swiss collections through the art market after 1899 means its direct colonial entanglements become less apparent vs. in the UK, as was also the case in Germany. However, Switzerland has only recently begun to engage in the ways in which the activities of Swiss entrepreneurs, merchants, bankers, missionaries, and mercenaries were implicated in the global colonial system. This work has tended to lag behind Germany's engagement with its difficult histories including colonialism. Provenance research on the Benin bronzes, therefore, dovetails with a move in Swiss museums such as the Swiss National Museum in Zurich, which has recently staged exhibitions on Swiss colonial entanglements.

While the joint declaration made by the Swiss Benin Forum in 2023 specified that objects that BIS researchers had determined to have been looted in 1897 ought to be returned to Nigeria, exhibitions like *Dialogue with Benin. Art, Colonialism and Restitution* focused more specifically on the keyword "dialogue" than restitution. In terms of the structuring of the curatorial team, this meant interdisciplinarity, on one hand: the curators included an art anthropologist, a performance scholar, a historian and an Afropean architect (Michaela Oberhofer, Josephine Ebiuwa Abbe, Esther Tisa Francini, and Solange Mbanefo). It also meant cooperation between scholars-curators in Switzerland and Benin. As architect Mbanefo explains in the catalogue, the exhibition design aimed primarily to highlight this multi-perspectivity. Entering the exhibition, the visitor first encounters a giant photograph of a woman in red walking a street in contemporary Benin City labeled in the image (on a giant arch spanning the busy intersection) "Guild of Enin, Bronze Casters, World Heritage Site". Mounted on walls that fan out backwards from the visitor, the image functions simultaneously as a marker that the visitor is not coming to view the past, but rather finds themselves very much in the present, a contemporaneity that is folded and complex like the architecture of the walls buttressing the

image. This is a world that is anchored in the past, but confident and forward looking, like the woman in red who strides toward the visitor [Fig. 6].

The design of these striated wall structures, which formed a kind of central courtyard within the exhibition space, were laden with significance. They referenced fractals and triangles, which can be observed in Benin decorative motifs and mythology, here forming the defensive architecture designed to protect Benin City (ultimately destroyed by the British). The curatorial team conjoined notions of these angled, repeating forms with the Edo proverb, *Agbon r'obion*, Mbanefo explained, which means, "The world is a triangle". The idea of triangulation, in turn, played a key role in an exhibition design in which points of view were orchestrated to shift and to implicate the visitor within a set of contingent relationships: as the visitor moved through the space, certain elements would come into focus based on the contingent position of the visitor's gaze between triangulated or striated displays. Most obviously, this was the case with photographs mounted on the walls on top of "folded" supports so that one could only glimpse the image as a whole from a particular position. Otherwise, colored stripes on the sides of the folds interfered in the illusion of wholeness, in keeping with the dialogic ethos of both BIS and Mbanefo's scenographic concept. The latter drew moreover from the central courtyards which feature in traditional Edo architecture. Within the courtyard, the visitor could examine the Benin "objects" in an intimate setting, defined not only by the folded walls but also by their bright coral color, which referenced the royal monarchy and its ceremonial deployment of color in the service of tradition and power. Outside of the courtyard, on green-blue walls (a reference to Edo wealth gods as well as water, its gateway to global connectivity), visitors could find "framing" displays including object biographies, the FESTAC 1977 pan-African celebration of arts and culture, and other contextualizing topics. The design, thus aimed to build an Afrocentric and dialogic foundation into the display of the "objects", locating them within African epistemologies as made manifest in space. The dialogic prerogatives of BIS and the exhibition thereby found an echo in spatial structures which built on contingent points of view, Benin's formal cosmologies and traditions, as well as dialogues across the curators' various disciplines. These dialogical qualities were extended through the presence of museum staff who engaged visitors in conversation (as opposed to the more familiar presence of silent guards).

Whereas the German displays directly confronted restitution and what the implications of restorative justice staged through the return of looted objects might mean for German museums, the Rietberg show highlighted how dialogic processes embedded in the BIS research project could find an experiential dimension through exhibition design. In both cases, a take-away that poses important questions for museums of the future may regard not only the role of museums, but also the role(s) of curators-of-the-future. Each

[Fig. 6]
Installation view © Museum Rietberg Zürich / Patrik Fuchs.

of the exhibitions were at pains to emphasize the importance of dialogue, interdisciplinarity, and collaboration. Their display strategies worked against singular narratives and points of view, as we have analyzed. To what extent, then, must museums re-think the role of the curator as an individual "care-taker" (Latin *curare*) for "objects"? How can curating become explicitly collaborative, and how will this collaboration and polyphony make itself manifest in *display*. That is to say, how will visitors be able to experience it? Does this imply that curation and scenography will increasingly need to merge? That not "objects", but display itself must become the curator's primary domain?

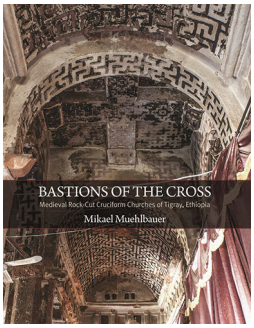
To complicate this question further, these exhibitions – particularly *I Miss You* with its stark questioning of who misses whom – point to the potential pit-falls of situating the museum as a host, however multi-perspectival or polyphonic. As long as the museum remains the care-giver for its "guests", how can the museum be decolonized? Hospitality relationships imply a mutual imbrication of obligation: hosts may provide for and welcome guests, but power relations may well remain imbalanced. The host is the giver, the guest the taker, even if taking is analogous to receiving "care". What these exhibitions dealing with restitution and restitutional justice in the museum imply is that the museum itself may ultimately need to relinquish its self-appointed role of host. What would it mean for the museum to become the guest of its "objects"? Could they allow these "objects" to become *subjects*, with their own agency to host? Breaking with hegemonic Western knowledge categories, the cultural significance of things may best be understood as always unstable and, as such, in a constant dialectic between leaps into the past such as "modern, (post) colonial or '*native*'", as Homi Bhabha long ago observed.[15] The way in which a museum facilitates relationships between actors and objects is thus bound to be the locus of radical dialogue if the museum is self-reflexive. This process must realize itself through the physical manifestation of display techniques. In the case of restitution, the museum is dealing not with singular events, such as a historical moment of looting and then a present moment of return. Instead, restitution is part of a process that alters the social relationships of all participants and all subjects.[16] Could the museum, conceived as a guest, mobilize the unleashed potential of socially entangled material culture? Instead of Germany saying "farewell" to the Benin bronzes, we may therefore see the series of exhibitions reviewed here as providing a welcome springboard. They draw attention to the necessity of rethinking how socio-political processes and their "objects" might find new physical formats, ultimately through the creation of new types of display. "You say goodbye, I say hello."

15
Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994, 152.

16
See, e.g. Friedrich von Bose and Konrad Kuhn, Provenienzforschung und Restitution. Für ein Denken in unabgeschlossenen Prozessen, in: *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, July 7, 2024 (November 5, 2024); Rassool, Rethinking the Ethnographic Museum.

MIKAEL MUEHLBAUER, *BASTIONS OF THE CROSS. MEDIEVAL ROCK-CUT CRUCIFORM CHURCHES OF TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA*

Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks 2023, 254 pages with 141 color ill., ISBN: 978-0-88402-497-2.



Reviewed by
Alebachew Belay Birru

This book by Mikael Muehlbauer has a total of 254 pages, 239 of which constitute the main sections, including bibliography and indexes. It has 159 figures, encompassing maps, pictures, and illustrations. It is indicated that the book is an advanced version of the author's PhD thesis. The cover displays the eye-catching features of the transept-vaults of Abreha wa-Atsbeha, with the facade of Wuqro Cherqos on pages ii–iii. In terms of organization, the book comprises a preface, a note on translation and editing, and an introduction followed by four chapters with a conclusion, bibliography, list of abbreviations, and general indexes. The preface highlights the situation in the author's research area, the Tigray Region of Ethiopia, in particular during and after his fieldwork, accompanied by an exhaustive acknowledgment of the scholars and institutions in Ethiopia, the US, and Europe who provided him with the technical, financial, material, and administrative support.

Five issues are raised in the introduction (pp. 1–26), which begins by paralleling San Marco in Venice, Italy, and rock-hewn churches in Tigray, Ethiopia. In the discussion, Muehlbauer singles

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1027–1033

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108510

out Abrha wa-Atsbeha for comparison with San Marco, which he considers to be synonymous with each other, not only in their cruciform aisles plan, but also in their elite patronage and their mosaics of exotic cloth patterns. Here, it seems the author wants to showcase the value of long-forgotten but world-class rock-hewn churches present in northern Ethiopia, alongside Venice's most well-known and touristic church, San Marco. To this end, he expresses his aspiration that "by opening up the remarkable churches of Tigray to wider audiences, and in a comparative perspective, I hope to model new possibilities for a more inclusive study of the Eastern Christian world" (p. 4).

In the introduction, Muehlbauer also discusses his four consecutive years (2016–2019) of fieldwork in Ethiopia and Egypt, as well as archival research held in the US and Italy. He explains the data collection tools he employed, including a handheld laser. He also clearly explains why there is a lack of C-14 dating, which is because living religious practices continue on the sites and excavation is an impossibility. In closing this subsection of the introduction, the author outlines the three major themes with which he tries to test the hypotheses in his work. These are dating, Byzantium connection, and patronage. He further argues that the 11th century saw a local reinvention of aisled cruciform churches commissioned by Christian elites.

In the subsequent parts of the introduction, the author details the geographic and topographic features of Tigray, followed by a summary of the history of Ethiopian civilization and Christianity. The last three topics describe the state of the field, the question of exchanges between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Byzantium, and how the book is structured. In the first of these cases, he assesses the state of Ethiopian studies from the 19th century to date. Taking a bird's-eye view of Ethiopian studies, he places a general broader emphasis on the genesis of the study of Ethiopian rock-cut architecture and art across time and space. While the author dedicates paragraphs to the discussion of the three worlds mentioned above – Ethiopia, Egypt, Byzantium – he pays attention to the need to maintain a balance between the debates that consider the churches as derivatives of the world outside, specifically the Byzantine world, and the idea of considering these churches as forming part of the local history of architectural development in Ethiopia. Moreover, taking three churches as case studies, he clearly shows his intention to correct the neglect that global medieval art studies has displayed toward the world-class rock-hewn churches of northern Ethiopia. In the final part of the introduction, he deals with the structure of the book, highlighting the content and scope of the four chapters and the conclusion.

The first and main chapter of the book deals with the genesis of rock-cut churches from the Aksumite (c. 300 AD) to the present, presented in chronological order under five major topics. It begins with the early Christian architecture characterized by the recasting of local architectural forms for ecclesiastical use. In addition, an

overview of the half-timbering technique, which the author considers to be a common building technique across the Red Sea basin, is included. The impacts of contact with the Mediterranean world on art and architectural forms of the period are also emphasized. A further interesting component of this section is the comparative observation that the author and, of course, previous researchers, such as Michael Gerves, have made between the appearance of the art and architecture of the period with reference to the miniature paintings found in the gospel of Abba Gerima (fig. 29, p. 41; fig. 33, p. 45), which is also taken as a case study for the subsequent discussions on the post-Aksumite phase (700 to 1100 AD, p. 12).

The next section of the first chapter discusses the post-Aksumite phase, with the author taking Degum Selassie as an example of this transition period and an indicator of societal contraction and the privatization of worship (p. 43). The two-century period from 950 to 1150, regarded by Marie-Laure Derat (2018) as the period of the "Second Christianization", is defined by the author as the most notable period of architectural dynamism since the Aksumite Era. The period – that is, the 11th century – is further considered an era of tremendous change in the political and economic spheres as well as in the architectural history of the region. Networks with Fatimid Egypt through the Coptic church and involvement in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean trades were seen as the factors contributing to the advances in the economic, religious, and political lives of the people.

The period from 1100 to 1300 is divided by the author into two parts, namely the Early Zagwe and the Zagwe proper, and signals the rise and advancement of the first centralized state structure in northern Ethiopia since the Aksumite period. In this section, the 12th century, in particular, is taken as a period that generated a multiplication of altars and the introduction of mural paintings in Ethiopian church architecture. Churches like Maryam Nazret are said to have been built during this period; it is seen by the author as an exemplary product of the campaigns to reconsecrate the Aksumite monuments. For Muehlbauer, the geographic proximity of the major salt trading hub to some of these churches had a role to play in their development.

Although there are parallel developments in today's Tigray Region, the 13th-century period of architectural dynamism is best exemplified in the Lasta-Lalibela area. In the following centuries (1300–1500), under the "restored Solomonic" dynasty, kings commissioned the establishment of monasteries. Thus, connections to and communications with the contemporary Mamluk Egyptian leaders are considered contributing factors to the art and architectural development of this period.

The author concludes the first chapter with a discussion on the intention to present an assessment of the genesis in the production, use, and research of the rock architecture in northern Ethiopia as a stepping stone providing the readers with a detailed background, before heading to his main research subjects, viz. Abrha wa-Atsbeha, Mikael Amba, and Wuqro Cherqos rock-hewn churches.

The second chapter is the heart of the book, which focuses on the author's main research subject – that is, the three rock-cut churches. The discussion begins with Abrha wa-Atsbeha, followed by Mikael Amba and Wuqro Cherqos. In all three cases, the discussion begins with background information about the geographical landscape and geological features in which these churches were created. The author provides a detailed description of the main architectural elements in the interior and exterior of the churches, such as the facade, narthex, and aisles of individual churches. The descriptions are accompanied by pictures and drawings, with special attention paid to the features on the ceilings that elaborate the cruciform elements.

The next section discusses the building phases of the churches, as chronology (pp. 124–134) is an important factor here. Muehlbauer discusses the reach of the previous research and his findings on the topic. Although he refers readers to the concluding chapter for the details of his findings, he takes into account synonymity in geology, metrology, and other architectural elements that enabled him to reach the conclusion that these three churches were produced by the efforts of masons in communication (directly or indirectly) with and commissioned by the same politico-religious figures in the proximate period.

In his argument for delineating the phases of church building, Muehlbauer regards Mikael Amba as the outcome of the second building campaign. This conclusion is based on references made to textual evidence (pp. 128–129). The text is one of the rarest pieces of literary evidence we have from this period. Moreover, its authorship by a Coptic metropolitan, Michael, and its figurative details about churches consecrated, priests, and monks ordained, with direct reference to his consecration of the church of Mikael Amba, adds weight to the author's argument. The connection between the Coptic and Ethiopian churches goes back to the early 4th century, since when, metropolitans have been assigned by the patriarchate of Alexandria and with the will of the sultans since the predomination of Islam in Egypt. This continued to the mid-20th century, when Ethiopia started to enthrone its patriarch and, hence, metropolitan. Furthermore, this specific case can be taken as one of the most important sources of evidence for the role that the metropolitans played in the church-building projects beyond their commonly known role of consecrating the buildings. Recent research, such as at Maryam Nazret, will provide more insights about the topic.

Given that these churches underwent a series of periods of structural dynamism that resulted in restorations and adaptations across time, it was not easy for the author to make precise observations of their cruciform plans and appearance. However, his scrutiny and efforts at every corner to examine the potential cruciform plans led him to clearly illustrate the similarities and differences between the three churches under study. Furthermore, his detailed investigation also permitted him to compare these churches in Tigray with those further south in the Wag and Lasta areas. Apart

from the main architectural investigations, Muehlbauer also made use of the changes and continuities in liturgical spaces as a case in point.

Chapter 2 also includes a tabulated summary of the relative chronology (p. 133) of the hewing, restoration, and rework of the churches from 1000 AD to 1939 – i.e., from the hewing of the churches to the restoration of Abreha wa-Atsbeha during the Italian occupation. The chapter culminates with a very good summary of the major internal developments (political centralization and re-Christianization under the emerging Zagwe Dynasty) and the external relations with the Fatimid mercantile networks that permitted the introduction of contemporary Justinian monumental fashions to the region. Ethiopian pilgrims and trading networks all along the Red Sea were taken as bases for these exchanges.

Chapter 3 assesses the medieval rock-cut churches of Ethiopia in the context of the political developments in the Mediterranean world during the 11th century. According to the various pieces of literary evidence consulted by Muehlbauer, central to these developments was a shift in interest on the part of the Fatimid dynasty under Badr al-Jamali from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean due to the presence of the Seljuk, and Turkey's preoccupation with the former. The already established Coptic network had been used to approach the Christian kings aside from pocket Muslim foundations in the region.

In a section that discusses vaults and domed cubes, the author suggests the adoption of late antique Mediterranean fashion rather than the pre-existing Aksumite features. The appearance of the symbol of the cross in different forms and positions also receives considerable attention in the chapter with a series of comparisons with counterparts elsewhere. Apart from images from the area of study, most of the pictures used for comparative assessment in this chapter are of churches, or parts of churches, from different architectural productions in Egypt, Turkey, Italy, and France.

In the chapter's concluding section, titled "Global Year 1000", Muehlbauer tries to challenge the pre-existing view of the "Dark Ages" attributed to the post-Aksumite Ethiopia, an idea shared by previous archaeologists such as Phillipson and Finneran who are mentioned in the preceding section where Muehlbauer discusses Aksumite pre-Christian and Christian architectural traces on the medieval churches under study. Although these scholars have shared concerns regarding justifying the change and continuity from the Aksumite further south, the application of this idea to the churches of the present research proves a worthwhile undertaking.

The fourth chapter of the book emphasizes the traces of connections between medieval Ethiopia and the Indian Ocean world that are found manifested on the churches mainly in the use of textiles and textile motifs. This is particularly the case with the churches of Abreha wa-Atsbeha and Wuqro Cherqos and how textile and architecture are found intertwined. Mikael Amba was thought to have been left unfinished during the adornment of the

other two rock-hewn churches in the 11th century. In this section, the author makes use of the reflections of travelers such as Alvarez from the 16th century. Moreover, parallels from contemporary Egyptian architectural features and textile evidence are employed extensively for elaboration. By drawing on museum collections, such as those of the Ashmolean in Oxford and other museums in North America, as well as ethnographic data, the discussion in this chapter becomes more practical and lively.

The chapter discusses knowledge and material (fabric) exchanges with a detailed look at the major maritime routes of the Red Sea, Silk Road, and the Indian Ocean, and their respective trading networks. Fatimid Egypt continued to be taken as the major agent in the movement of textile commodities to northern Ethiopia. The detailed investigation looks as far as the Far East (China), and an assessment of commercial links to the Horn of Africa in those days is presented. The chapter also illustrates the specific architectural elements, such as windows, chancels, screens, and latices, that display textile and textile-driven motifs (p. 189).

The temporal focus of the book, the 11th century, with its multifaceted and global trading patterns, is well depicted. The intermediaries and otherwise contemporaries of the period, including countries other than Egypt, such as Armenia, Yemen, and Gujarat (India), and their influence are taken into account. As the main textile element, silk, and its socio-aesthetic function within the church, receives a special place in the description. The author also argues that ornament is the hallmark of visual culture studies. Other local examples from the subsequent centuries, including Zarema Giorgis and churches from Lalibela, such as Bete Maryam, are considered for comparative assessment. Furthermore, the central topic of the subject, which is the cross motif and plan in different forms, has a particular take on both textile and architectural analysis.

The book's conclusion contains a synthesis of the discussions in the preceding four chapters and their implications. It begins with a proposal on the need to count these three rock-hewn churches as signals of the great architectural movement of the Middle Ages. Chronologically, Muehlbauer took the late 11th century (1089–1094) to be the foundation of these rock-cut structures as monasteries. These religious establishments were taken as reflections of the preexisting advance of Aksumite architecture and a strong alliance with the Byzantine world.

Muehlbauer further proposes that development in the production of rock-cut churches over subsequent centuries was a continuation and elaboration of the 11th-century churches from Tigray, which were probably built by the Hatanis, dynastic predecessors of the Zagwe (Lalibela). In this respect, the author takes Bete Giorgis in Lalibela to be more directly linked with Tigrayan cruciform churches. At the same time, elements such as blind windows, chamfered pillars, and tour moldings are considered to be adoptions from Aksumite architecture. Churches from Tigray, such as Maryam

Qorqor, and Zamaddo Maryam and Bethlehem, further south in the Amhara region, are considered for comparative observation.

The section concludes with the last four paragraphs coming back to the title of the book, "Bastions of the Cross", with a humble presentation of the author's work, the motive that brought him to this work, and the outcome. This deductive approach in describing the what and why of the book, as well as the title as part of the conclusion, is a more plausible approach than placing it in the introduction as this may help readers to correlate their understanding of the content of the book with the title given to it.

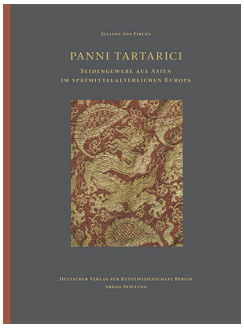
The central argument that Muehlbauer makes about the need to maintain the balance between the issue of locally rooted inspirations and counterparts from elsewhere is interesting. Nevertheless, discussions on the typology of cross motifs, such as identifications as Greek and Maltese, could have benefited from further elaboration. In addition to the mere identification of cross motifs on the churches, clarification as to whether these cross types are locally rooted or are part of the eastern Mediterranean world is needed. It should be emphasized that the diverse materiality and typology of crosses in Ethiopia have not yet been well investigated. Although this thesis requires more precision, it might open a new route of investigation in Muehlbauer's further research. The multiplicity of rock-cut churches in Ethiopia, which represent an ongoing tradition in some areas, and the presence of diverse built churches across time and space require further comparative investigations in order to identify with better precision what is local, imported, or shared.

In general, Muehlbauer's book, with its both outward and inward-oriented observations of the world of rock-cut ecclesiastical architecture in northern Ethiopia, is an excellent contribution. Although the author could not conduct in-depth archaeological investigations for the reasons indicated elsewhere, he has made use of wide-ranging literary, architectural, and archaeological resources to address the basic questions of his research. The extensive fieldwork that the author conducted and the attempts he made as a participant observer of the culture and church tradition in his research area are very inspiring. Additionally, the book has exhaustive footnotes and bibliographical information. Moreover, the monograph is informed in many ways by about ten papers on the related topics that Muehlbauer published before the book.

The book can serve as a comprehensive guide and reference for students of higher education and researchers in the fields of art and architectural history, archaeology, and economic and religious history, among others.

JULIANE VON FIRCKS, *PANNI TARTARICI. SEIDENGEWEBE AUS ASIEN IM SPÄTMITTELALTERLICHEN EUROPA*

Berlin/Riggisberg: Deutscher Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft Berlin and Abegg-Stiftung 2024, 268 pages with 179 color and 6 b/w ill., ISBN 978-3-87157-263-0 and ISBN 978-3-905014-78-5 (Hardback).



Reviewed by
Patricia Blessing

This long-awaited book brings together material on *panni tartarici*, as thirteenth- and fourteenth-century gold brocades produced under the umbrella of the Mongol Empire were called in Europe, where they were highly appreciated at the time. These textiles were imported from Iran, Central Asia, and China, through trade networks that reached across the Black Sea region into the Middle East and Asia. In her study, Juliane von Fircks carefully examines the reception of these textiles in present-day Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the Czech Republic. Yet the book is more wide-ranging, proposing a broader reception history of silk textiles, from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, as well as a study of textile production in Ilkhanid Iran, and China under the Yuan dynasty. Throughout, the author presents beautiful images of all the objects covered.

Chapter 1 is a brief, but thorough discussion of how silk was appreciated from the Roman Empire into the Ottonian period. Von Fircks combines textual sources that report on the value placed on such textiles, and how they were used, with surviving objects. These include, for instance, the clothing that survived from the tombs of Merovingian queens Bathilde (d. ca. 680) at Chelles and Arnegunde

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1035–1040

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108255

(d. ca. 580) at Saint-Denis, and the well-known textiles connected to Bishops Bernward of Hildesheim and Pope Clement II in Bamberg. Chapter 2 addresses the ways in which silks, and imaginaries of the East in general, appear in courtly romances of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, such as the work of Wolfram von Eschenbach. At the same time, the chapter also considers how the experience of the Crusades, beginning in the 1090s, changed Christian European ideas about the East through more sustained and direct contact with the Islamic world and Byzantium. Additional scholarship to be considered here might have been the work of Marisa Galvez and Geraldine Heng.[1] In Chapter 2, the reader also first encounters the few textiles attributed to Seljuq Anatolia (pp. 47–49). Here, a reference to the catalog *Court and Cosmos* would have been central – more on this issue below.[2] Chapter 3 is a short overview of how the Mongols and the Mongol Empire were presented in European sources of the thirteenth century; here, too, engagement with Heng's work, and with more recent scholarship on the Mongol Empire, some of which is mentioned in the Introduction, would have been useful.

Chapter 4 examines silk in the realm of the Mongol Empire, beginning with an overview of how such objects, as well as clothing, appear in the translated Ilkhanid sources, and the *Secret History of the Mongols*. This also includes the taking of textiles as booty, and changes to Mongol clothing as the empire expanded and adopted practices from various cultures now under its umbrella. The discussion of clothing and identity should have included Eiren Shea's book, which is listed in the bibliography.[3] Unfortunately von Fircks does not engage with Shea's nuanced and carefully researched arguments about Mongol clothing and shifting identities, either here or in the discussion surviving examples of Mongol women's clothing in Chapters 5 and 6.

Chapter 5 addresses the crucial question of whether cloth of gold is a Mongol invention, and whether production can be tied down more closely. Overall, this is the most problematic chapter in the book. It returns to Seljuq textiles, as before without referring to the catalog of *Court and Cosmos*, a major show on Seljuq art on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2016.[4] Notably in the present context, it brought together a range of Seljuq textiles, including the exceedingly rare examples attributed to Anatolia, affording a unique opportunity to view these side-by-side.

1
Marisa Galvez, *The Subject of Crusade. Lyric, Romance, and Materials, 1150 to 1500*, Chicago 2020; Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2018.

2
Sheila R. Canby, Deniz Beyazit, Martina Rugiadi, and A. C. S. Peacock, *Court and Cosmos. The Great Age of the Seljuqs*, New Haven, CT/London 2016.

3
Eiren Shea, *Mongol Court Dress, Identity Formation, and Global Exchange*, New York 2020.

4
Canby, Beyazit, Rugiadi et al., Court and Cosmos.

Von Fircks discusses these examples without reference to the catalog edited by Sheila Canby, even though that title is listed in the bibliography. This omission is particularly problematic in the case of the textile inscribed with the name of Rūm Seljuq sultan ʿAlā al-Dīn Kayqubād (r. 1220–1237 CE), which was restored at its home institution, the Musée des Tissus in Lyon, for the purpose of the exhibition. Comparison to the famous dragon-shaped door knocker from the Great Mosque of Cizre (historical Jazirat ibn ʿUmar) is also made in that catalog. Von Fircks omits the fact that the door knocker, now in the David Collection in Copenhagen, was stolen from the mosque in the 1960s, and the door, along with the second knocker, moved to the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art in Istanbul for safekeeping afterwards.[5] When addressing the historical context, the only reference given is to the German translation of Tamara Talbot Rice's general work on the Anatolian Seljuqs.[6] Such an outdated reference is unacceptable, given the rich English-language scholarship published over the last three decades by historians such as A. C. S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız, and art historians such as Scott Redford, Oya Pancaroğlu, Richard P. McClary, Patricia Blessing, and Suzan Yalman.

Chapter 6 returns to the use of *panni tartarici* in Europe, with the earliest surviving cases of use in Maubeuge, Las Huelgas, and Braga, in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. I am not familiar with the further literature on Maubeuge and Braga. In the discussion of the textiles found in the royal tombs at Santa María de las Huelgas in Burgos, Spain, however, a wide range of scholarship is not cited, such as María Judith Feliciano's seminal article "Muslim Shrouds for Christian Kings?".[7] The same is true for more recent scholarship in English and Spanish by Rose Walker, Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, Eduardo Carrero Santamaría, Concha Herrero Carretero, and María Barrigón. Furthermore, extensive textile motifs that appear in the site's stucco decoration, studied by Cynthia Robinson, Gema Palomo Fernández, Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza, Razan Francis, and others, are not mentioned at all. Considering how careful von Fircks is in her motif and technical analysis of the textiles, and her attention to the materials as such, these failures to engage with scholarship are deeply troubling.

5
Z. Kenan Bilici, Bronze Door-Knockers of Cizre Great Mosque. A New Example, in: Matteo Compareti, Paola Raffetta, and Gianroberto Scarcia (eds.), *Ēran ud Anērān. Studies Presented to Boris Il'ich Marshak on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, Venice 2006 [first published online in 2003 (October 26, 2024)]. For an image of the doors in situ, see: Canby, Beyazit, Rugiadi et al., Court and Cosmos, 64, fig. 37.

6
Tamara Talbot Rice, *Die Seldschuken*, Cologne 1963 [first published in English as *The Seljuks in Asia Minor*, London 1961]. See the critical review of that book by Hanna Sohrweide, Die Seldschuken by Tamara Talbot Rice, in: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 90/2, 1965, 305–306 (November 22, 2024).

7
María Judith Feliciano, Muslim Shrouds for Christian Kings? A Reassessment of Andalusi Textiles in Thirteenth-Century Castilian Life and Ritual, in: Cynthia Robinson and Leyla Rouhi (eds.), *Under the Influence. Questioning the Comparative in Medieval Castile*, Leiden 2005, 101–132.

Chapter 7 returns to Iran and China under Mongol rule and again raises such issues. A few missing studies are Birgitt Hoffmann's study of the endowment of Rashīd al-Dīn in Tabriz and recent excavations at that site; the reports of the German-led excavations at Takht-e Suleymān in the 1970s, and further work on that site by several scholars are also not mentioned.[8] For Tabriz in the Ilkhanid period, a note (p. 137, n. 87) points to an article published in 1962 as the "still most complete study on the subject", although a major volume was published in 2014.[9] Yuka Kadoi's seminal study on the influence of Chinese art on Islamic art in the Ilkhanid period is only cited a few times, and deserves deeper engagement.[10] For the Diez Albums, it would be important to consult numerous recent studies collected in the proceedings of a major conference on the subject held in Berlin.[11]

Chapter 8 returns to the use of *panni tartarici* in Europe, focusing on the 1295 inventory of Pope Boniface VIII's treasury, textiles surviving from the fourteenth-century court of Prague, and the Heinrichsgewänder in Regensburg, with substantial discussion of the objects in each of these cases, alongside the relevant primary sources that document their use and trajectory. In the discussion of striped textiles and weavers' inscriptions that is relevant for Regensburg, Corinne Mühlemann's recent, rigorous work on the subject is included and given due credit.[12] The discussion of fourteenth-century European elite men's clothing based on few surviving examples made of cloth of gold is almost hidden toward the chapter's end. Somewhat buried in this long chapter is a discussion of terms, first of alternate terms for the cloths of gold in European sources, then for those used in Islamic and Chinese sources. Here, a fundamental mistake is made, stemming from summary paraphras-

8
Birgitt Hoffmann, *Waqf im mongolischen Iran. Rašīduddīns Sorge um Nachruhm und Seelenheil*, Stuttgart 2000; Rudolf Naumann, *Die Ruinen von Tacht-e Suleiman und Zendan-e Suleiman und Umgebung*, Berlin 1977; Yves Porter, 'Talking' Tiles from Vanished Ilkhanid Palaces (Late Thirteenth to Early Fourteenth Centuries). Frieze Luster Tiles with Verses from the Shah-nama, in: *Journal of Material Cultures in the Muslim World* 2, 2021, 97–149; Abdullah Ghouchani, *Ash'ār-i Fārsī-i Kāshīhā-yi Takht-i Sulaymān*, Tehran 1992; A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, *Les frises du Shāh Nāme dans l'architecture iranienne sous les Ilkhān*, Paris 1996. For a list of publications on recent excavations at the Rabʿ-i Rashīdī, see: University of Bamberg, Rabʿ-i Rashidi in Tabriz. Archaeological and Architectural Field Research (October 26, 2024).

9
Judith Pfeiffer (ed.), *Politics, Patronage, and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz*, Leiden 2014.

10
Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie*, Edinburgh 2009.

11
Julia Gonnella, Friederike Weis, and Christoph Rauch (eds.), *The Diez Albums. Contexts and Contents*, Leiden 2017.

12
Corinne Mühlemann, *Complex Weaves. Technique, Text, and Cultural History of Striped Silks*, Affalterbach 2023.

ing of Thomas Allsen's discussion of the term *nasīj*.[13] Von Fircks states: "Thomas Allsen weist darauf hin, dass das Wort *nasīğ*, eine chinesische Variante des arabischen Wortes *nasaja* (weben), in der Mongolenzeit die spezifische Bedeutung von Seidengeweben mit Goldmustern annahm" (p. 150). Allsen does no such thing: he notes that the Arabic term *nasīj* (the same as *nasīğ*, just using a different transliteration system from Arabic to Latin script) means generically "woven stuff" or "textile", but takes on the specific meaning of gold brocade in the Mongol period.[14] In Chinese, the word *nasīj* in its specific meaning designating gold brocade was adapted as *na-shih-shih* to refer to such textiles.[15]

Chapter 9 addresses how patterned silks, especially those from the Mongol Empire but also ones produced in Spain, and in emerging Italian centers beginning in the fourteenth century, are represented in paintings made in Siena, the Netherlands, fifteenth-century France, and Venice. Somewhat surprisingly, Florence and Pisa are not discussed here.[16]

Von Fircks's expertise in medieval European art history, with detailed attention to the production, technique, and use of textiles, is clear in the chapters that focus on the reception of the textiles in medieval central and northern Europe, but elsewhere, unfortunate gaps appear. In sections of the book that deal with Islamic and East Asian contexts within the Mongol Empire (and in some other instances, as discussed below) issues ranging from missing footnotes to large swathes of relevant scholarly literature being disregarded emerge. In part, these omissions raise the question to what extent the author's Habilitation, submitted to the Johannes Gutenberg Universität in Mainz in 2017, was updated before publication. In the bibliography, very few titles published after 2016 appear, although the author states in the preface that some chapters were revised in 2020. Of course, there are always delays in academic publishing, from submission of manuscript to publication, but some gaps should have been avoided. More broadly, there is the question of the challenges posed by such a wide-ranging study, requiring in-depth knowledge of Islamic and East Asian art history, in addition

13
Thomas Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire. A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*, Cambridge 1997, 2–4.

14
Ibid., 2–3.

15
Ibid., 3.

16
For these cities, see: Vera-Simone Schulz, Infiltrating Artifacts. The Impact of Islamic Art in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Florence and Pisa, in: *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 87/4, 2018, 214–233 (October 26, 2024).

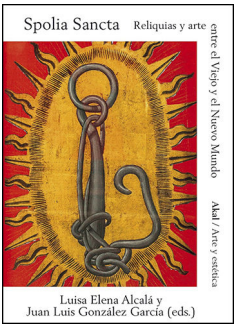
to the author's expertise in medieval European art history, and the study of historical textiles.[17]

A few matters of typography: using the DMG transliteration system, the Seljuq sultan is Qiliğ Arslān II, not Qiliğ Ārslān II. The use of the cross (†) to indicate date of death throughout is jarring in the case of the many individuals who are not Christian. The neutral *gest.* for *gestorben* (died, hence equivalent to d. in English) is established usage.

[17] The study is best read together with Anne E. Wardwell, Panni Tartarici. Eastern Islamic Silks Woven with Gold and Silver (13th and 14th Centuries), in: *Islamic Art* 3, 1988–1989, 94–147, and Juliane von Fircks and Regula Schorta (eds.), *Oriental Silks in Medieval Europe*, Riggisberg 2016.

LUISA ELENA ALCALÁ DONEGANI & JUAN LUIS GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA (EDS.), *SPOLIA SANCTA. RELIQUIAS Y ARTE ENTRE EL VIEJO Y EL NUEVO MUNDO*

Arte y estética, Madrid: AKAL/Siglo XXI Editores 2023, 336 pages with 68 ill., ISBN 978-84-460-5224-1.



Reviewed by
Hélène Dupraz Sancho, Victor Maria Escalona, David Aaron Jost & Tamara Kobel

Relics and reliquaries historiography has tended to focus primarily on the European world. In scholarship on the early modern Spanish world, for instance, attention has been limited to the El Escorial complex and the Iberian Habsburg collecting tradition. However, during the last decades, these research areas have expanded, both spatially and temporally.[1] *Spolia Sancta. Reliquias y arte entre el Viejo y el Nuevo Mundo* (Relics and Art between the Old and the New World) serves as a compelling demonstration of how continuing in this vein and widening the scope allows art historians to grasp broader dimensions of movement, staging, displacement,

1
Philippe Boutry, Pierre-Antoine Fabre, and Dominique Julia (eds.), *Reliques modernes. Cultes et usages chrétiens des corps saints des Réformes aux révolutions*, 2 vols., vol. 2, Paris 2009. Stéphane Baciocchi and Christophe Duhamelle (eds.), *Reliques romaines. Invention et circulation des corps saints des catacombes à l'époque moderne*, Rome 2016. The authors of this review are members of the GLOBO Project at the Institute of Art History, University of Bern, Switzerland. The project investigates relics and human remains during the early modern period in various areas of the Iberian monarchies.

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1041–1046

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108256

exchange, and artistic production in and around relics. The volume features contributions covering many regions of former Iberian monarchies corresponding with areas in present-day Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, and Spain. Therefore, across a range of geographies, the volume multiplies the approaches, reuniting eighteen scholars with different backgrounds and origins. Indeed, the assorted case studies provide points of reference for readers as they illustrate the relic's multiple social, religious, historical, political, and emotional layers of meaning. It accounts for the creation, acquisition, donation, even theft, and resemanticization of relics and reliquaries as well as gives special attention to transformative journeys across geographical, artistical, and cultural spaces.

The volume uses the evocative term "spolia sancta" as soon as in its title, to describe relics and objects related to them. Derived from the Latin "spoils" (*spolium*), the term *spolia* refers to the reuse of parts and fragments of ancient architectures and artworks generally aiming to convey continuity, appropriation, and/or transformation.[2] Thus, differentiated from the relics – of which the definition has generally been limited to the categories of sacred human remains and their contact objects, along with sacred images or icons (*acheiropoieta*) – the "*spolia sancta*" are presented here as a wider category: artifacts, human remains, for sure, but also containers, staged or built spaces, rituals and performances, as well as images (sacred or not, miraculous or human-handmade). The term thus includes the elements surrounding the relics that carry a kind of sacredness and have an active role in social life and social fabric.

Spolia Sancta is divided into four sections, corresponding to four main questions. The contributions in the first part, "Imagen y Reliquia" (Image and Relic), are devoted to similarities, differences, and the interplay between the two similar, yet different categories of objects. The book begins with an examination of a theoretical treatise by the Jesuit Martín de Roa from 1623 on the veneration of images and relics. Cécile Vincent-Cassy pleads for a joint examination of image and relic "to underline that both are united and their legitimacy is subordinated to the cult of the saints" (p. 24). After this opening, which offers the volume a theoretical theological basis from the early modern period, the contributions are devoted more to the practical context of images and relics as cult objects. María José del Río Barredo and Katherine Mills investigate the ritual use of these two categories of objects and their respective functions, particularly through the movement of the relics and images and their placement in liturgical spaces. Equally interested in the interplay between images and relics is Carmen Fernández-Salvador in her contribution on the "image-relic" of the altarpiece of the Virgen

[2] Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen has analyzed the relationship between spolia and relics in the Middle Ages in various studies, for example: ead., Spolia as Relics? Relics as Spoils? The Meaning and Functions of Spolia in Western Medieval Reliquaries, in: Cynthia Hahn and Holger A. Klein (eds.), *Saints and Sacred Matter. The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, Washington, DC 2015, 173–192.

del Pilar in Quito, a copy of the original in Zaragoza. She raises questions about the relationship between the original and the copy, but also the staging of the "image-relic" in relation to other relics around it to increase the authority of the copy.

In the second part, "Reliquias en la Practica Artistica" (Relics in Artistic Practice), the authors explore in case studies the mobility of relics and the craftsmanship underlying the production of reliquaries. José Riello starts this part by drawing a direct line from acheiropoieta (images made miraculously without a human hand) and reliquary busts to the modern genre of portraiture. In his analysis of a drawing of Maria Magdalena's reliquary in Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, Riello highlights the core feature that links reliquary busts and portraiture: they both hold the tension between the visible and the invisible; between the presence and the absence of the depicted. This is contrasted by a case studied by Pablo F. Amador Marrero and Ramón Pérez de Castro that deals with the alleged impossibility to copy two Castilian medieval sculptures of Christ. The comparative study of these two sculptures highlights the curious interplay between these sculptures-as-relics and their attempted copies. Roberto Alonso Moral, in his contribution to the volume, analyzes the socio-cultural dimension behind the production of reliquary busts in Naples for a global market by the end of the 16th century. As the demand for suitable relic containers grew, the production of busts as anthropomorphic reliquaries reached a peak and had a significant effect on the local economy. In contrast to this macro-perspective, Yessica Porras ends part two by highlighting a small-scale practice of nuns from a female convent in New Granada. Spatially restricted by life in a convent, these nuns turned their imposed limitations into creativity and made use of paper reliquaries to house the few small relics that they received. The complex paper structures resembling gardens and landscapes of pilgrimage allowed them to travel spiritually to achieve individual proximity to their saints.

The third part, "Identidades y Espacios" (Identities and Spaces), examines the different ways private individuals as well as religious and political actors and institutions made use of relics. The four chapters showcase how relics could take on the role of "sacred goods" in a devotional market, necessitating human intervention to extend their sacredness into new contexts and spaces. In an essay about the female private collector Mencía de Mendoza (1508–1554), Noelia García Pérez offers a nuanced understanding of her relatively small but distinct collection of relics of female saints connected with motherhood and childbirth. She does so by delving into the Marquise's biography and her connection to humanist practices, offering a vista onto a wider context in which to situate this collection's particularities. Almudena Pérez de Tudela Gabaldón discusses the acquisition strategies of Philipp II (1527–1598) for El Escorial. She documents the relics entering the collection of El Escorial, introduces us to exhibition and storage spaces, and gives new insights into the celebrations revolving around the arrival

of the relics. She thereby uncovers the underlying political, diplomatic, and social dynamics connected with the trade of relics. The chapter by Antonio Joaquín Santos Márquez deals with the collection of the cathedral of Seville and explores the social significance of relic donations. It traces their movement and emphasizes the various ceremonies and festivities surrounding their arrival in the collection during the second half of the 16th century. In Agustina Rodríguez Romero's case study on the relics of the holy cross (*lignum crucis*), the focus shifts from the human actors handling relics to the venerated objects themselves. The author examines the function of cross relics as tools for evangelization processes in the viceroyalty of Peru and discusses how visual and written representations of the cross relics shaped religious and cultural communities.

The concluding section, "Éxitos, Fracasos y Resignificaciones" (Successes, Failures, and Resignifications), delves into the significance of martyrdom (in its widest definition) in Latin American history and investigates how the religious model of relic veneration was sometimes transposed to secular contexts. To do this, Escardiel González Estévez examines martyrdom episodes in America and Asia, analyzing how they generated relics and narratives that circulated between these regions and Europe, making relics pioneering objects of globalization. She questions why relics from America did not benefit from similar traffic as others, and why the New World lacked its own saints until well into the 17th century. She also highlights the fluid exchange between Christian relic worship and indigenous rituals in the Americas, particularly in the Andes, where ritual practices surrounding human remains were more prevalent and well-documented. Maria Berbara examines the reaffirmation of relic power that took place in 16th-century Brazil, in parallel to the Reformation movements which threatened relic legitimacy in Europe. She also describes that in Portuguese America, relics intersected with shamanic practices, leading to conflicts between Christians and indigenous peoples over their possession. Maria Judith Feliciano discusses the failed attempt to establish a local cult to Spanish martyr saints in Puerto Rico due to socio-economic factors and the lack of reliability in the context of the "Reconquista" martyrdom – at the hands of Arabic soldiers during the so-called "Reconquista" – for the local Puerto Rican population. This failure sheds light on the challenges of implanting devotional practices in island contexts and prompts a reevaluation of colonial diversity and religious mechanisms. This article also shows how difficult it can be to retrace a specific relic's history and the complexity of researching when sources lose track of them for a while. This section then also demonstrates ways in which relics have been repurposed to serve political and historical narratives, contributing to the formation of collective memory in and of modern Latin America. Patricia Zalamea Fajardo, for example, explores the contemporary (19th- to 21st-century Latin America) reinterpretation of martyrs and saints through similar practices in ritual and arts, like protecting,

collecting, and exhibiting in museums some objects that belonged to important historic personalities. She discusses how heroic figures have been portrayed with saint-like qualities, blurring the lines between martyrdom and heroism, between relic-image and civic portraits, between divine sanctity and politico-national sacredness.

The diverse approaches of the contributors shed light on a wide range of agents who operated with, through, and because of relics. Further, Rodriguez Romero in her chapter on the *lignum crucis* lets the objects themselves take center stage and highlights their agency. In a similar manner, Berbara examines the function of human bones as mediators. She brings a new aspect to the well-known case of the Tupinamba's appropriation of Francisco Pinto's bones and the interaction between Tupi and Christian actors by looking at how the contact affected visual argumentation in the confessional conflict in Europe. This contribution to the volume extends a line of thinking proffered by Margit Kern, who has addressed "transcultural negotiations" around the matter of human sacrifice in Mexico and Europe.[3] And, more generally, these essays show the continued interest in tracing the cultural, social, and global lives of objects – their "biographies" – in ways that have been robustly mobilized by object-focused disciplines such as archaeology, art history, and museum studies over the course of the last twenty-five years.[4] The notable range of social actors highlighted in the book points to the quite divergent socio-historical stories that can be accessed by taking relics as a starting point. There is an expanded range of male actors like King Henry of Portugal (1512–1580), involved in diplomatic processes, a bishop like Benito de Ribas (c. 1600–1668), trying to establish the cult of martyr saints in Puerto Rico, and artists building up a production process in Naples to meet the high demand for bust reliquaries. But female agency also takes a starring role in more than one case study, and this amounts to a seminal contribution to the volume as a whole. This starts with the contribution by Río Barredo and Mills, in which the nuns of the Convent of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid moved the relics within liturgical frameworks. But these nuns also play an important role as the authors of the "rich, but still underutilized" (p. 49) notebooks, which make it possible to study this case at all. Porras also considers the role of nuns, but in relation to the production of paper reliquaries, which is generally female connotated and enables an intimate form of devotion by making. In his study on bust reliquaries, Moral emphasizes the role of women as collectors of relics. While he mentions several active female figures, another author focuses on one specific case in detail: García Pérez sheds light not only on Mendo-

[3] Margit Kern, *Transkulturelle Imaginationen des Opfers in der Frühen Neuzeit. Übersetzungsprozesse zwischen Mexiko und Europa*, Berlin 2013.

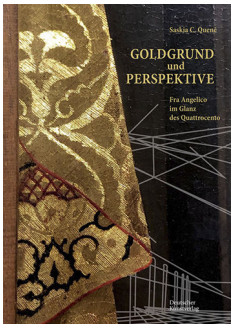
[4] Igor Kopytoff, The Cultural Biography of Things. Commoditization as Process, in: Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge 1986, 64–92.

za's role as a wealthy, humanistically educated collector. She also looks at the significance of the collection for Mendoza as a woman with specifically female experiences. This emphasis on the roles of women in the processes that accrued in and around relics and reliquaries is a strength of the book, if it is only revealed when reading the individual articles and not explicitly stressed in the volume's framing.

In conclusion, the case studies presented in *Spolia Sancta* represent a welcome geographical and thematic expansion of scholarship on the role of relics in the early modern period. The works of the authors, focused on a single category of object, demonstrates the productive application of diverse historical and, notably, art-historical methods and perspectives in their analysis. For scholars and readers interested in the early modern use of relics and sacred objects, *Spolia Sancta* is a valuable resource, likely to be revisited frequently, even after an initial reading.

SASKIA C. QUENÉ, *GOLDGRUND UND PERSPEKTIVE. FRA ANGELICO IM GLANZ DES QUATTROCENTO*

Berlin/München: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2023, 332 pages with 111 color ill., ISBN 978-3-422-98938-2 (Hardback).



Reviewed by
Henrike C. Lange

Saskia Quené's dissertation *Goldgrund und Perspektive. Fra Angelico im Glanz des Quattrocento* is a smart and beautifully produced book. Stating that it fills a gap would not be quite accurate, as it rather expands its main concepts in all kinds of ways. The author opens up a new discussion of Fra Angelico and his work in gold ground, gold, and gilding, and the perspectival structure of his paintings: spatially, materially, perspectivally, historiographically, and theoretically. Her study is advertised as examining something elusive that can be described as a "blind spot", namely, the meaning(s), condition(s), and fate(s) of the gold ground. It addresses one of the unpublished eternal set of questions of the auditorium, something students and audiences in museums endlessly ask about, but for which there is not one easy answer – and hence very few publications that provide an overview of the subject. The how, when, where, what for, and why of the gold ground – questions that have as many variables and combinations as any artist could play on and all must be re-examined for each individual artwork.

This is what Quené does with a strong focus on her very few select case studies. The author states that she was searching for something more elusive than the original question of gold ground,

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1047–1052

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108509

for its origin and iconography, covering categories of objects as diverse as manuscripts and altarpieces, Egyptian mummy portraits and Byzantine mosaics, Trecento cult images, and tarot cards (p. 13). What she eventually found was best pinned down in the work of Fra Angelico, and so the present study instead presents "Prolegomena" (historiography, iconography, material, technique, form, and function) and is structured around (1), the *Madonne dell'Umilità*, (2) the manifestation of the devotional image from point, line, and plane towards a form of "Incarnation" (especially in the Annunciation iconography) and (3), a short study of Fra Angelico's *Paradiso* in relation to colour/gold and gold/light.

As a historical and material phenomenon, the gold ground is omnipresent, often seen as singularly epoch-making (medieval) and -breaking (Renaissance/early modern). The enduring *Goldgrund* of the Italian Quattrocento in its finer forms and formulations has thus been recognized, as Martin Warnke once remarked, as substituting a "thinly veiled persistence of the cult of material sacred objects" which seems to insist on the presence of an irrepresentable Heaven in the context of the increasingly scientific blue-skied early modern image.[1] For decades, the field depended mostly on a handful of important, but somewhat insular, interventions such as Wolfgang Braunfels's *Nimbus und Goldgrund* and Wolfgang Schöne's *Licht in der Malerei*, often missing Bodonyi's fine dissertation on the gold ground in late antiquity that lay dormant in Vienna (despite Gombrich's more prominent review of the study).[2] One should not forget a small number of theses and dissertations such as those by Lois Heidmann Shelton and Beate Leitner, both 1987, respectively on gold and gold ground.[3] More recently, Michael V. Schwarz productively revived the complex questions by asking about the agency of the gold ground, proposing to move the discussion away from an elusive "meaning" to a more illuminating understanding of "function".[4] And exhibitions reliably enjoy the promotional draw of gold

1
Martin Warnke, oral communication in office hours, Hamburg (Germany), Warburg-Haus, *Wintersemester* 2002.

2
See Wolfgang Braunfels, Nimbus und Goldgrund, in: *Das Münster* 4, 1950, 321–334, and Wolfgang Schöne, *Über das Licht in der Malerei*, Berlin 1954. See also József Bodonyi, *Entstehung und Bedeutung des Goldgrundes in der spätantiken Bildkomposition. Ein Beitrag zur Sinndeutung der spätantiken Kunstsprache*, PhD Dissertation, University of Vienna, 1932, and Ernst H. Gombrich, review of József Bodonyi, Entstehung und Bedeutung des Goldgrundes in der spätantiken Bildkomposition. Ein Beitrag zur Sinndeutung der spätantiken Kunstsprache, Wien 1932, in: *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur* 6, 1937, 65–76.

3
See Lois Heidmann Shelton, *Gold in Altarpieces of the Early Italian Renaissance. A Theological and Art Historical Analysis of Its Meaning and of the Reasons for Its Disappearance*, PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1987. See also Beate Leitner, *Der Goldgrund – ein Bildelement in der spätmittelalterlichen, westlich-abendländischen Tafel- und Buchmalerei*, M.A. Thesis, University of Vienna, 1987.

4
See Michael V. Schwarz, Goldgrund im Mittelalter – 'Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use!', in: *Gold. Gold in der Kunst von der Antike bis zur Moderne* (exh. cat. Vienna, Belvedere Museum), ed. by Agnes Husslein-Arco and Thomas Zaunschirm, Vienna 2012, 28–37.

(e.g., Hamburg 1999 "Goldgrund und Himmelslicht"; Berlin 2005 "Geschichten auf Gold"; Vienna 2012 "Gold. Gold in der Kunst von der Antike bis zur Moderne").[5] Medievalists have thoroughly discussed the issue wherever applicable to their painters, mosaicists, illuminators, and architects, most prominently in publications around gold-ground-bound and gold-ground-exceeding artists such as Cimabue, Giotto, Giusto, the Vivarini, Simone Martini, Gentile da Fabriano, and Pisanello, among others.

Even limiting the question to early modern painting in Italy, the contemporaneity of gold ground, gilding, and gold paint on the one hand, and naturalistic skies, objects, and figures in space on the other, cannot be pressed into one simple formula between light and shadow or between material and immaterial means of representation – especially not on any linear, teleological line from the "dark" ages towards an early enlightenment of humanism. And therein lies a triple brilliance: that of the artworks and their maker's intellectual genius and the skill of their hands, that of the materials themselves (gold, gold ground, gold leaf, punchwork, applications, gold paint, tempera, oil), and that of the means of interpretation between representational and symbolic dimensions. Quené combines close-up studies of Fra Angelico with a side-glance to Gentile (without much looking around, which will hopefully be picked up by future generations, for instance, to Starnina, Veneziano, or Lorenzo Monaco). She helps to re-complicate the oversimplified narrative of perspective and naturalism being automatically opposed to the gold ground, which stemmed from Alberti's partial rejection of the ready-made gold as cheapening the artist's more worthy skill of creating its shine and opacity by means of colourful *chiaroscuro*.

The scope of Quené's study frames the gold ground in a manner welcome in the context of perspective and other spatial phenomena, moving deeper into the working of gold ground. We are confronted with the finer calibration of the spectator-image relationship, modulated by the tension between light and shadow, spatiality and flatness, opacity and the idea of transparency and depth into illusionistic distance. The gaze bounces off the image surface – in this book, off the page – but never without unique complications of the matter on the panel through incisions, punchwork, interruptions. To make this evident, the publisher (Deutsche Kunstverlag) produced an attractive publication of the German text with images in excellent quality, interspersed and structured with an endpaper made of exquisite red and, within the book, almost-full monochrome pages combined with details from the paintings in focus: (1) red for the Newark (Alana Collection) *Madonna with Child*, (2) gold for the Prado *Annunciation*, and (3) blue for a detail from the altarpiece predella from S. Domenico, Fiesole (now National Gallery, London).

[5] See *Goldgrund und Himmelslicht. Die Kunst des Mittelalters in Hamburg* (exh. cat. Hamburg, Hamburger Kunsthalle), ed. by Uwe M. Schneede, Hamburg 1999. See also *Geschichten auf Gold. Bilderzählungen in der frühen italienischen Malerei* (exh. cat. Berlin, Gemäldegalerie), ed. by Stefan Weppelmann, Berlin 2005.

Glanz, *Nachglanz*, *Abglanz*... evocative in her prose, Quené addresses gold ground as its own materialization of the content, for the first part, as "Grund der Demut" (echoing the ambivalent meaning of *sfondo* and *campo*, both translatable to *Grund* as "reason" in German, as also addressed in a classic study by Jeroen Stumpel, and more recently by David Young Kim).[6] With his unique visual theology, Fra Angelico is an ideal case study for the persistence of gold ground with the integration of various gold, gold paint, and gold ground techniques, weaving his figures into complex spatial contexts between materiality and light, between scientific innovations and theological themes.

More specifically, research in the visual arts as well as in the literature and vernacular mysticism of Trecento/Quattrocento Italy has long addressed the importance of "humilitas". As a religious-cultural theme, humility constantly stands in productive tension with notions of spiritual riches. One example for this dynamic is the actual use, or painterly / sculpturally representation, of luxury materials such as gold, ivory, or silk in Marian devotion. Between gold decorating and perspective, *humilitas* iconographies clash with the challenge of representational "reality". And in the early Quattrocento, it is this clash that brings about the ever-new encasing of figures within subtle variations of gold ground in visual spaces, all skilfully engaging with major optical categories such as transparency, perspective, relief, volume, and spatiality. Humility iconographies have been addressed traditionally – in art history, by Millard Meiss, in Dante studies, by Marilyn Migiel, and recently in Dante studies as well as in studies on Giotto.[7] For instance, in Teubner's 2023 *Dante and the Practice of Humility*, the author examines Dante's concern with humility also as a compositional exercise to train the author to write with humility. The tension that Teubner detects between the self-giving and self-possessed forces intertwined and active in the author-artist – created but creating for the creator – seems to run parallel to what Quené describes as Fra Angelico's painterly practice for the *Madonna of Humility*. These parallels suggest informative echoes bouncing back and forth between word and image, activating the dynamics of religious thought in the practice

6
See Jeroen Stumpel, On Grounds and Backgrounds. Some Remarks about Composition in Renaissance Painting, in: *Simiolus* 18, 1988, 219–243, and David Young Kim, *Groundwork. A History of the Renaissance Picture*, Turnhout 2022.

7
See, for painting, Millard Meiss, The Madonna of Humility, in: *Art Bulletin* 18, 1936, 435–465; for literature, Marilyn Migiel, Between Art and Theology. Dante's Representation of Humility, in: *Stanford Italian Review* 5, 1985, 141–159. More recently and with further bibliography, for Giotto, see Henrike Christiane Lange, Giotto's Triumph. The Arena Chapel and the Metaphysics of Ancient Roman Triumphal Arches, in: *I Tatti Studies* 25/1, 2022, 5–38, as well as Anne L. Williams, Imago humilis. Humor, Irony, and the Rhetorical Wit of the Sacred in the Arena Chapel, Padua, in: *Gesta* 61, 2022, 57–80, and Henrike Christiane Lange, *Giotto's Arena Chapel and the Triumph of Humility*, Cambridge 2023; for Dante, see Rachel Teubner, *Dante and the Practice of Humility. A Theological Commentary on the Divine Comedy*, Cambridge 2023, and Henrike Christiane Lange, Ephemerality and Perspective in Dante's Marble Reliefs and Botticelli's Drawing for *Purgatorio* 10, in: Matthew Collins and Luca Marcozzi (eds.), *Reading Dante with Images. A Visual Lectura Dantis*, vol. II, forthcoming.

of artmaking and craftsmanship (be it for the highly visual text in Dante's case, or on the material surface of his paintings in the case of Fra Angelico).

Furthermore, Quené's study fits nicely into other coordinate systems defined by recent monographs that promote new approaches to both the visual structure of late medieval painting as well as its inherent modernity.[8] Quené includes a broad range of theoretical and analytical perspectives, engaging approaches as diverse as Louis Marin's *Opacité de la peinture* on the one hand, and Schild Bunim's thorough illustrations of background ornaments on the other.[9] She swiftly sorts through what seems, in her line of questioning, relevant (e.g., Dante, Part III on *Paradiso*, pp. 229–290) and irrelevant (e.g., Bachtin, p. 223, n. 131), worthy of attention, or worthy of criticism. Given the many quoted sources and influences, some findings could be mixed in various ways, and possibly with at times varying results and interpretations, but they convince overall as a set of choices within the framework set by the introduction. Between the work in theory and the focus on craftmanship, it is particularly commendable that the author took opportunities to try out some of the techniques.

One lamentable fact is the absence of an index, which would not merely facilitate searches within the hard copy, but, most importantly, provide the skeletal blueprint of the brain of the book. This is especially regrettable as the book is so rich and tightly knit (the author alludes to this quality in explaining why the bibliography does not distinguish between primary and secondary sources); the copious footnotes are so extensive and well-considered, they are the real goldmines in this book. The hard copy, with its unique touch of monochromatic pages distinguishing the different parts of the book in pure red, gold, and blue, will best be consulted by specialists in tandem with the digital version's search function.

I am submitting this review to the editors while viewing a few archival boxes relating to the founders of the Department of History of Art at the University of California, Berkeley.[10] Among Leopold

8
See, for instance, Robert Brennan, *Painting as a Modern Art in Early Renaissance Italy*, Turnhout 2020, and Karl Whittington, *Trecento Pictoriality. Diagrammatic Painting in Late Medieval Italy*, Turnhout 2023.

9
See Louis Marin, *Opacité de la peinture. Essais sur la représentation au Quattrocento*, Florence 1989. See also Miriam Schild Bunim, *Space in Medieval Painting and the Forerunners of Perspective*, New York 1940.

10
The present boxes include donations by Walter Horn (who founded the department, its Phototeca, and its Slide Library between 1938 and 1939, when he became the first art historian on the faculty of the University of California system), Jean Bony, Leopold Ettlinger, and Michael Baxandall. Beyond serving, as one of the "Monuments Men", as a fine arts intelligence officer from 1945 to 1946, locating the Imperial Crown Jewels and Coronation Regalia of the Holy Roman Empire, Horn was a specialist in medieval architecture. Horn later published the St. Gall plan in the University of California Press's most extensive project, see August Frugé, *A Skeptic Among Scholars. August Frugé on University Publishing*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1993, especially ch. 17, Mega Biblion. Exposing the Press to Art History, 229–244 and James H. Clark, Addendum II, Publishing The Plan of St. Gall, 339–353.

Ettlinger's donations, I found a phonebook-thick manila envelope, filled with Alinari photos and images with stamps from "Universität Hamburg, Kunstgeschichtliches Seminar", from Warburg London, and from Photo Marburg: the Sistine Chapel frescoes, comparisons to Perugino, Botticelli's *Punishment of Korah* and *Stories of Moses*, comparisons to Byzantine manuscripts and mosaics, and so on. Any Sistine Chapel scholar would recognize the book that was printed from these exact original photos before coming to Ettlinger's handwritten pencil-signature in old German calligraphy on the page that itemized a "Provisional List of Plates": this is the image programme for Ettlinger's 1965 *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo: Religious Imagery and Papal Primacy*.[11] The book has endless merits; however, certain materially and optically unique features in gold (such as the golden clouds in Cosimo Rosselli's *Mount Sinai* fresco from the Moses cycle) can simply not be seen in the valuable tome's pages – the gold long disappeared through the lenses of photography and printing, swallowed by white highlights and black ink.

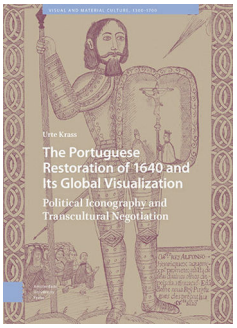
It is only at those times, when we try to understand the writing of the history of art by looking at the means and limitations of mechanical capture and reproduction across decades, that the difference hits us like a punch to the retina. The small golden clouds in the sky of Rosselli's *Mount Sinai* was never apparent to readers. They depended on a visit to the site to reconnect to what was read in the text, and even then needed a steel-trap visual memory. *Goldgrund und Perspektive* delivers both the text and the complex visual documentation of its topic. Quené's book therefore also represents an excellent example of new possibilities for the field. It is probably not by chance that the author consolidated her argument over a specific time in the more recent history of technology – a period during which research could oscillate between advanced means of photographic and print reproduction of gold on the one hand, and, on the other, the stratospheric technological progress of personal photography in front of the objects over the past two decades. The researcher can immediately check and correct the light and reflection of gold on the camera screen, taking unlimited shots from subtly varying angles. The text, in this fortuitous case, matches this searching, gradual visual analysis.

Yet the book as an object, reinforced and reinvented with the present-day genius of printing and technology, is now also capable of rendering certain effects and experiences that are much closer to visual contact with the artwork in real space. Given these technological possibilities, we should feel not simply like children on the shoulders of giants – but rather like children with certain generational superpowers in digital technology. And among those, an adequate reproduction of the visual effects of gold on paper is certainly not the least formidable.

11
See Leopold D. Ettlinger, *The Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo. Religious Imagery and Papal Primacy*, Oxford 1965.

URTE KRASS, *THE PORTUGUESE RESTORATION OF 1640 AND ITS GLOBAL VISUALIZATION. POLITICAL ICONOGRAPHY AND TRANSCULTURAL NEGOTIATION*

Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2023, 508 pages with 184 ill., ISBN: 978-9-46372-563-7 (Hardback).



Reviewed by
Annemarie Jordan Gschwend

The death of Sebastian I, King of Portugal, on a battlefield in Alcácer Quibir, Morocco, in August 1578 triggered a series of events which inevitably led to the end of the Avis monarchy in 1580. Sebastian's untimely death marked the beginning of political upheaval and the transition of Portugal's throne to another crown and dynasty. Portugal and its global trade empire, which linked Lisbon to Africa, Brazil, India (Goa) and the Far East (Macau), was suddenly up for grabs. Sebastian's failure to secure his succession with an heir compounded this impending crisis, as royal candidates from different courts engaged in a fierce legal battle for a legitimate takeover. A power vacuum quickly ensued, reshuffling the political chess board for several royals and princes, whose dream of a global throne was a game worth playing. A handful of contenders staked their claim to rule Portugal. The list of potential candidates read like a "Who's Who" of Renaissance Europe: a Habsburg King, Philip II of Spain; a Valois Queen of France, Catherine de' Medici; two Italian princes, Ranuccio I Farnese, Prince of Parma and Ema-

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1053–1058

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108511

nuele Filiberto, Duke of Savoy; a Portuguese *infanta*, Duchess Catarina of Braganza; and finally António, Prior of Crato, the bastard son of Infante Luís, the former Duke of Beja (an uncle of the late Sebastian) and grandson of King Manuel I (r. 1495–1521).

Through the sheer force of his military might, reinforced by an army of mercenary soldiers recruited from across Europe, led by the ruthless Spanish Habsburg military commander Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, the 3rd Duke of Alba, Philip II, King of Spain, forcefully seized Portugal's vacant throne in December 1580. This marked the union of the two Iberian crowns and their overseas empires, a rule imposed upon Portugal for sixty years. Philip II justified his conquest as legal, basing his arguments on genealogy, descent, and false claims of lineage as a "rightful" Portuguese prince. The Spanish Habsburg takeover significantly altered Portugal's former identity, culture, arts, music and architecture. Lisbon diminished in importance on the European and world stages. The monarchy of these joint kingdoms resided in Madrid, transforming Lisbon, once a global capital, into a provincial city without the physical presence of a real king. Despite Philip II appointing his Habsburg nephew, Archduke Albrecht of Austria, Viceroy of Portugal, who ruled in Portugal for ten years (1583–1593), royal, aristocratic and religious patronage dwindled. Court patronage disappeared due to a lack of money and incentives. The glory and power of previous Avis rulers faded altogether during the reigns of the succeeding Habsburg monarchs, Philip III and Philip IV.

Urte Krass's richly illustrated book is a significant contribution to the understanding of the December 1640 revolt. This pivotal event led to a coup d'état and the end of Portugal's sixty-year onerous union with Spain. Krass's ambitious study, one of the first in English, comprehensively explores this period of transition and turbulence. She meticulously follows the visual and documentary trails, providing an insightful exploration of how Portugal was able, after gaining its independence, to recreate itself – socially, culturally and politically – beginning with the ascension of the Braganza king, John IV, in December 1640. Krass centres on political iconography to better understand Portugal after the 1640 Restoration while incorporating more recent approaches in transcultural art history and visual (cultural) studies. The author asks how visual media deployed in this transitional period rendered the change of power and dynasties visible and viable. This book reconsiders church façades, façade sculptures, and new religious buildings whose architectural language was to visualise Braganza rule. In tandem, she approaches the question of imaging these new royals in painted or printed portraits for local and global distribution. The material culture in Portuguese Asia after 1600 is considered, including religious ivories carved in Goa and Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka), a portable Japanese Namban lacquer oratory with religious subject matter, and an Indian textile. These luxury objects were manufactured for daily use and veneration for the Portuguese market, European consumers, and religious converts in the Far East, Asia, and Brazil.

Krass's exploration of the role of visual media in shaping Portugal during the Restoration period is a study of the power of imagery. It demonstrates how visual media, from architecture to portraits to exotic luxury objects from Portuguese Asia, was vital in redefining Portugal's identity.

John IV initiated an ambitious programme to cement the Braganzas in seventeenth-century Portugal and abroad in its overseas territories, making use of magnificent pageants with ephemeral architecture (such as triumphal arches), masquerades, theatrical performances, *tableaux vivants*, and fireworks to promote his house. Krass views these multimedia events as grand spectacles and strategic propaganda. Productions were staged even in Portugal's faraway power seats in Cochin and Macau to restore the global reach and impact of the Braganzas. Krass's exploration of these events, mounted with scale and ingenuity, was comparable to similar fêtes in Baroque Europe.

Krass has organised the chapters chronologically. The first part of the book focuses on John IV, his rise to power, and the stabilisation of his rule. Chapter 1 outlines how Portugal transitioned from a conspiracy in 1640 to legitimising a new reign and a royal family, endorsing its regained national identity with the help of religious miracles and the cult of relics. The Braganzas assumed power under the protection of the Virgin Mary, as Krass relates from several contemporary accounts, including the published treatise *Restauração de Portugal prodigiosa* (1643). Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 review the proclamation and elevation of the new Braganza king in the abandoned Lisbon royal palace, which coincided with the miracle of a crucifix coming to life. John IV's legitimacy was sanctioned by none other than Christ. Miraculous images of the living Christ witnessed in Lisbon and afterwards Goa highlight this monarch's election in 1640. Printed religious broadsheets and engravings eulogised John IV, bridging the revived Lisbon court with Portuguese Asia. The Braganza's special veneration of Christ, the Eucharist and relics of the True Cross, housed for decades in their ancestral palace in Vila Viçosa (Alentejo), dovetailed best with John IV's divine right to rule. Chapter 4 surveys his acclamation in Portugal and its overseas territories celebrated with pageants, parades, temporary structures, and performances. Affordable prints and texts printed en masse proclaimed a Portuguese again on the throne.

The Lisbon royal palace, the now-lost Paço da Ribeira, and its interiors, including the royal chapel, are discussed in Chapter 5. It must be stressed that the Portuguese royal collections, wardrobes (*guardaroupas*) and treasuries of the former Avis kings and Queen Catherine of Austria (r. 1525–1578), especially her *Kunstkammer*, were appropriated by Philip II of Spain when he conquered Portugal in 1580. He plundered the palace, libraries and belongings of his cousin, Infanta Maria of Portugal, the youngest (unwed) daughter of Manuel I. Returning to Madrid in 1583, Philip travelled with cartloads filled with court portraits, Flemish tapestries, paintings, exquisite silver and gold plate, exotic objects, Ming porcelain, lac-

quer furniture and textiles from Africa, Brazil, India, China and Japan belonging to his Portuguese relatives. His theft left the once richly appointed Lisbon palace interiors and residences outside Lisbon (Santos, Almeirim and Sintra) depleted of any treasures. John IV, financially strapped, was forced to recycle the rich Braganza collections of exotica, Flemish tapestries, paintings and relics housed in Vila Viçosa and their now-lost Lisbon palace to decorate his new palatial spaces and chapel.

Royal patronage costs money, and as Krass underscores, the urban redevelopment of Lisbon with monumental sculpture or civic and religious buildings to celebrate this reign bordered on restraint. There was a shortage of architects and engineers. The new regime terminated older, extant projects begun and sponsored by the Habsburgs, such as the São Vicente de Fora Church, now designated by John IV, the home of the Braganza pantheon. John IV ushered in what the architectural historian George Kubler termed in his classic study, *Portuguese Plain Architecture. Between Spices and Diamonds, 1521–1706* (1972), the *estilo chão*, the "severe style" for church and municipal architecture across Portugal.

By 1640, few capable portraitists resided in Lisbon; therefore, the commissioning of portraits of the new royal family for distribution in Portugal and as diplomatic gifts to other courts remained a challenge, as seen in Chapter 6. The faces of the Braganza rulers were few and far between, in comparison to those of the previous Habsburg rulers – Philip II, Philip III and Philip IV – well marketed by their leading court painters, Alonso Sánchez Coello, Juan Pantoja de la Cruz and Diego Velázquez. John IV appointed José de Avelar Rebelo to image him as Portugal's restored monarch; however, this painter emulated portrait formulae promoted by the Habsburg court (fig. 57). John marketed himself and the Braganzas best by using printed images and pamphlets that were less expensive and time-consuming to produce. These were distributed through ambassadors sent to European courts. Portuguese ambassadors were crucial in establishing the Braganza's right to rule, and they were ordered to dispel their image abroad as rebels.

Printed genealogies were mass-produced to prove legitimacy and give weight to the Restoration cause (fig. 62). The latter meant to smash the legal claims of Habsburg, Farnese, Savoy, and even Valois claimants. Krass rightly points out that John IV's grandmother, Infanta Catarina of Braganza (1540–1614), was a direct descendant of Manuel I, superseding (through male lines) Philip II's "entitlement" to annex the Portuguese crown sixty years prior (pp. 259–261, fig. 79). Equally complex iconographies anchored the funerary ephemera (the catafalque or *castrum doloris*) of John IV's funeral in the Braganza church of São Vicente de Fora in Lisbon in 1656 (Chapter 8). A royal funeral had not been celebrated in Lisbon since the death of the Avis king, John III, in 1557. John IV's royal funeral was the first of the Braganza house.

Krass untangles in Chapter 7 the enigmatic iconography of a blue silk wall hanging or quilt (*colcha* in Portuguese) embroidered by

Indians in Bengal for a Portuguese client, today in Boston (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum). The complex themes provide insights into shifting political and cultural alliances in Portugal and Asia on the eve of the 1640 revolt. The central field depicts the façade of one of twenty triumphal arches erected in Lisbon in 1619 to celebrate the visit of Philip III of Spain. Preserved in a series of prints by João Baptista Lavanha, *Viagem da Catholica Real Magestade del Rey D. Filippe II* (1622), these served as visual models exported to Bengal, underscoring the cross-cultural transfers in this commission. The stitched portraits of Portuguese kings in this textile, borrowed from a series of Avis and Habsburg rulers, may reflect the painted cycle of Portuguese kings (twenty portraits), which formerly hung in the main reception hall, the *sala grande*, of the Lisbon royal palace, but were stolen by Philip II in 1583 for display in the Royal Alcázar of Madrid. This portrait series, lost in the destructive palace fire of 1734, began with the iconic image of the first Portuguese king, Afonso I, also known as Afonso Henriques the Conqueror (1109–1185).

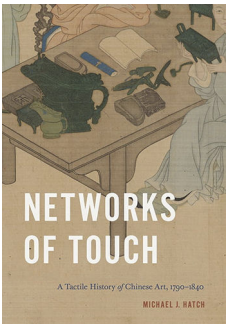
Afonso I, the legendary monarch, is the primary subject of two treatises on the history of Portugal compiled by the Capuchin monk António de São Thiago in Goa. Chapter 9 considers the thirty-four ink drawings in these manuscripts, in which Hindu pictorial traditions intersect with European models, incorporating Portuguese heraldry and coats of arms. Old Testament prophecies in these two works confirm the messianic mission of the Portuguese crown and the Braganzas to continue spreading Christianity in Asia and the Far East – a mission already begun by the former Avis dynasty, starting with Manuel I. Conversion in India and Ceylon takes up the concluding chapter, with attention drawn to numerous ivory sculptures of Baby Jesus and the Christ Child as a shepherd. Statuettes varying in size from small to large were not only carved for European export markets but commissioned by and for newly converted elite social classes for private adoration, particularly in the different kingdoms in Ceylon dominated by Buddhism and Hinduism. Missionaries deployed these religious commissions, especially for children who could associate the infant Buddha with the figure of Baby Jesus, thus synchronising divergent religions and shared worship practices in these artworks. Evangelism, conversion and adherence to Christianity were the primary purposes of these ivories.

Krass's book is not just a retelling of dramatic historical events leading to the Portuguese Restoration but a detailed analysis of the visual strategies and political tactics used by the Portuguese to reclaim their independence and establish a new order in Iberia in 1640, after sixty years of Habsburg rule. Questions of legitimacy troubled the fledgling Braganza dynasty as John IV sought to dispel the negative image of rebellion and revolution, seeking to redefine his rule through targeted imagery and court portraits. Krass's book examines how this new Lusitanian power sought to realign itself in Portugal, Europe and its overseas territories, especially in Brazil and the *Estado da Índia* in Asia. The author demonstrates how legiti-

macy in global regions under Portuguese rule was achieved through communication, instant information distribution and propaganda propagated through broadsheets, prints and engravings. This work provides a rich narrative for scholars and students interested in a little-known chapter of Portugal's history in the seventeenth century.

MICHAEL J. HATCH, *NETWORKS OF TOUCH. A TACTILE HISTORY OF CHINESE ART, 1790–1840*

Perspectives on Sensory History, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press 2024, 222 pages with 20 color and 43 b/w ill., ISBN 978-0-271-09557-8 (Hardback).



Reviewed by
Weitian Yan

The word "touch" sparks many imaginations. It draws attention to the tactile sense through which our body interacts with the material world. The act of touch involves the reception and processing of a complex set of material and empirical knowledge, such as weight, surface texture, temperature, and moisture. By extension, a "heart-touching" story stresses the affects that things exert on people, and the idiom "in touch" implies a desire to maintain close connections and an acute awareness of the ever-changing world. In *Networks of Touch*, Michael J. Hatch draws on the highly provocative and multifaceted nature of "touch" as a sensory concept to develop a new account of the arts of nineteenth-century China, a period marked by sweeping interests in philological and antiquarian studies. The timeframe of the book (1790–1840) is often described as a period of decline, during which regional uprisings and global conflicts began to surface and eventually led to the collapse of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Artistic productions of this period are also often labeled as stagnant and incidental, in contrast to the kaleidoscopic court culture of the "High Qing" era (ca. 1683–1799) and the transcultural modernist movements of the late nineteenth

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, pp. 1059–1064

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108353

century.[1] Hatch's book re-evaluates this period and its significance, generating fresh insights into how antiquities from the deep past – bricks with mold-cast inscriptions, fragmented steles, early pictorial engravings, and re-discovered bronze vessels – actively invited material investigations, connected friends, fostered an epigraphic aesthetic, and contributed to a turn toward tactile thinking. This interdisciplinary framework brings sensory history to the analysis of visual and material culture in China.

The book revolves around the network of Ruan Yuan (1764–1849). A prominent government official, Ruan held several important positions in the Manchu empire and developed a transregional network of scholars, artists, and craftspeople. As a scholar specializing in *kaozheng* (evidential scholarship), he authored influential exegeses of Confucian classics and led the compilations of several provincial gazetteers, contributing to the methodological shift toward philology. As a resourceful antiquarian collector of bronze vessels and stone inscriptions, Ruan headed two major surveys of epigraphic inscriptions in Shandong and Zhejiang Provinces. Each chapter of Hatch's book focuses on either the works of Ruan or those by Ruan's contemporaries. Through these interconnected cases studies, Hatch shows the proliferation of an epigraphic aesthetic in the second half of the Qing dynasty. Central to this new development, as Hatch argues, was a generational turn toward the sense of touch. Scholars and artists of the period developed an enhanced awareness of the body, in contrast to the mind, as the source of knowledge and pleasure in both intellectual discourse and artistic production.

In the Introduction, Hatch lays out the book's structure and offers succinct definitions of some key terms in the book. To name three examples, he explains "epigraphic aesthetic" as "an appropriation of the stylistic, material, and tactile features of ancient inscribed objects [...] as well as of their reproductive technology, rubbings" (p. 4), "tactile thinking" as "a form of direct apprehension that conjoined sensory perceptions with cognitive processes" (p. 5), and "ink rubbing" as "suspended perceptions of touch" (p. 9). With an emphasis on Confucian classics, Hatch also draws up a brief history of touch in China, in contrast with other sensory modalities (e.g., sight and vision).[2]

In Chapter 1 "Calligraphy's New Past", we follow the footsteps of Ruan as he began his career in the capital city Beijing and later took on crucial government posts in Shandong and Zhejiang Provinces. In this biographic sketch, Hatch pays close atten-

1
Another important revisionist project that examines painting production during this period is Yeewan Koon, *A Defiant Brush. Su Renshan and the Politics of Painting in Early 19th-Century Guangdong*, Hong Kong 2014.

2
One source that is missing in Hatch's bibliography but could contribute to this history of touch is John Hay, The Human Body as Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy, in: Susan Bush and Christian Murck (eds.), *Theories of the Arts in China*, Princeton, NJ 1983, 74–102.

tion to Ruan's epigraphic and philological activities, in addition to his many bureaucratic responsibilities. Ruan's conscious efforts to understand and re-organize the past were "a tool for better management of the present" (p. 31). Ruan and his contemporaries also celebrated friendship through newly produced inscriptions on portable and handheld stone materials (e.g., seals and inkstones). One intriguing example was the inkstone that bears a portrait of the scholar Guo Lin (1767–1831) on its back and additional inscriptions by Ruan and his friends on the sides (p. 35, Fig. 8). The inscriptions fashion Guo as an unyielding scholar in times of hardship, evoking a long-established literary tradition. Yet when one presses an inkstick against the engraved portrait of Guo to produce liquid ink, the man's body literally endures the grind. The act of grinding ingeniously activated the familiar scholarly character. Comparable studies of material objects, texts, and their allusion to the act of touching are also central in two recent books by Thomas Kelly (2023) and Sophie Volpp (2022).[3] In a university seminar, the three publications could be assigned together to examine the affectivity and sensory illusion of different textual media.

In the second half of the first chapter, Hatch offers a close reading of two influential essays by Ruan, "Southern and Northern School of Calligraphy", and "Northern Steles and Southern Letters". According to Ruan, the history of Chinese calligraphy is best illuminated through the southern and northern schools. These two stylistic lineages, divided for the first time by Ruan, stress a contrasting set of aesthetic pursuits. The style of the south, "free and loose", is most associated with the sage of Chinese calligraphy Wang Xizhi (303–361) and his followers, while the style of the north, "awkward and rough", is most found on early steles and other stone monuments. Ruan favored the "northern school" for its ancient origin and perceived authenticity. These essays marked a watershed moment in the history of Chinese calligraphy. While previous scholars had begun using early stele inscriptions as ideal calligraphic models, it was Ruan who first put such a belief in writing and set in motion a new canon of calligraphic styles.

Chapter 2, "Obliterated Texts", examines a series of haptic encounters in Huang Yi's (1744–1802) *Engraved Texts of the Lesser Penglai Pavilion*, a printed collection of "double outline" tracing copies of some fragmented early stone engravings. A close friend of Ruan, Huang gained fame largely through his personal pilgrimages to ancient monuments and sites in Henan and Shandong Provinces. The "double outline" method refers to an ancient technique that traces the contours of Chinese characters. Hatch proposes that the ten-volume publication is not simply "descriptions of calligraphic texts" but "images that explored the surfaces of material objects" (p. 61). Printed images in the book encourage an experience of early

[3] Thomas Kelly, *The Inscription of Things. Writing and Materiality in Early Modern China*, New York 2023; Sophie Volpp, *The Substance of Fiction. Literary Objects in China, 1550–1775*, New York 2022, especially the section titled "Touching Recession. The Painted Wall", 155–160.

inscriptions via bodily terms – cleaning the mossy and eroded surface of the original stone monuments, tightly pressing paper onto stone to make ink rubbings, and tracing the rubbings to make additional copies. Hatch also argues that the enthusiasm for "double outline" copies brought heightened attention to the shape of brushstrokes, which is one defining feature of the epigraphic aesthetic in calligraphy, shared by several contemporaries of Huang and Ruan. Adding to the author's observation, I wonder how the application of "double outline" technique on different material surfaces may complicate our understanding of Huang's project. After all, the "double outline" method had long been used in transferring inked calligraphic works onto stone, and sometimes also in seal carving.[4] Both reverse the medium transfer of Huang's project, and both engaged human hands.

While the previous two chapters primarily deal with the changes in the field of calligraphy, Chapters 3 and 4 explore the development of the epigraphic aesthetic in painting. Chapter 3 "Epigraphic Painting" takes the reader through the narrative, style, and reception of the handscroll *Presenting the Tripod at Mt. Jiao* by Wang Xuehao (1754–1832). Celebrating Ruan's donation of an ancient tripod to the Dinghui Temple at Mt. Jiao in modern-day Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, this painting depicts the tripod with a group of figures on a ferry, in an expansive riverscape. Hatch demonstrates the novelty of this seemingly conservative work by contextualizing it with other paintings by noted Qing artists, including Jin Nong (1687–1764), Luo Ping (1733–1799), and Qian Du (1763–1844). The latter group introduced epigraphic aesthetic to painting by applying "double outline" technique and broken and awkward brushwork. In contrast, Wang's painting and its appendix of ink rubbings draw forth a desire to hold and touch the original tripod. Such imagined tactile responses to paintings of this kind, argues Hatch, was a feature of the epigraphic mode of image making. Hatch's engaging analysis aside, the striking topographical feature of Wang's painting begs some questions (p. 81). Given the prominence of Mt. Jiao in the painting tradition of China, did Wang build his picture on any earlier representations of the place? Relatedly, why did Wang make his image look like a representation of the West Lake (p. 87)?

In Chapter 4, "Tactile Image", Hatch develops attentive and critical reading of a group of radically experimental works by the Buddhist monk Liuzhou (1791–1858). Known as "the epigrapher-monk", Liuzhou gained recognition from Ruan through his skills in making "full-form rubbing", a new technique to capture the complete impression of an ancient object through the creative assemblage of rubbings tapped from different sides of the object. The completed work "blurs the boundaries between rubbings and painted images" (p. 97), generating "the sensations of an object that is no longer present" (p. 103). In some of Liuzhou's extant works, mini-

[4] Robert E. Harrist Jr., Copies, All the Way Down. Notes on the Early Transmission of Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi, in: *East Asian Library Journal* 10, 2001, 176–196.

ature figures were added to caress, nod to, or kneel on rubbings of ancient objects. In another example, *Wishing a Century of Long Life*, Liuzhou collaged rubbings of different material objects to make the character *shou* ("longevity"). All these works offer unprecedented visuality and construct a fictive space for tactile and bodily encounters. One issue, which has been briefly addressed by Hatch, is the relationship between Liuzhou's Buddhist background and his artistic production (pp. 112–113). I wonder if the Buddhist conception of sensory illusion has any implications in Liuzhou's works. What did the ability to evoke tactile responses mean for a Buddhist devotee in the nineteenth century?

The next chapter, "A Tactful Literatus", focuses on the versatile artist Chen Hongshou (1768–1822). The craft of Chen, in Hatch's view, speaks about the increased importance of tactile experience in the apprehension of epigraphic materials. Once an aide to Ruan, Chen achieved distinction in a broad array of artistic genres, including calligraphy and seal carvings that simulate carved and molded inscriptions, "boneless" finger paintings, and "purple clay" teapots that engender bodily imaginations rooted in classical poems and inscriptions. Hatch describes Chen's artistic corpus collectively as "brushless arts", stressing that these works moved beyond earlier brush ideals and presented a series of bodily marks to his audiences.

The last chapter, "The Limits of Touch", explores two counter cases in which little sense of human touch was involved but other forms of sensory imagination (sight, sound, smell, and taste) became prioritized to bring forth somatic responses. The first case is Ruan's book *Paintings in Stone*, a compilation of comments and inscriptions made by Ruan and his friends on picturesque marble stones of Dali, Yunnan Province. The project started when Ruan took on his last provincial post as the governor of Yunnan and Guizhou. For Ruan, his excitement came from the natural patterns on marble stones that resemble canonical paintings in history. Such an attempt to chart a history of painting in stone signifies a return toward "direct and unmediated contact with the world" (p. 156). If one wishes to expand on this chapter, a transhistorical and transregional analysis of Ruan's book project might yield more exciting discoveries. The enjoyment and appreciation of stone materials has a long history in China. In the eighteenth century, the harnessing and manipulation of different stones and gems were also a hallmark of the Manchu court culture. How does Ruan's project compare with early literati connoisseurship of rare stone materials? Was it related in any way to the sourcing of local stone products by the Qing imperial workshops? The second case is concerned with how Qian Du, a classicist painter in the network of Ruan, made use of engraved pictures and poems to interweave a web of multi-sensorial experience. Hatch invites the reader to ponder how literati arts could stimulate different sensory experiences and what a sensory history of Chinese art might look like. The book ends with an epilogue, in which Hatch calls for a reassessment of these artists as harbingers of the modern

visual culture that came into full blossom in the early twentieth century.

The most significant intervention of the book is Hatch's attention to the role of non-visual senses in the production and reception of material objects. This framework is in line with recent efforts in the broad fields of sensory history and visual culture to redress the primacy of sight and examine the sensate body as a whole.[5] For the study of late imperial China, Hatch's project contributes to the ongoing explorations on the sensual perception of art objects, and the embodied modes of knowledge production.[6] One question that lingers throughout the book is how the reader should connect those non-visual senses to the Chinese terms used by Ruan and his contemporaries. Hatch has pointed out a variety of critical vocabularies of touch, including *ji* 跡 (traces), *mo* 摸/摹 (touch, caress, or copy), and *ta* 拓/搨 (rub).[7] It could be useful to contextualize the different ideas of "touch" in the writings of Ruan and his acquaintances. How did Ruan and his friends view the "body (*shen* 身)" as a perceptual organ? How did they talk about the issue of hands in the production of painting and calligraphy? A few specific examples would better situate the significance of "touch" in nineteenth-century art criticism.

Lucidly written and ambitiously conceived, *Networks of Touch* is the first English monograph that provides a systematic and critical treatment of many major yet understudied artists in nineteenth-century China. Hatch successfully brings life to the lived experience of individual figures and the embodied experience of their artworks. Comments and questions I raise in this review stem from my enthusiasm for this project. The book's inquiry into tactile thinking offers a new way to look at the Qing antiquarian culture and will generate more discussions to come.

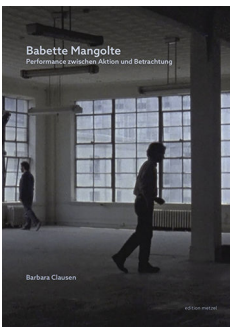
5
For examples, see W. J. T. Mitchell, There Are No Visual Media, in: *Journal of Visual Culture* 4/2, 2005, 257–266 (December 12, 2024); Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past. Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 2007.

6
For a review essay on these recent attempts, see Jennifer Purtle, Ways of Perceiving Late Imperial Chinese Art, in: *Art History* 36/5, 2013, 1070–1076 (December 12, 2024). For discussion on embodied knowledge of Qing China, see Dorothy Ko, *The Social Life of Inkstones. Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China*, Seattle 2017.

7
The term *ta* is discussed in the main text but missing from the Glossary of Foreign Terms (pp. 170–171).

BARBARA CLAUSEN, *BABETTE MANGOLTE. PERFORMANCE ZWISCHEN AKTION UND BETRACHTUNG*

München: Edition Metzel 2023, 348 Seiten mit 85 Abb.,
ISBN 978-3-88960-235-0.



Rezensiert von
Marie-Luise Lange

Ausgehend von der These, dass Performanceereignisse nicht mit dem „Vorhangfall“ enden, widmet sich Barbara Clausen dem rezeptionsgeschichtlich wichtigen Thema der „Historisierung und Institutionalisierung der Performancekunst durch ihre Dokumentarismen“ (S. 12). Am Beispiel der 1941 im Elsass geborenen französisch-amerikanischen Filmemacherin, Fotografin und Künstlerin Babette Mangolte setzt sich die Autorin mit Formen des dokumentarischen Blicks sowie der medialisierten Reproduktion und Institutionalisierung von Performancekunst auseinander (vgl. S. 12). Clausens Untersuchungen fokussieren sich auf die 1970er-Jahre in New York, in denen die Künstlerin zu einer geschätzten Chronistin der Performanceszene avancierte. Von der konzeptuellen und minimalistischen Ästhetik der Zeit geprägt, versuchte Mangolte die fotografierten und gefilmten Performances zunächst objektiv zu dokumentieren. Theoretisch folgt Clausen dem kulturwissenschaftlich determinierten „performative turn“, durch den sich Performance und Performativität zum Bindeglied zwischen Theater, Bildender Kunst, Tanz und den ihnen verbundenen Wissenschaftsgebieten entwickelte. Im "performative turn" wird Performancekunst als fortlaufender Prozess zwischen ursprünglichem Ereignis,

21: INQUIRIES INTO ART, HISTORY, AND THE VISUAL
4-2024, S. 1065–1072

https://doi.org/10.11588/xxi.2024.4.108600

Medialisierung und Rezeption gelesen. Ihre überlieferten Darstellungen sind bedeutungskonstituierend wirkende Bildkonstruktionen. Während sich Clausen durch intensive Archivforschung, der Lektüre von Publikumsberichten und Performancetheorien sowie in Gesprächen mit Künstler*innen und Zeitzeug*innen der Rezeptionsgeschichte der Performance nähert, kristallisiert sich die Frage heraus, ob „andere Dokumentarismen eine andere Geschichte der Performancekunst geschrieben" (S. 15) hätten. Deren Beantwortung erfordern Clausen zufolge neue kunstwissenschaftlich-methodologische Analyseansätze, die sowohl die Ereignishaftigkeit des performativen Aktes als auch den kontingenten historischen Umgang mit den Spuren der Performance berücksichtigen.

Die auf Clausens Dissertation beruhende Publikation besteht aus drei kompakten Kapiteln und zwei Interviews mit Babette Mangolte. Die Einführung verweist auf die Problematik der Dokumentation von Performancekunst und ihrer von der verwendeten Technik, den kulturpolitischen Implikationen der Zeit und vom Blick der Chronist*innen abhängigen Medialisierung.

Der Abschnitt *Dokumente zwischen Aktion und Betrachtung* führt in das mehrfach gebrochene Verhältnis von vermeintlicher Authentizität performativer Aktionen sowie in die Unterschiede zwischen präsentischer und späterer Rezeption anhand von Dokumentationen ein. Durch das scheinbare Verschmelzen von Ereignis und technischer Reproduktion „wird das Netzwerk der Blicke [...] sowohl sicht- als auch unsichtbar" (S. 29). Die fotografischen oder filmischen Dokumentaraufnahmen können immer nur ein fragmentarisches Bild der Ereignisse überliefern. Clausen macht deutlich, dass das Besondere an Babette Mangoltes Dokumentationen weniger im Verweis auf ihre individuelle Zeugenschaft als vielmehr im sensiblen Einfühlen "in die projizierte Sichtweise der Performer*innen auf ihr Werk" (S. 31) besteht. Aufgrund dieser künstlerisch-einfühlenden Blickstrategie wurde Mangolte von Künstler*innen wie Brown, Rainer, Jonas, Akerman, Whitman und anderen gern zur Dokumentation ihrer Werke herangezogen. Indem Clausen aufzeigt, dass Performancekunstgeschichte „vom Happening bis zum Spektakel, vom postmodernen Tanz zur Body Art oder vom Aktionismus bis hin zur sozialen Intervention [...] auf einem Handlungsnetzwerk verschiedenster Produzent*innen und Rezipient*innen" (S. 32) basiert, entkräftet sie Klischees, die Performance als reinen Ausdruck „authentischer Gefühle und essenzialistischer Intentionen" (S. 39) ansehen, welche sich jeglicher Analyse entziehen. Mit Verweis auf den Protest gegen die überall aufkeimende neoliberale Wirtschaftspolitik, den Drang des Kunstbetriebes den digitalen Massenmedien etwas "live" entgegenzusetzen sowie die damit im Zusammenhang stehenden theoretischen Diskurse von Autor*innen wie Amalia Jones, Judith Butler, Hans-Thies Lehmann, Erika Fischer-Lichte und anderen im Bezug auf die Deutung des Performativitäts- und Medialitätsbegriffs erklärt Clausen das Revival der Performancekunst um die Jahrtausendwende, welches sich

vor allem im Festival- und Ausstellungswesen sowie im Kunstmarkt widerspiegelt.

Während die Performances der 1960er-Jahre ihr kritisches Potenzial in Bezug auf soziale und ethnische Konflikte entwickeln, dekonstruiert die vor allem an feministischen Filmtheorien geschulte Blickpolitik in den 1970er-Jahren die tradierten Blickregime in Hochkultur, populären Medien und im Alltag. Dabei bilden Konzeptkunst, Performance und Minimalismus eine theorielastige ästhetische Allianz, welche Repräsentation, Konstruktion und Definition von Subjektivität kritisch hinterfragt. In diesem Sinne experimentiert beispielsweise der Tanz mit reduzierten und ungelernt wirkenden Bewegungsabläufen. In den 1980er-Jahren kommt Performancekunst im Kunstmarkt- und Unterhaltungsbereich an. Gleichzeitig kämpfen politisch orientierte Gruppen wie zum Beispiel die Guerilla Girls (1985) in Performanceaktionen für bessere Sozialsysteme und die Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter und Ethnien. Im Rahmen institutionskritischer Theorien und der Bewegung der „Relational Aesthetics" wird Performancekunst in den 1990er- Jahren zum Austragungsort geschlechts- und identitätspolitischer Auseinandersetzungen.

Der Abschnitt *Theorien zur Performancekunst und ihrer Medialisierung* beschreibt die Genese des Verhältnisses von Performativität und Medialität und legt damit die analytische Grundlage zur Untersuchung von Babette Mangoltes vielschichtigem Werk. Zurückgreifend auf Positionen von Butler, Jones, Mersch, Phelan und anderen beleuchtet Clausen die seit 2000 polarisierend geführte Debatte, ob Performancekunst eher als Live-Format oder als ein von seiner Medialisierung her bestimmtes Genre zu lesen sei (vgl. S. 71). Im Anschluss definiert sie Performance als ein „hybrides und diskursives Medium" (S. 76), dessen Geschichte sich im Wechselspiel kontroverser Debatten, Medien sowie verschiedener Autor*innenschaften als kontingente Konstruktion selbst schreibt. Anhand der Performancedokumentationen und ihrer eigenen künstlerischen Werke zeigt Clausen, wie sich Babette Mangoltes durch Flüchtigkeit geprägte Bildästhetik entwickelt hat. „Was Mangolte von anderen Chronist*innen ihrer Zeit [...] unterscheidet, ist ihre Fähigkeit, die Subversivität und Neuartigkeit der Aktionen in den drei von ihr behandelten Bereichen der Performance – Tanz, Theater oder Kunst – sowohl in deren Unterschiedlichkeiten als auch Gemeinsamkeiten zu erkennen und wiederzugeben" (S. 104).

An Richard Foremans postmoderner Tanzproduktion *Total recall* (1975) erläutert Clausen die Dokumentationsmethode Mangoltes, welche jenseits narrativer Strukturen auf das Einfangen des multiplen Bühnengeschehens abzielt. Ihre vom strukturalistischen Film und von der Schwarz-Weiß-Ästhetik der 1970er-Jahre beeinflussten Fotografien arbeiten mit zwischen Intuition und Technik changierenden Aufnahmemethoden. Sie fangen die inhaltliche wie formale Intentionalität der Performer*innen ein, ohne das interaktive Zusammenspiel mit Requisiten, Publikum, Aufführungsort und der Flüchtigkeit oder Dehnbarkeit von Zeit zu vernachlässigen.

In der berühmten Tanzperformance *Roof Piece* von Trisha Brown (1973) geben vierzehn auf den Dächern Manhattans platzierte Tänzer*innen einstudierte Bewegungen über größere räumliche Distanzen weiter. Mangoltes Fotografien fangen die Unmittelbarkeit der Performance ein und machen so den urbanen Stadtraum zum Schauplatz einer „kritisch konzeptionellen Kulturproduktion" (S. 114). Andere Dokumentationen zu Browns Arbeiten wie *Group Accumulation-Serie* (1973) und *Antikriegs-Demonstration Downtown New York* (1972) spiegeln die geistesgegenwärtigen Positions- und Blickwechsel der Fotografin im Verhältnis zu den Bewegungsdynamiken der Agierenden und ihres Umfeldes wider. „Sie konzentrierte sich nicht auf einen Bildmittelpunkt, z. B. die Performer*in, sondern spannte ein Netz vieler Verhältnisse auf, inmitten dessen die Performance als Teil eines Ganzen ihren Platz fand" (S. 125).

Im Abschnitt *Raum – Körper – Medien: Akerman, Brown, Jonas, Mangolte, Rainer* wird Mangoltes Kameraarbeit für die genannten Filmemacherinnen sowie für ihre eigenen Filme *The Camera: Je/La Camera: I* und *What Maisie Knew* untersucht. Dabei spielen Aspekte wie die Kollaboration mit ihren Auftraggeber*innen oder die mediale Vermittlung aus der gleichzeitigen Perspektive von Performer*innen und Zuschauer*innen eine große Rolle. Ziel vieler Filmemacherinnen der 1970er-Jahre war die Entwicklung einer neuen feministischen Bildsprache, die das Publikum für die tradierten Zuschreibungen von Weiblichkeit vor und hinter der Kamera sowie für die spezifischen Produktionsbedingungen weiblicher Künstler sensibilisieren sollte.

„Lange Kameraeinstellungen, die hypnotisch gleichmäßigen Bewegungen von über die Fassaden und Flächen ziehenden Kamerafahrten und die Inszenierung der Kamera als Darstellerin – diese Techniken wurden zu Mangoltes stilistischen Markenzeichen, die sie in ihrer Zusammenarbeit mit Chantal Akerman entwickelte" (S. 144), für die sie Filme wie *La Chambre* (1972) drehte. In ihrem eigenen Film *The Camera: Je/La Camera* überlagern sich fotografische Ebenen mit filmischen, wodurch Transformationen vergangener Raum- und Zeitereignisse als reflexive Metaplateaus entstehen.

Nach Clausen stellte die Kollaboration Mangoltes mit Joan Jonas, deren Serie *Organic Honey* sie dokumentierte, einen Meilenstein für ihre weitere Tätigkeit als Filmemacherin dar. In der künstlerischen Praxis von Jonas gehen performative Bewegungsabläufe, Raum, Zeit, Geräusche, Objekte, Spiegelungen, Kostümierungen sowie Maskeraden der Protagonistin und simultan übertragene Videoaufnahmen eine intermediale Verbindung ein. Deren Überschneidungen machen das Publikum zu Zeug*innen „der De- und Rekonstruktion des visuellen Regimes hinter und vor der Kamera" (S. 169). Mangoltes technische und physische Anwesenheit innerhalb der Live-Performance erzeugte zusammen mit Jonas' Verkleidungsmaskeraden eine gewollt dezentrierte Aufführung, wodurch sowohl der performative Unmittelbarkeitsanspruch als auch die Authentizität des weiblichen Repräsentationsmechanismus infrage gestellt wurden.

Mangoltes Arbeit zu Chantal Akermans Film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), in welchem der Tagesablauf einer Hausfrau und Gelegenheitsprostituierten geschildert wird, entwickelte sich zu einem entscheidenden Ereignis innerhalb der Filmgeschichte. Die konstante, schnittlose, auf Hüfthöhe der Schauspielerin fixierte Kameraführung und die in Realzeit aufgenommenen Situationen ihres Alltags beschreiben fast ethnografisch die in ihrer Isolation gefangene Frau. Die fotografischen und filmischen Aufnahmen Mangoltes zu Yvonne Rainers *Lives of Performers* (1972) zeichnen sich durch Konzentration auf das ephemere Gestenspektrum sowie das realzeitliche Einfangen der minimalistischen Handlungsabläufe aus. Diese Filminszenierung aus Bildcollagen, Filmdokumentationen aus dem Probenprozess und fotografischem Dokumentarmaterial fängt nicht nur die choreografische Qualität zwischen Bewegung und Stillstand ein, sondern verdeutlicht auch Mangoltes Interesse, die Strukturen des Unterhaltungskinos unterlaufend handlungsbedingte Zeiteinheiten aufzuführen. „Die in diesen Versuchen so immanenten Brüche, die sich stetig im formalen und inhaltlichen Ineinandergreifen von temporalen, narrativen und physischen Aspekten zeigen, markieren das für die Performancekunst der Postmoderne inhärente Wechselverhältnis zwischen Präsentation, Repräsentation und Rezeption“ (S. 191), so Clausen.

Am Beispiel des Filmes *What Maisie Knew*, der die subjektive Wahrnehmung der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehungen von Erwachsenen aus der Perspektive des Mädchens Maisie thematisierend mit einer aus der unteren Bildhälfte nach oben gerichteten Kameraeinstellung arbeitet, charakterisiert Clausen Mangoltes individuelles Aufnahme- und Blickregime. Sie weist nach, dass Mangoltes durch Zeitlupen, Wiederholungen und Standbilder sowie durch überlagernde Tonebenen hervorgerufene nichtlineare Erzählform auf „den Bruch mit der Handlung im Medium Film selbst" (S. 197) setzt.

Im Tanzfilm *Water Motor*, in welchem sich die Faszination Mangoltes für die Bewegungs- und Zeitabläufe der Tänzerin Trisha Brown ausdrückt, wird der normalen Variante des dynamischen Tanzes eine Slow Motion-Version hinzugefügt. Die dadurch entstandene Theatralik, die eigentlich den antispektakulären Intentionen Browns widersprach, deutet Clausen als Bruch mit dem selbst proklamierten Credo der Filmemacherin, eine rein auf die Technik konzentrierte, objektive Chronistin von Performancekunst zu sein. In der Folge löst dann auch die eigene künstlerische Praxis Mangoltes deren Rolle als gefragte Dokumentaristin zunehmend ab.

Der Abschnitt *Performing Memory: Eine kritische Rezeptionsgeschichte* setzt sich mit der „Frage der Wiederholbarkeit, des Reenactments und der Reinszenierung, der Aneignung und Appropriation vergangener Performances“ (S. 215) sowie dem damit verbundenen Versuch, den bestehenden Kanon der Performancegeschichte immer wieder neu zu überschreiben, auseinander. Nach einer etwas irritierend geführten Auseinandersetzung zu kulturel-

len Erinnerungsstrategien hinsichtlich der Performancekunst, die einst nur als Fotografie oder in Filmen dokumentiert wurde, sich jedoch heute durch soziale Medien wie Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, vimeo, youtube und andere als fluider Bilderstrom ins kulturelle Gedächtnis einschreibt, problematisiert Clausen das inspirierende wie auch kritische Potential von performativen Reenactments und Appropriationen. Sie seien „künstlerische Methoden und Techniken, die zwischen einem eklektischen, historisierenden und nostalgisierenden und einem politisch subversiven, kultur- und gesellschaftskritischen Aneignungsprozess mit der Vergangenheit hin- und herpendeln." (S. 220) In ihnen wird fremde Bildlichkeit mit dem Ziel aufgegriffen, sich diese neu inszeniert zu eigen zu machen und einem veränderten sozial- und kulturpolitischen Kontext anzupassen. Der Kritik an der Aneignung von Performances aus fremden kulturellen Kontexten oder anderen Zeitebenen setzt Clausen die konstruktiven Ansätze der *Theories of Relationality* und *Intersectionality* entgegen. Diese fußen auf der Überzeugung, „dass Kultur immer ein dicht gewobenes Netzwerk verschiedenster Machtbeziehungen und Relationen produziert, generiert und präsentiert" (S. 221), durch welches sich schließlich neue intellektuelle, politische und künstlerische Perspektiven eröffnen. Am Beispiel von Mangoltes Filmen *Four Pieces by Morris (1993)* und *Seven Easy Pieces by Marina Abramovic (2007)* diskutiert Clausen, wie mit dem Revival der *Performing Histories* und deren historisch-künstlerischer Einordnung umzugehen sei. Der in den 1990er -Jahren gedrehte Film *Four Pieces by Morris*, der vier der bekanntesten Performances von Morris aus den 1960er-Jahren für seine Retrospektive im Guggenheim Museum rekonstruieren sollte, steht für die unumgänglichen Verschiebungsmomente, die einem Rekonstruktionsverfahren von historischen Performances innewohnen. Der Film ist sowohl als eine Art Dokumentation der von Morris und anderen Zeitzeug*innen unter Zuhilfenahme von medialen Spuren erinnerten Handlungen zu betrachten als auch als ein eigenständiges Kunstwerk der Filmemacherin, welche hierfür die volle Autorinnenschaft übertragen bekam. Mangoltes Film bündelte die Perspektiven verschiedener Protagonist*innen und konstituierte ein neues, der Ästhetik der 1990er-Jahre angemessenes Zeitgefühl.

Mangoltes individuelle Handschrift musste in der Filmdokumentation *Seven Easy Pieces by Marina Abramovic* der exakt geplanten Bildpolitik der Performerin weichen. Am Beispiel der Wiederaufführung von historischen Performances von Künstler*innen wie Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, VALIE EXPORT und Joseph Beuys sowie der eigenen Performance *Lips of Thomas* (vgl. S. 239) durch Abramovic diskutiert Clausen Fragen wie „Wessen Authentizität wird im Kontext der Reenactments von *Seven Easy Pieces* inszeniert? Inwiefern verkompliziert sich die Frage der Authentizität durch die Konvergenz von Autorschaft und Medialität in den verschiedenen Schichten der Dokumentarismen, die in *Seven Easy Pieces* in Erscheinung treten?" (S. 238). Dabei deckt sie die Ambivalenz zwischen dem medial aufbereiteten „Spektakel" der

Wiederaufführungen durch Abramovic als körperliche Aneignung der nur durch Dokumentarismen gekannten Performances und die durch eine gezielte Reproduktionspolitik erreichte Einschreibung sowohl in ihr persönliches Œuvre als auch ins kulturelle Gedächtnis auf. Mangolte wurde zum immanenten Teil der performativen Inszenierung. Als Filmemacherin, die fünfzig Stunden Dokumentaraufnahmen der Performancereihe auf eineinhalb Stunden zu kürzen hatte, trug sie dazu bei, die körperliche Leistung der Künstlerin zu fetischisieren und die „vermeintliche Begeisterung des Publikums" (S. 253) in den Rezeptionsprozess der Performance einzuspeisen. Ihre sonst übliche Dekonstruktion der Ereignisse durch analytische Kameraarbeit wich hier einer passiveren und affirmativeren, von der Künstlerin stark kontrollierten Dokumentationsarbeit. Insofern offenbart Abramovics Reenactment-Reihe die ambivalente Problematik der Dokumentation, Reproduktion, Historisierung, Institutionalisierung und Vermarktung von Performancekunst.

Der Abschnitt *Die Inszenierung des Dokumentarischen* verfolgt Mangoltes Entwicklung von einer Chronistin der avantgardistischen New Yorker Performanceszene der 1970er-Jahre zu einer Künstlerin, die in der künstlerischen Präsentation ihres Archivs über Reproduktions- und Wahrnehmungspraxen hinsichtlich Tanz, Theater und Performance reflektiert. Als Zeitdokumente der 1970er-Jahre geben die historischen Dokumentationen Einblicke in die postmodernen, interdisziplinären Kontexte und deren Einfluss auf mediale und kulturelle Umbrüche.

Ausgehend von der Analyse der frühen Installation *How to Look...* 1978 im MoMA PS1 gelingt es Clausen, Mangoltes sich immer weiter differenzierende Transformations- und Reflexionsfähigkeiten hinsichtlich der Verflechtung ihres dokumentarischen Archivs mit neu zu kombinierenden Foto- und Filmcollagen sowie deren Übertragung in einen multimedial konzipierten Ausstellungsraum darzustellen. Sie beschreibt Mangoltes interaktive Strategie in Installationen wie *Looking and Touching I, II,III* (2007–2013), in denen sie mit der Dualität von Betrachtung der fotografischen Originalabzüge von Performances aus den 1970er-Jahren aus Distanzen von drei Metern und der aktiven Partizipation des Publikums spielt, das die gleichen, auf einem Tisch ausgelegten Fotografien selbst sortieren konnte. Durch die Einbeziehung von Tonaufnahmen und Filmsequenzen aus dem New York der 1970er-Jahre lässt Mangolte in ihren Installationen multimediale Zeit- und Raumkontexte entstehen, welche historische Ereignisse und Zeitatmosphären mit Perspektiven auf die Gegenwart verbinden.

Mit Verweis auf die seit 2013 stattgefundenen retrospektiven Personalausstellungen Mangoltes in Montreal, Wien und anderen Orten zeigt Clausen, wie nun auch deren filmisches und hybride mediale Räume eröffnendes Schaffen ins Zentrum der Aufmerksamkeit rückt. In diesen Präsentationen reflektiert Mangolte ihre Doppelrolle als Dokumentaristin und Künstlerin, welche durch ihre medialen Übersetzungen performativer Ereignisse an der Kon-

struktion des Erinnerungsspektrums von Performancekunst im kulturellen Gedächtnis beteiligt ist. Schließlich trägt ihr Werk dazu bei die Rezeptionsgeschichte der Performancekunst als ein Palimpsest unterschiedlicher medialer Dokumentarismen, das immer wieder Veränderungen unterzogen ist, zu begreifen.

Die 2006 mit Babette Mangolte geführten Interviews am Ende von Clausens Monografie offenbaren die unterschiedlichen Möglichkeiten der dokumentarischen Selbstverantwortung in der Kollaboration mit den Performer*innen und manifestieren Mangoltes Auffassung zu performativen Dokumentations- und Inszenierungsformen, Reenactments sowie Repräsentations- und Ausstellungsstrategien.

Barbara Clausen hat mit ihrer Publikation über Babette Mangolte eine große Lücke in der Aufarbeitung der Dokumentationsmechanismen innerhalb der Performancekunstgeschichte geschlossen. Die besondere Qualität des Textes besteht darin, dass die Autorin die individuelle, transdisziplinäre künstlerische Praxis der Protagonistin in die jeweiligen kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurse um Performativität, Medialität und Dokumentation einbettet und damit das Verständnis für die komplexen Prozesse der Rezeptionsgeschichte der Performancekunst als kulturellen Kreislauf zwischen Ereignis, Medialisierung und kultureller Erinnerung erweitert. Darüber hinaus bietet der anhängige Apparat aus künstlerischer Biografie, ausgewählter Kinematografie, Ausstellungen und Texten von Mangolte eine hervorragende Basis, um tiefer in das Schaffen der Künstlerin einzudringen.

eISSN 2701-1550