Visualizing History: India
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Office 300 Wheeler House. Office hours: Monday, Wednesday 1:30-3:30, and by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

In this course we will explore India through its visual culture and examine how visual materials have been used in exhibitions and museums to represent the region to audiences in EuroAmerica. Throughout, we will be interested in analyzing how visual materials make political claims and articulate cultural identities, whether in museums or elsewhere. The course will be divided into roughly three parts. In the first (weeks 1-4), we will use visual materials to establish a historical and thematic foundation for studying South Asia. Most basically, this means an introduction to the history and culture of the region, as this course assumes no prior knowledge of the area. But it also involves close attention to key historical themes, including political and economic power, religious identities and practices, and socio-cultural hierarchies. Using examples of religious icons, posters, narrative friezes, sculptural portraits, cloth, and clothing, we will examine how various visual materials have generated meanings in different historical contexts, and how those materials were used for particular social, cultural, and political ends.

In the second part of the class (weeks 5-9) we will explore attempts to represent the diversity and rich historical complexity of South Asia in exhibitions and museums displays from the nineteenth century to the present. As self-conscious attempts to use selective materials to stand in for a massively complicated, multi-faceted whole, these exhibitions help to highlight the politics, technologies, and expectations that shape visual representations. This section will start with mid-nineteenth century exhibitions in Europe where India appeared as the glittering, exotic focus of displays related to the British empire; from there we will turn to more recent attempts to approach South Asian arts from a variety of thematic and temporary perspectives, exploring the intellectual arguments made for new exhibition strategies. Throughout this part of the course, we will situate attempts to display India in a comparative context, asking how South Asia displays fit into the broader history of the development of museums in EuroAmerica, and how South Asian exhibition strategies compare to those used to present the arts and cultures of Africa.

Finally, in the third part of the course, we will take the breadth of knowledge and methodologies learned over the course of the semester to offer our own arguments for how to put the arts of South Asia on display at the Fleming Museum. Working closely with Andrea Rosen, the curator at the Fleming, we will analyze the Fleming’s South Asian collections, identify themes for how to exhibit those materials, select particularly important or illustrative objects to go on display, and develop textual materials to accompany an exhibition. As the final project of the semester, you will be asked to present and deliver a full exhibition proposal to the Fleming staff; as they redesign the displays of the South Asian collections, the hope is that your exhibition ideas may shape how visitors come to experience the arts of India.

Course learning objectives:

- To develop scholarly methodologies for analyzing, interpreting and talking about visual evidence from the past.
- To build a deeper knowledge of the politics and cultures of visual attempts to represent diverse cultures and peoples.
• To understand the visual culture of India.
• To identify and assess source materials for research projects.
• To understand the practicalities and politics of museum exhibitions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course requirements include active participation in discussion, six wiki posts, two longer (5-7 pages) summative papers, an exhibition proposal, a group exhibition presentation, and a final project. Classes will be structured around regular discussion and activities; it is your responsibility to check the syllabus to see what is scheduled for each day and come to class prepared accordingly.

Grades will be determined as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibition-related reflections (6 total)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>First summative paper</td>
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<td>Second summative paper</td>
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<td>Exhibition proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group exhibition presentation</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
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NOTES ON REQUIREMENTS

Participation: You are expected to read the materials listed for each day on the syllabus and to come ready to talk about them. (All readings are available on Blackboard.) If you are not comfortable talking in a large group, you can submit a written response to the readings; details on how to do this will follow. You are also expected to do a lot of work outside of class preparing ideas for an exhibition; this work is not always graded, but will factor into your participation grade.

Exhibition reflections (six total): Throughout the semester you will be asked to submit six reflections to the class blog and wiki exploring ideas for exhibition strategies and reviewing existing exhibitions; you also have to comment on what other people in the class post. Your reflections will not be graded, but each one accumulates points towards this portion of your grade, so do take them seriously. There are three types of reflections required for the class:

**Two blog posts exploring exhibition ideas:** Due Monday February 1st and Monday February 8th, these posts should suggest possible exhibition ideas for how to display the arts of South Asia, based on the reading for the previous week.

**One journal post reviewing the permanent exhibits at the Fleming:** Due Monday Feb. 29th, you have to write a review of the permanent exhibits on display at the Fleming.

**Three wiki pages reviewing existing exhibitions:** Anytime between February 22nd and April 1st, each student will be expected to write at least three wiki pages about different exhibitions of the arts or culture of South Asia (you don’t have to have seen the exhibition in person). Each exhibition can only be discussed once, so if another student has already written about an exhibition you have just discovered, you have to find another one to write up. (Which means there is an advantage to doing this assignment as early as possible.) Each page should do the following:

• Note the exhibit’s title, and where/when it was held.
• Summarize the intent/focus of the exhibit.
• Discuss the types of materials included in the exhibition. (All one media? All one artist? Varieties of media, across time?)
• Reflect on the image of India/South Asia created in the exhibition, and what is not present/included in that image.
• Provide links to materials available online about the exhibition (reviews, scholarly essays, websites, exhibition catalogs, etc.)

Two summative papers (5-7 pages): Due at the end of each of the first two parts of the semester, these papers function as take-home midterms. Specifically, you will be asked to pull together the materials within each part of the semester, integrating ideas, readings, themes, and methodologies to think about object-based analysis as well as overall exhibition principles.

Exhibition proposal: In this paper (five pages or less, plus bibliography) you will have to present an argument for why the Fleming should display the arts and culture of South Asia through the three themes your group has chosen. Your goal is to define the vision underlying your exhibition strategies, as well as to link the individual themes your group is working on to recent trends in how museums have chosen to exhibit the arts and culture of South Asia.

Exhibition presentation: On the two final days of class, the working groups will present plans for how to exhibit the arts of South Asia at the Fleming. As part of the presentation each group will need to define the comprehensive vision uniting the exhibition, explain the individual themes chosen to illustrate different facets of art and culture, explain the choice of objects, and display a visualization of what the exhibition will look like within the gallery space. Presentations will be graded by the class as a whole, in a group critique at the end of each session.

Final project: This project (approximately 15-18 pages total), due during finals period, will bring all the different elements of an exhibition proposal together, offering a written rationale for the exhibit (in the form of a narrative exhibition proposal of 8-10 pages), details on what the exhibit will include (provided in an object list), a visualization of what the displays will look like within the gallery space, and the text that would accompany the exhibition overall. Much of this work will be done as a group, so each student does not need to write or prepare all of these materials individually. Still, it does represent a substantial body of work, so plan accordingly.

POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Academic Honesty: Please be advised that I take academic honesty seriously and personally, and will expect you to uphold the highest standards of honesty in this class. Plagiarism or other offenses against the university’s policies will result in an F for the class. For a full explanation of the university’s policies see: http://www.uvm.edu/~wmmppg/ppg/student/acadintegrity.pdf

Deadlines: All written work must be turned in at the assigned time, in class, on the day that it is due. Late papers will be penalized a half of a letter grade per day. In other words, if you submit an A paper (which comes with a numerical grade of a 95) a day late, it will now drop to a 90. If it is two days late, it will be an 85 or a B.

No laptops used in class without permission: To minimize distraction to other students from the use of laptops to surf the web in class, I do not permit the use of laptops in class without permission; if you would like to use a laptop to take notes, please come see me.

Special needs: I am happy to accommodate students with specific learning needs; please let me know if you are entitled by the university to special provisions or assistance.
SCHEDULE AND MAIN TOPICS

PART ONE: POWER AND THE VISUAL

Wednesday, 1/20: Introduction
Friday, 1/22: Why the visual matters
   Reading:

Week 2: Functions of the visual
Monday, 1/25: The lives of Indian images
   Reading:
Wednesday, 1/27: Communication strategies
   Reading:
Friday, 1/29: Materials with meanings
   Reading:

Week 3: Appropriating power
Monday, 2/1: Power through possession
   Reading:
   Davis, “Trophies of War” in Lives of Indian Images, 51-87
   FIRST BLOG POST DUE: Choose one theme from last week’s reading (living images, use of images, or the power of cloth, and then explain how you could illustrate that theme in an exhibition. What would the title of the exhibition be? Assuming that you could use the objects illustrated in the readings, would you want additional materials as well? If so, what kinds of things? Please also respond with comments and/or questions to at least three other posts.
Wednesday, 2/3: Embodying authority, embodying divinity
   Reading:
Friday, 2/5: Weaving in cosmopolitanism
   Reading:
Week 4: Colonial collecting practices in India
Monday, 2/8: Collecting as self-fashioning
Reading:

**SECOND BLOG POST DUE:** Choose one theme from last week’s reading (appropriating powerful objects, appropriating visual modes of representation, appropriating new styles of dress), and then explain how you could illustrate that theme in an exhibition. What would the title of the exhibition be? Assuming that you could use the objects illustrated in the readings, would you want additional materials as well? If so, what kinds of things? *Please also respond with comments and/or questions to at least three other posts.*

Wednesday, 2/10: Colonial power over objects
Reading:

Friday, 2/12: Indian images in collections
Reading:

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**PART TWO: EXHIBITION STRATEGIES, EXHIBITION POLITICS**

Week 5: Museum studies
Monday, 2/15: NO CLASS—PRESIDENT’S DAY
Wednesday, 2/17: FLEMING MUSEUM VISIT
Introduction to the museum, its history, goals

**FIRST SUMMATIVE PAPER DUE:** Drawing on all the readings and discussions in part one, in 5-7 pages, answer the following question: what are the main kinds of contextual information necessary to fully understand a South Asian object (i.e. a sculpture, a frieze, a piece of clothing, a portrait, etc.) that might be exhibited in a museum?

Friday, 2/19: Historicizing museums, categorizing practices
Reading:

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Week 6: Exhibiting India
Monday, 2/22: Nineteenth century international exhibitions
Reading:

**JOURNAL ENTRY DUE:** Based on our visit to the Fleming last week, as well as additional time in the museum on your own outside of class (for the Fleming’s hours, see [here](#)), write a review of the museum’s permanent exhibits. While there is no length requirement, do try to be both thorough and succinct; there’s a lot to cover which means you can’t discuss everything, but do provide a thoughtful assessment of the following:
What are the core elements of the permanent collection on display?
How do those separate elements fit together within the museum? What do they add up to?
Different parts of the museum were installed at different periods: are there some galleries or installations that were particularly effective/interesting/successful for you? Were there other galleries or installations that you were less impressed by?

Wednesday, 2/24: FLEMING MUSEUM VISIT
Introduction to the South Asia collections

Friday, 2/26: India through folk arts and ethnography
Reading:

Week 7: Exhibiting India—thematic strategies
Monday, 2/29: Exhibition strategies-universal exhibitions
Reading:
Goswami, B.N., “Another Past, Another Context” in Exhibiting Culture: 68-78.
Review exhibition practices at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. For current exhibitions on Asia, see here. For past exhibits of Asian arts, see here.

Wednesday, 3/2: BAILEY-HOWE LIBRARY VISIT
Introduction to library research resources on exhibitions by library liaison Daisy Benson

Friday, 3/4: Exhibition strategies-thematic approaches
Reading:
For class today, review one of the various exhibition catalogs on reserve in the library (see the list provided) and come prepared to explain the following:
• What was the focus/theme of the exhibition?
• What kinds of objects were used to illustrate its theme?
• What is left out of this exhibition, in terms of peoples/cultures/themes/issues?
• What kind of an image of India/South Asia does this exhibit present?

March 7-11—NO CLASSES, SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Comparative case: Representing Africa
Monday, 3/14: Cross-cultural displays
Reading:
Vogel, Susan. “Always True to the Object, in Our Fashion” in Exhibiting Culture: 191-204.

Wednesday, 3/16: FLEMING MUSEUM VISIT
Introduction to the Fleming's Africa exhibits: display strategies, techniques of representation

Friday, 3/18: Africa within American art museums
Reading:
PART THREE: EXHIBITIONS IN PRACTICE

Week 10: The Fleming collections

Monday, 3/21: Exploring the permanent collection

*In-class workshop:* Introduction to Pinterest, how to use it for our project. Introduction to the database of the permanent collection, how to use it.

*In-class work:* In class we will divide into working groups to start going through the South Asian materials in the permanent collections. Your group’s assignment by Friday is to create mini-exhibits of 12-15 objects illustrating potential themes for displays.

**SECOND SUMMATIVE PAPER DUE:** Drawing on all the readings and discussions in part two, in 5-7 pages, answer the following question: what should the central goals and/or principles be for the Fleming’s new displays of South Asian objects?

Wednesday, 3/23: Creating exhibitions from a permanent collection

*In-class work:* Bring your group’s initial thematic ideas to class; we will discuss what makes a compelling theme, what kinds of objects are useful to illustrate your themes.

*Reading:*  

Friday, 3/25: The initial pitch: themes

*Due at the start of class:* Each group should have available on Pinterest three or four boards illustrating themes for a potential exhibition at the Fleming. Each board should include images of 12-15 objects that would be used to illustrate the theme; your group must also provide a paragraph (or more) explanation for each theme, explaining what the theme is and why it would be an important way to represent the arts of South Asia.

*In-class presentations:* For class, come prepared as a group to make a formal pitch for three or four themes (each illustrated with a separate board on Pinterest) that you think would usefully represent South Asia to the museum-going public at the Fleming. In your pitch (no more than 10 minutes total, for all the themes), discuss what the three or four themes are and why each is a helpful introduction to or overview of the arts of South Asia. There’s no need to go through all of the objects you are using to illustrate a theme: over the weekend, we will all review each other’s Pinterest boards.

Week 11: Working with valued/important objects

Monday, 3/28: Thematic priorities

*Due at the start of class:* Over the weekend, look through the Pinterest boards of the other groups in order to identify three themes on any of the group boards that you think are particularly effective; come to class prepared to explain which are the most effective, and why they are important to the presentation of South Asia as a region.

*In-class workshop:* Introduction to the most valuable, exhibition-worthy South Asian objects in the permanent collection, source of their value. Your group’s assignment by Friday is to create new Pinterest boards of 12-15 objects again, now using at least five or eight of the most valuable South Asian objects across three or four boards.
Wednesday, 3/30: Identifying important objects

Due at the start of class: Come to class prepared to argue which 5-8 of the most valuable objects you would have to include in an exhibition, and which you think could be left out.

Reading:

Friday, 4/1: Themes of value

NOTE: This is the last day to submit exhibitions reviews on the class wiki

Due at the start of class: Each group should come with three or four new Pinterest boards illustrating themes that would use some of the museum’s most valuable objects. (For themes, feel free to borrow from other groups, focusing on the ones that you found most compelling from the previous week; you must still come up with your group’s own, new set of objects.) As before, each board should include images of 12-15 objects that would be used to illustrate the theme: this time, the difference is that at least 2 of those objects must be among the most valuable/important ones in the Fleming’s South Asia collections. As with the previous week, your group must provide a paragraph (or more) explanation for each theme, explaining what the theme is and why it would be an important way to represent the arts of South Asia: if you are borrowing a theme, you can ask the original group to use their initial thematic language and may use some of their images/objects, but must edit/alter the language and the object list to make it your own.

In-class presentations: For class, come prepared as a group to make a formal pitch for your themes. In your pitch (no more than 10 minutes total, for all the themes), discuss your 3-4 themes and why each is a helpful introduction to the arts of South Asia; you must also indicate why this theme is a good place to showcase the particularly important/valuable objects you have selected. There’s no need to go through all of the objects you are using to illustrate a theme: over the weekend, we will all review each other’s Pinterest boards.

Week 12: Building an exhibition

Monday, 4/4: BAILEY-HOWE LIBRARY VISIT

In-class work: Library liaison Daisy Benson will help identify research materials for object labels

Wednesday, 4/6: Putting themes together

Due at the start of class: Look through the Pinterest boards of the other groups in order to identify the three themes that, taken together, best cover key themes/ issues/ topics in the art and culture of South Asia. Come prepared to argue for what themes should be combined to represent South Asia in the Fleming Museum.

Friday, 4/8: Comparative examples

Due at the start of class: Each thematic group must submit a list of 15 objects to be pulled from storage by the Fleming staff—objects that you want to consider for inclusion in your exhibit.

Due at the start of class: Review the class wiki to find exhibitions that might have explored themes similar to the ones you are working on in your group. For class today, come prepared to discuss with at least two examples of exhibitions that offer meaningful precedent or insight into how to prepare or present your theme.

Reading:

Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, “Exhibition Proposals,”
**Week 13: Pitching the exhibition**

Monday, 4/11: Pitching the idea to the museum

*EXHIBITION PROPOSAL DUE:* In five pages or less, present an argument for why the Fleming should display the arts and culture of South Asia through the three themes your group has chosen. In your paper be sure to address the following:

- How will your exhibit represent the richness, diversity, and complexity of South Asia?
- How will your exhibit represent the variety and importance of the Fleming’s collections?
- How will the themes you have chosen engage or appeal to museum-goers?
- How will your exhibit be informed by recent exhibition strategies at other museums?

**Wednesday, 4/13: FLEMING MUSEUM VISIT**

*Introduction to the labels in use at the Fleming, exhibition furniture/materials*

**Reading:**


Victoria and Albert Museum, “Gallery Text at the V&A: A Ten Point Guide”

**Friday, 4/15: Pitching ideas**

*Due at the start of class:* Come to class with comments on the exhibition proposals of all of the members in your group. Be prepared to offer those comments to the authors, as well as to share ideas on what made for the most compelling proposal overall.

**Week 14: Working out the details**

Monday, 4/18: Groups 1a and 1b in the Fleming, 1c and 2a in workshop with Hope

*Group 2b and 2c: Due at the start of class:* Come with a draft version of the wall text that will be used to communicate the goals of your exhibit to the public, and one object label.

**Wednesday, 4/20: Groups 1c and 2a in the Fleming, 2b and 2c in workshop with Hope**

*Group 1a and 1b: Due at the start of class:* Come with a draft version of the wall text that will be used to communicate the goals of your exhibit to the public, and one object label.

**Friday, 4/22: Groups 2b and 2c in the Fleming, 1a and 1b in workshop with Hope**

*Group 1c and 2a: Due at the start of class:* Come with a draft version of the wall text that will be used to communicate the goals of your exhibit to the public, and one object label.

**Week 15: Visualizing the exhibition**

Monday, April 25: Finalizing exhibition plans

*Due at the start of class:* Come to class with a final list of the objects for your thematic group’s display; be prepared to explain/defend your list to the other thematic groups in your exhibition cluster, and to negotiate a final list for the entire exhibition group in class.

**Wednesday, April 27: Visualizing exhibitions**

*In class workshop:* Exploring mounting and display option, with technical help.

**Friday, April 29: Finalizing ideas**

*Class working day:* Final day to work on presentation materials.

**Week 16: Presentations**

Monday, May 2: Group 1

Wednesday, May 4: Group 2
Presentation guidelines: This represents a formal pitch to Andrea for how to organize the displays of South Asian arts in the Fleming Museum. The pitch will have to include:

1. **The overall vision for the exhibition:** Explain the goals and vision for the exhibition as a whole: what principles guided your choices? What image of South Asia do you want museum-goers to have? Please include the text to be used on the main exhibition wall panel.
2. **The three themes of the exhibition:** Explain why you choose these themes, and why they are important to representing the arts of India. Please include text for the thematic wall panels.
3. **Objects to be put on display:** Explain how the objects chosen will illustrate the themes, why (taken together) the objects present a complex vision of the theme, and how the objects represent the richness and importance of the Fleming’s collections.
4. **Display visualization:** Present a Google-Sketchup visualization of your exhibits.
5. **Audience engagement:** Explain why this exhibition will engage or appeal to museum-goers.

**Final project due Friday May 13th, 5 pm**

This project (approximately 15-18 pages total) must consist of the following parts:

1. **Exhibition proposal narrative:** First, in 8-10 pages, present a formal proposal for the exhibition that you have been working on. To do so, first explain the broad vision of the exhibition as a whole, explaining it represents the complexity of India through select themes and objects. Second, detail the individual theme that you worked on, demonstrating why that theme is important and how it relates to other exhibitions of South Asian art. Third, explain why the individual objects selected offer a useful illustration of your theme, while also representing the richness and importance of the Fleming’s holdings. **NOTE:** This part of the project must be done separately by each student.
2. **Object list:** Present a list of the objects to be included, including details on size, materials, date of production, etc. **NOTE:** This list can be the same for all members of your group.
3. **Visualization of your gallery display:** Using Google Sketchup, prepare a model of what the gallery would look like with your displays (i.e. all three themes) in it. **NOTE:** This visualization can be the same for all members of your group.
4. **Wall text for the exhibit:** In no more than 200 words, explain the goal/intent of the exhibit of South Asian arts. **NOTE:** This text can be the same for all members of your group.
5. **Text for the section panel:** In no more than 150 words, define the theme of this section of the exhibit, explaining what unites the objects within the section, and why this theme helps to illuminate the arts and culture of South Asia generally. **NOTE:** This text can be the same for all members of your smaller thematic group.
6. **Object label:** Prepare a label for one object in your theme. For the label, in no more than 60 words, offer whatever information about history, context, origin, importance, relevance, and function viewers would need to make sense of the object. **NOTE:** This must be done separately by each student, with each student working on a separate object.