



FAAC

CHRONICLE

FALL 2022

From the President's desk

Namaste! With this edition, we delve into the inimitable art and culture of India to help acquaint you with our DIA's spectacular collection of Indian art. Indian art and culture reflect the many religions practiced by India's diverse communities. Four major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—were conceived in what is today India and share some metaphysical and philosophical ideas. India is also home to other religions, including Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity. In addition, physical, spiritual, and mental practices of meditation and yoga emanated from ancient texts.

Religious concepts inspired much of India's early art. The creativity of artisans is found in the form of visual art and architecture in temples, shrines, monuments, rock carvings, and palaces. The influence of religion may also be seen in bronze and stone sculptures, paintings, murals, and epic poems, vibrantly depicted in paintings and on temple walls. Architectural elements often demonstrate a keen sense of symmetry and balance. Some monuments and palaces boast graceful interior spaces embellished with mosaics in floral and geometric motifs, inlaid with ivory or semiprecious stones. Other artistic gems were small, easily transportable objects, like stunning paintings bound into books and albums, and

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centuries-old literature recorded on illustrated palm-leaf manuscripts.

Performing and decorative arts form other important artistic strands that flourish in India's multicultural and multiethnic society. Performing arts draw on themes from mythology and literature, and are passed down through instrumental music, theater, and dance. Skillful artisans inspired by long-standing traditions create elegant hand embroidery, rangoli floor art, street art, folk art, and innovative cuisine.

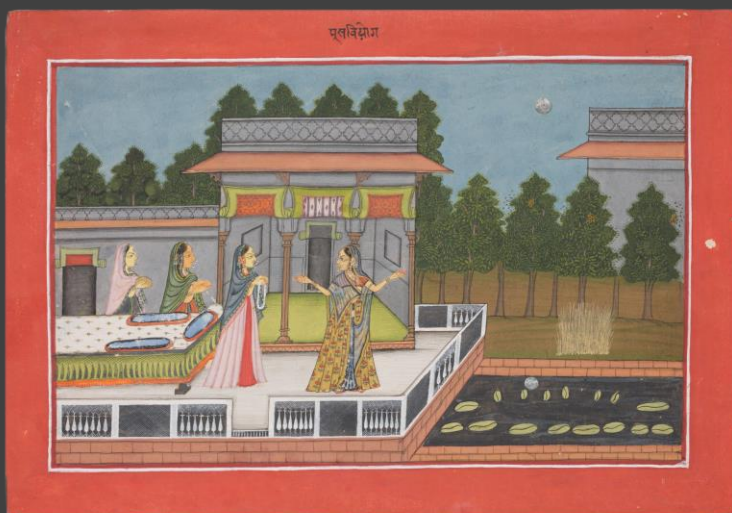
The arts in India developed over thousands of years through diverse styles and regional variations. These developments can be observed from the Indus Valley Civilization to the Ajanta and Ellora rock caves, and in Chola bronze sculptures and Rajput palaces. These examples are just a few of the myriad art forms that have contributed to Indian art. In present-day India, art continues to grow with the times yet still maintains its own artistic integrity. Today, ancient and contemporary arts often mingle, creating an eclectic blend of styles that show the influence of globalization.

The range of Indian art, whether viewed at local or historic sites or in museum collections, is a testimony to human intellectual achievement and creativity. This art tells a story of India's past; its roots give clarity to the present and are an inspiration for the future. Indian art is enduring, significant, and powerful. It is globally relevant and contributes to understanding our modern world.

This newsletter contains exceptional articles sampling the beauty and emotional power of art from India. It discusses an eye-catching peacock-shaped incense burner, the magnificent architecture of Rajasthan, and the exquisite craft of hand embroidery.

Centuries of artistic development are on display in the DIA's gallery of Indian and Southeast Asian art, the Padma and Raj Vattikuti and Family Gallery. It is a treat to immerse ourselves in these awe-inspiring objects and to appreciate and understand the rich culture of India.

Anita Rajpal
President, Friends of Asian Arts and Cultures



ON THE COVER

Indian (Kota or Bikaner, Rajasthan), *The Month of Pusa (December–January)*, from a *Manuscript of the Barahmasa ("Twelve Months")*, late 19th–early 20th century, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 6 3/8 × 9 1/4 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Leo S. Figiel and Dr. and Mrs. Steven J. Figiel, 70.757.

Katherine Kasdorf – Curatorial Update

Earlier this year, the Department of Arts of Asia and the Islamic World at the Detroit Institute of Arts acquired a spectacular peacock-shaped incense burner, made around the late 15th to mid-16th century for a sultanate court in the Deccan region of central to southern India. Both a sculpture and a functional object, it is made of brass and stands nearly a foot tall, a scale that lends the bird a commanding presence. In the courtly context for which it was produced, the incense burner would have engaged multiple senses, enchanting the eye with its sculptural details and delighting the nose with the fragrance of the scented smoke wafting through its openings.

Cast in two parts that bisect the peacock just below its outstretched wings, the body is hollow, made to accommodate incense. A hinge below the tail facilitates the opening of the object, and the deposits that coat the interior—likely soot—attest to its history of use. As a sculpture, the peacock is finely detailed and expressive, and it can be linked to a long tradition of bronze casting in southern India. When it was used as an incense burner, scented smoke would have curled upward from the neatly cast holes of the back and neck, animating the bird and echoing the curling ends of its tail. Smoke also would have issued from an opening in the peacock's mouth, producing a visual effect that must have looked powerful in some contexts, and perhaps amusing in others.

It is easy to imagine this incense burner in a palace room or courtyard, displayed alongside other luxury objects and filling the surrounding space with fragrance. The people who saw it must have beheld it with wonder, delighting in the conceit of an incense burner that was also a peacock, and marveling at the animated effects of the smoke issuing from its body.



Indian (Deccan Sultanate), *Peacock-Shaped Incense Burner*, late 15th–mid-16th century, brass, 11 3/4 × 7 3/4 × 7 1/2 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, Museum Purchase, Ernest and Rosemarie Kanzler Foundation Fund, 2022.1.

The scent of the incense would have pleased them too, but its purpose was likely more than aesthetic. As the historian Emma Flatt has shown, in the courts of the Deccan sultanates smells were believed to have a transformative effect on the body and soul—a pleasing fragrance was beneficial to one’s physical health and inner spirit, while a displeasing odor could have the opposite effect. Similarly, scent was believed to impact supernatural beings, such as angels, jinns, and demons; specific smells could drive away evil spirits or attract good ones.¹

Along with its olfactory and visual properties, the peacock-shaped incense burner would have carried a whole host of associations for the courtly people who engaged with it.² Deccan sultanate paintings and architecture suggest that peacocks had royal associations—they were a bird of prestige and power. In Indian poetry and painting, peacocks are associated with rain and the monsoon season, and with love and longing. They also appear in the *Ragamala*, a tradition of classical Indian music in which specific patterns of notes are associated with codified visual imagery. All these associations likely would have been familiar to the cultured people who engaged with the incense burner in its courtly context, making it a richly meaningful object with the power to evoke sound and emotion, in addition to stimulating the senses of sight and smell.

In April 2023, the peacock-shaped incense burner will make its debut in the DIA’s gallery of Islamic art, where it will be displayed near other works of South Asian Islamic art. When you see it, I hope you will delight in its visual details and imagine the dynamic, multisensory experiences of its historical viewers.

¹ Emma J. Flatt, *The Courts of the Deccan Sultanates: Living Well in the Persian Cosmopolis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 61–65, 242–45, and *passim*. See also Flatt, “Spices, Smells and Spells: The Use of Olfactory Substances in Conjuring Spirits,” *South Asian Studies* 32.1 (May 2016), pp. 3–21.

² These associations are noted by Flatt in her discussion of peacock-shaped incense burners from the Deccan (Flatt, *Deccan Sultanates*, pp. 65–69).

Recent Publications by the Curator

Katherine E. Kasdorf and Neha Vedpathak, “Revisiting *Still / Rise*: Katherine E. Kasdorf in Conversation with Neha Vedpathak,” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 96 (2022): 30–39.

Emma Natalya Stein and Katherine E. Kasdorf, “Alternate Narratives for the Tamil Yoginis: Reconsidering the ‘Kanchi Yoginis’ Past, Present, and Future,” *Religions* 13.10 (Oct. 2022): <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13100888>.

Katherine E. Kasdorf, “A Monument Transformed: Traces of Ruin, Restoration, and Choice in Halebidu’s Kedāreśvara Temple,” in Annapurna Garimella, ed. *The Long Arc of South Asian Art: Essays in Honour of Vidya Dehejia* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited and Mumbai: Marg, 2022): 199–211.

Majestic Forts and Palaces of Rajasthan

Smita Datta Makhija

Conservation Architect, India Council on Monuments and Sites North Zone Representative

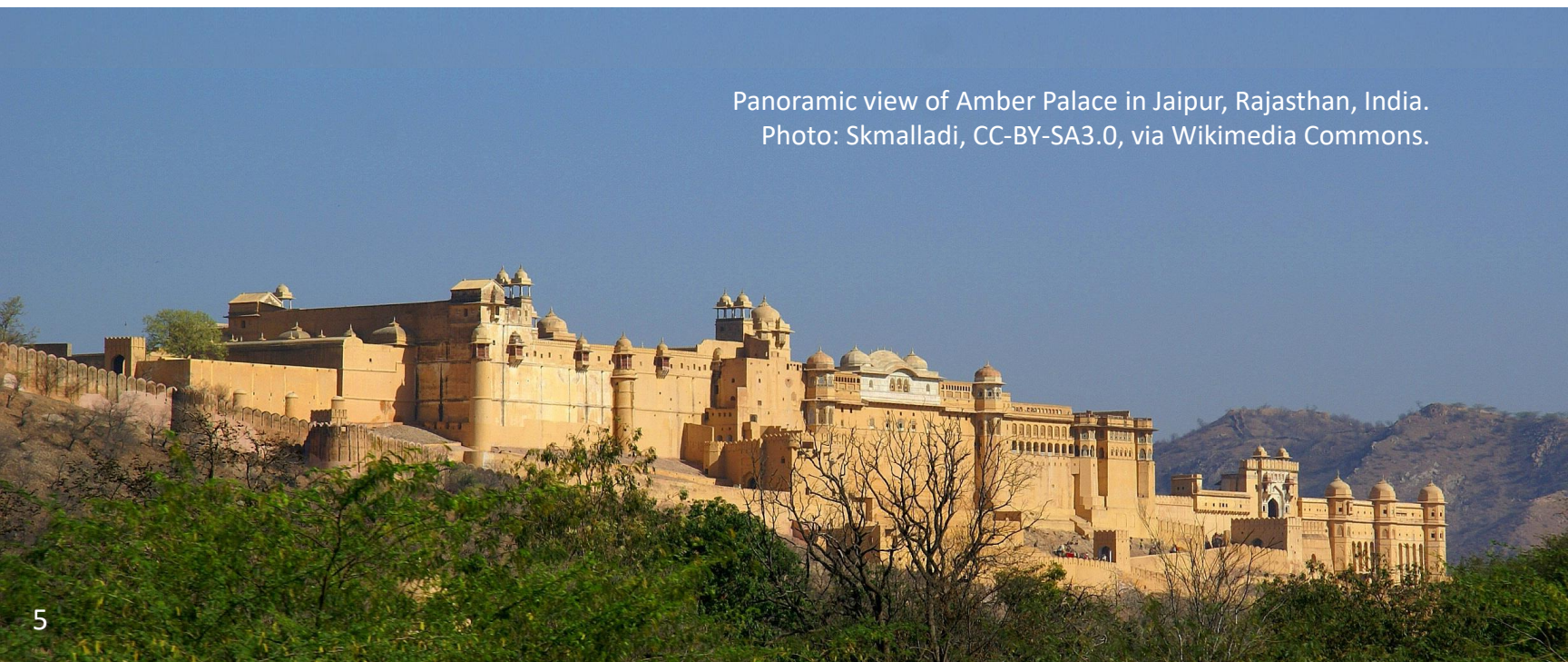
The Indian subcontinent is dotted with scores of legendary forts, palaces, and cities. Several impressive examples lie in the state of Rajasthan in northwestern India, a land comprised of golden sand dunes from the great Thar Desert, interspersed with the rocky terrain of the Aravalli mountain range. An abundance of color and vibrant decoration evolved in response to this monotone landscape and was woven into the fabric of Rajasthani life via the festivals and fairs celebrated in this region. The forts, palaces, and cities of Rajasthan—many of which were built by Rajput royal families between the 16th and 19th centuries—reverberate still with this rich cultural heritage.

The majority of Rajput hill forts have extensive, expertly built defensive walls, which fuse with the organic patterns of the landforms. Inside fortified walls, opulent palaces made of sandstone and marble were constructed with multilayered courtyards and bustling mercantile centers, making the fort-palace complex an important hub for the advancement of academics and the arts. Beautiful tanks and

stepped wells were built in a unique style as a practical way to collect monsoon rainwater, ensuring a reliable water supply for the inhabitants and modulating the microclimate.

One of the most famous hill-fort palaces is at Amber, located just outside the city of Jaipur. Prior to the establishment of Jaipur, the Kachhwaha Rajput rulers resided for over a

Panoramic view of Amber Palace in Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.
Photo: Skmalladi, CC-BY-SA3.0, via Wikimedia Commons.



century in Amber fort. Its ramparts lead up to a spectacular palace overlooking Maota Lake. During the construction of Amber in the mid-16th century, the Kachhwaha Rajputs forged a strategic alliance with the Mughal court. Amber represents the finest architectural amalgamation of the evolving Rajput style with Mughal nuances.

In 1726, the scholarly ruler of Amber, Maharaja Jai Singh II, planned the city of Jaipur, located about seven miles from Amber. An ambitious ruler, passionate about astronomy, mathematics, and science, he studied European cities, collected world maps, and enlisted Vidyadhar Bhattacharya, an architect (*vastukar*) and mathematician, as the chief planner. The city design was conceived as nine squares based on the principles of the *Vastu Shastras*, ancient Indian treatises on urban design and architecture. Streets are aligned with the major axes running north to south and east to west, and adjusted to the topography. A tight-walled periphery surrounds the city, which can be entered through seven gates.

The city of Jaipur was constructed keeping the function, aesthetics, and harmony of open and built components as the key parameters for creating spatial layouts. The streets are lined with continuous colonnaded markets, shops, residences, and temples with uniform facades. At the intersections of the streets, there are large public squares called *chaupars*, resembling a cross-shaped board game. Given the detailed attention to its design and development, it is not surprising that Jaipur is packed with many architectural gems, including the Hawa Mahal (Palace of the Wind), the City Palace complex, Jantar Mantar Observatory, and Govind Devji Temple.

A distinctive architectural feature of the city are the multicourt manor houses called *havelis*. The havelis were constructed with a series of open courtyards that filtered light and supplied

ventilation. Inside the haveli, daytime heat and nocturnal cooling are controlled by high ceilings, textured surfaces, and screened balconies. Small and large courtyards provide private spaces to enjoy festivals and social gatherings.



Amber Fort, view of Ganesh Pol gateway.
Photo: Firoze Edassery, CC BY-SA 3.0, via
Wikimedia Commons.

The palace rooms found in both Amber and Jaipur are of special interest. They exhibit a rich display of exquisite floral designs of precious and semiprecious stones. Floors are inlaid with sandstone, limestone, and semiprecious stones, creating ornate stone carpets. Similarly, the walls and ceilings are extensively decorated with intricate carvings, paintings, and mirrors. The famous Sheesh Mahal room in Amber is adorned with mirrorwork on the walls and ceilings. The elaborate mirrorwork reflects light, creating a magical ambiance when the room is lit with oil lamps (*diyas*).

Jaipur, along with Delhi and Agra, forms the Golden Triangle of Indian art, history, and culture. The beauty and significance of this city prompted UNESCO to make it a World Heritage Site in 2019. The city of Jaipur allows the visitor to experience the unique Rajasthani architectural style and ambiance of its numerous forts and palaces.

Indian Embroidery: A Fashion Treasure

Padma Raj Keshri

Sustainable Design Consultant

India is a land of many cultures, traditions, and art forms that emanate from different regions of this vast country. One beautiful example is found in the form of traditional hand embroidery. The roots of embroidery in India are deep, as the ancient needles made of bone, bronze, and copper found in the Indus Valley indicate. Different cultural and regional styles have developed in various parts of the country, each telling its own story through unique embroidery stitches.

Hand embroidery is an art form of self-expression, pride, and creativity, where a needle and thread are used to produce decorative designs with a combination of stitches. Various textiles and fabrics, such as cotton, silk, wool, and leather, are the base for the embroidery. Fabrics are often dyed with plant and mineral sources that vary based on topography and climate. There is a long history of traditional

practices for extracting the dye from plant fibers and other sources, with some methods still in use today. The benefits of natural dyes are being reexamined as there is a growing awareness of the environmental impact of synthetic dyes and their contribution to pollution. The rising demand for natural dyes in the international market is a positive development for sustainable fashion.



Hand embroidery from India. Photo courtesy of Rachna Gulati, all rights reserved.

After the fabric for the embroidery is chosen, the types and numbers of strands of thread, including gold, silver, silk, cotton, and wool, are selected and vary with the artistic design and embroidery style. In a time-consuming process of hand stitching, decorative beads, shells, coins, mirrors, seeds, precious stones, fabric scraps, or sequins may be sewn to the fabric, incorporating them into the design. Artisans (*karigars*) are free to create colorful and imaginative designs with their choices of fabric, thread, and decorations. Embroidery techniques are often handed down from one generation of artisans to the next.

Each region of India has developed its own embroidery aesthetic and style. There are over eighty embroidery techniques and recognizable styles of stitches; the following are just a few examples. *Kantha*, a style from Bengal, is known for using a simple running stitch to create geometric patterns and scenes from life.

Chikankari, originating in Lucknow, uses white thread on pale pastel fabric in its design. *Zardosi*, created with silver, gold, or copper wires, and *Mukaish*, created with gold and silver pieces of metal, were both developed for royalty. Many distinct styles come from Rajasthan, such as decorative patchwork, the laborious *Aari* work using beads and sequins, and *Shisha*, or mirrorwork, with mirrors stitched into the embroidery design. *Phulkari* from Punjab often uses natural dyed fabrics with dam stitches embroidered on the reverse and the design taking shape on the front. *Kashida* from Kashmir uses wool or cotton thread and is inspired by motifs from nature. Each locality tells its individual story through intricate embroidery patterns. The skill and beauty of this art form has led the fashion industry to use Indian embroidery in its creations, giving it well-deserved global recognition.



Punjabi (present-day India or Pakistan), *Phulkari*, late 19th–early 20th century, silk embroidery on cotton, 98 1/2 × 50 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Andrew L. and Gayle Shaw Camden, 2021.17. Photo courtesy of Will Chandler.

FAAC BOOK AND MOVIE CLUB

As we embark on our third year, I want to welcome you to the 2022–23 season. We enjoyed very interesting discussions of books and movies in 2021–22 — books such as *The Silver Swan: In Search of Doris Duke* by Sallie Bingham and movies such as *The Man Who Sold His Skin* directed by Kaouther Ben Hania, *Little Big Women* directed by Joseph Hsu, and *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* directed by Ashutosh Gowariker. We also had vibrant discussions with all our panelists. Thank you to guest speakers, including Yar Wei and FAAC Board Members Professor Saeed Khan and Karen Chopra, and to all those members who participated with us via Zoom in 2021–22. I specifically want to thank Freda Giblin and David Morrison for all the input and guidance that they provided.

We are excited to announce the following Books and Movies for the 2022–23 season!
MARK YOUR CALENDARS and JOIN US!

Jumana Cooper
FAAC BOOK AND MOVIE CLUB COORDINATOR

REMINDER: Further details about meetings will be sent to members who register for the FAAC book and/or movie clubs. To attend a Book or Movie Club meeting, please email Jumana Cooper at jumana@comcast.net

LEADERS: Jumana Cooper, Freda Giblin, David Morrison, Emmy Peck, Anita Rajpal
COORDINATOR: Jumana Cooper

Book Club Discussion

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2022 (IN PERSON) at the home of David Weinberg
The Tale of Genji, abridged edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), by Murasaki Shikibu (Author) and Royall Tyler (Adapter, Editor, Translator)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2023 (IN PERSON) at the home of Jumana Cooper
The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century (University of California Press, 2004), by Ross E. Dunn

Movie Club Discussion

WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 16, 2022 (ON ZOOM)
The Assassin directed by Hsiao-Hsien Hou
A female assassin receives a dangerous mission to kill a political leader in eighth-century China.
YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3HIOgFSOfk>

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 1, 2023 (ON ZOOM)
Ayla: The Daughter of War directed by Can Ulkay
“Set in the 1950s Korean War, the Turkish movie is the story of compassion and love. Despite being abominable for creating inauspicious atrocities, sometimes wars beget the altruistic inherent nature of people.” — Shafin Saif.
YouTube: <https://youtu.be/nztfBjm3gll>

WEDNESDAY MAY 3, 2023 (ON ZOOM)
Bosta directed by Philippe Arcatingi
A 2005 Lebanese film, *Bosta* is a story of young Lebanese artists who meet again, after being separated, and tour different cities of Lebanon in an old bus, performing a techno version of the dabkeh that shocks conservatives, but moves forward towards the future.
Netflix:
<https://www.netflix.com/watch/81003917?source=imdb>

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 9, 2023 (ON ZOOM)
TBD

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FAAC Board member David Weinberg graciously opened his residence to host the book club's first in-person meeting in October, when we discussed *The Tale of Genji*. Thanks to FAAC member Jane Yamasaki for guiding the discussion, using her knowledge of Japanese history and literature to bring in pertinent background information. Photo courtesy of Sharon Dow.

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2023 FEBRUARY

Thur, Feb 23 | 6:00 p.m.

Charles Lang Freer, Chinese Art, and the Making of Global Detroit –
Lecture with Dr. Ian Shin, Assistant Professor of History and American Culture, University of Michigan –
Online program, in partnership with Freer House

2023 MARCH

Sun, Mar 5

Hinamatsuri (Japanese Girls' Day)
Celebration – DIA onsite

Fri, Mar 17 – Sat, Mar 18

Meet-up in New York for Asia Week
(limited to 14 participants)

2023 APRIL

Tue, Apr 4 | 6:00 p.m.

Lecture with Dr. Margaret Graves,
Associate Professor of Islamic Art and
Architecture, University of Indiana,

on Islamic ceramics in the DIA's
collection (title to be announced) –
DIA onsite, reception to follow

National Arab American Heritage
Month Celebration (programming to
be announced)

2023 MAY

Asian American and Pacific Islander
Heritage Month Celebration
(programming to be announced)

2023 JUNE

Sun, Jun 4

Special curator's event for members
at the Sustaining level and above,
including lunch and behind-the-
scenes viewing of paintings from the
DIA's collection

*Stay tuned for more public programs
being planned for 2023!*