Expressive Cultures Images: Indian Court Painting: 1450-1800

A course proposal for the Spring Term of 2015

The university draws students from many regions of the world and this course could provide an option which expands the geographic and cultural diversity of the current offerings in the “Expressive Cultures: Images” category. It will serve to introduce students in a variety of fields and disciplines to the subcontinent’s vibrant and diverse visual production. Before the twentieth century, the cultural and artistic life of the Indian subcontinent was primarily supported by rulers in various regional centers. During the period covered by this course, 1450-1800, paintings on paper filled several important roles. They fused the indigenous tradition of devotional imagery with new, primarily secular functions. In the Indian cultural tradition paintings provide visual metaphors for various moods, seasons, times of day and concepts. They celebrate the lives and accomplishments of individual rulers through the medium of narrative pictures and portraits. They also recall the lives and personalities of gods and heroes.

In addition to this subjects’ intrinsic appeal, there are specific reasons why this course is particularly appropriate for the spring term of 2015. The Metropolitan Museum of Art holds an important collection of Indian paintings which are on display in pair of contiguous galleries, one contains paintings from the Islamic Department and the other has examples from the Asian Art Department. In addition, exceptionally, during the spring of 2015 the museum will host a major loan exhibition devoted to Indian art focused on pictures and objects from the Deccan region. Although American audiences have gained a certain familiarity with Mughal art, works from the Deccan are so widely scattered around the globe that only scholars dedicated to that region’s study have been able to see more than a few of the region’s extraordinary paintings. This course is timed to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Despite the interest and richness of Deccani Art, however, that topic is probably too specialized to constitute the entire focus of a course aimed at undergraduates with no prior exposure to study of the subcontinent’s artistic accomplishments. For that reason, the course which I would like to offer is entitled “Indian Court Painting: 1500-1800” and I propose to give will also consider paintings made for rulers in various sections of the subcontinent. It will explore open with a consideration of pre-Mughal painting from western India, and analyze paintings made for the Mughals before turning to the Deccani states with a particular focus on materials that will be in the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of it. The final section of the course with explore court paintings made for the Rajput rulers of northern and western India during the later seventeenth eighteenth centuries. These pictures draw from both the Mughal and Deccani traditions but also exhibit unique features which are visually engaging. The art of these three dynastic groups will be presented sequentially as series of case studies but these specific examples will also be cross-referenced in ways that will help the students to understand the ways in which these artistic traditions interacted.

The challenge of tackling not one but three unfamiliar topics in a single course may seem overly ambitious, but the project is made more feasible by the presence of a single book which can provide a cultural, geographical and historical framework that will help to link together the disparate elements and give them a more concrete physical and intellectual focus. That book is India before Europe by Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot, published as a paperback by Cambridge University Press. Chapters of this book will be used in discussion sections to provide a context for the paintings from...
specific artistic centers that will be contained in the two formal lectures given each week. Additional readings will be assigned to provide background for the pictures discussed in the lectures.

Although a course focused solely on painting from the Deccan would not be appropriate for a general undergraduate audience the integration of materials from this exhibition will enrich the student’s understanding of the course’s lectures and readings. The two groups of paintings mentioned above, the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the special loan exhibition about the art of the Deccan will both be used as the focus of student writing assignments. They will be asked to write two papers which are based directly on paintings on view at the Metropolitan Museum. To ensure that the students actually visit the museum rather than working from digital resources they will be required to provide proof of their visits in the form of admission stickers which carry the date of a visit.

Student Assignments and Assessment

1. Attendance of lectures and discussion sections: 20% of grade
2. Weekly summaries of the assigned readings: 1 double sided, single spaced page/week: 30%
   These summaries should analyze the contents of the readings and connect them with the themes of the lectures.
3. Paper of 6 pp. focused on two paintings from the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art due in the 6th week of the term: 15%
4. Mid-term examination: 10%
5. Final project which will take the place of the final examination: 25%
   This project will consist of a ten page paper describing an exhibition proposal containing 10 paintings selected to be representative of the materials covered in the lectures, readings and exhibition visits.

1. Jan. 26-30: Introduction to the themes and structure of the course

   Lec. 1: 15th Century Western Indian Painters abandon Palm Leaves for Paper

   Lec.2: The Mandu Sultans order a Persian Cook Book & Dictionary

   Readings:

   C. B. Asher and C. Talbot, India before Europe, CUP Press. Issbn 0-521-00539-6, pp. 1-24, 84-114


2. Feb. 2-6: The Mughal Rulers and their Persian Heritage: Babur r.1526-1530; Humyun r. 1530-40, 1556

Lec. 1: The Central Asian Heritage of Babur shapes Mughal Visual Culture

Lec. 2: The Emperor Humayun and his Persian painters

Readings:

Asher & Talbot, India before Europe, pp. 115-123.

Babur: The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur Prince and Emperor, trans. W. M. Thackston, 50 pp. of selected passages describing Babur’s impressions of India and how it differs from Iran


E. Fisher, “The Technique of Indian Painters: a Short Note,” in Masters of Indian Painting, II, 793-798.

John Seyller, “Painting Workshops in Mughal India,” Masters of Indian Painting II, 799-804

3. Feb. 9-13 Akbar (r.1556-1605) establishes painting as a Mughal court activity
Lec. 1: Akbar’s fascination with history shapes Mughal court culture

Lec. 2: Akbar’s fascination with portraiture sets the agenda for other Indian rulers

Readings:

Asher & Talbot, *India before Europe*, 123-151.

Abu’l Fazl, *The Akbarnama*, approx 25 pages on Akbar’s ideas & attitudes


Amina Okada, “Basawan,” in *Master Artists of the Imperial Mughal Court*, 1-16.

4. Feb. 16-20: Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) develops a personal vision of painting

Lec. 1: From Court Portraiture to Jahangir’s Dream Pictures

Lec. 2: Nature Observed, Nature recorded the paintings of Mansur

Readings:


Stronge, *Painting for the Mughal Emperor*, 110-141;


5. Feb. 23-27; Shah Jahan (r. 1627-58): a Sense of order, a Love of Ceremony

Lec 1: The *Shah Jahan Nama* Paintings

Lec 2: The Album as portable museum

Readings:

Asher & Talbot, *India before Europe*, 152-163, 186-207.


6. Mar. 2-6 The Impact of Late Mughal Painting and its 18th century Revival: Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) and Muhammad Shah (r. 1720-48)

Lec. 1: Aurangzeb: a Focus on Portraiture

Lec.2: Muhammad Shah with his court; the Mughal Legacy Revived in 18th century Delhi

Readings:
Asher & Talbot, India before Europe, 225-236
N. Haidar, “Bhavanidas,” in Masters of Indian Painting: 1650-1900, pp. 531-546.
W. Dalrymple, Y. Sharma, Painting and Painters in Mughal India, 1707-1862.
Terence McInerney, “Chitarman II,” in Masters of Indian Painting, II, 547-562.

7. Mar. 16-20: European Themes in Mughal Painting & Midterm Exam

Lec. 1: The Copying and Transformation of European Painting by Mughal Artists

Lec. 2: Mid-term exam

Reading:

Amina Okada, “Keshav Das,” in Masters of Indian Painting I, 153-166.

John Seyller, “Basawan,” in Masters of Indian Painting I, 119-134.
(Spring Break: Mar 16-20)

8. Mar. 23-27: Artistic Culture at the Deccan Courts:

Lec 1: Introduction to the Deccan: Geography, History, Visual Art at the Literature & Art courts,

Lec 2: Painting at Ahmadnagar and the Northern Deccan: 1550-1600

Readings:

Asher & Talbot, *Asia before Europe*, 163-185;


Lec 1: Bijapuri Painting in the 16th and early 17th century

Lec 2: Bijapuri Painting in the later 17th century

Reading:


Deborah Hutton, “The Pem Nem: A Sixteenth-Century Illustrated Romance from Bijapur,” in *Sultans of the South*, pp. 44-63


10. Apr. 6-10: Painting at Golconda under the Qutb Shahi Dynasty: 1580-1672
Lec 1: Sixteenth Century Painting at Golconda

Lec 2: Painted and Printed Textile Pictures from the Deccan

Readings:


11. April 13-17 Western Indian Painting in the 17th century: The Rise of Local Masters

Lec 1: The Chunar Ragmala of 1605 and its Importance

Lec 2: The Royal Library at Udaipur in the mid 17th century Jagat Singh I and Sahibdin (1620-55)

Andrew Topsfield, Court Painting at Udiapur, Zurich, 2001, chs. 2, 3, pp. 21-84

12. Apr. 13-17 The Hunter and the Hunted in 17th Century Western Indian Painting

Lec. 1: In Praise of Elephants

Lec 2: Hunting Tigers in the forests of Kotah


13. Apr. 20-24 The Depiction of Court Life at 17th & 18th century Udaipur in Mewar
Lec 1: Portraying the Ruler and his pastimes Sangram Singh II (1710-34)

Lec 2: The Palace as Stage, the Palace as Subject


14. Apr. 27-May 1: The Pandit Seu Family of Painters: the transmission of an artistic legacy at the Courts of Western India across generations

Lec 1: Krishna and Radha as Models for Court Lovers in Western and Northern Indian Painting in the 18th century

Lec. 2: Court Ceremonies and the Idealization of Court Life

Readings:


Final Exams: May 13-19