ASIAN ART CONNECTIONS
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FAL 2008

GARDEN...

and

COSMOS

The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur

OCTOBER 11, 2008–JANUARY 4, 2009

Smithsonian
Freer Gallery of Art and
Arthur M. Sackler Gallery
This groundbreaking exhibition of Indian art explores the visual expression of the royal court in Jodhpur from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Newly discovered paintings and a silk-embroidered canopy from Rajasthan in northwestern India form the core of this memorable experience.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, court artists of Jodhpur developed a unique school of painting that synthesized the imperial Mughal style with their own local aesthetic. Lively images of lush gardens set amid the desert regions of Rajasthan distinguish the court art of the eighteenth century. Other works present scenes of palace entertainments or sacred landscapes where the Hindu deities Rama and Krishna engage in adventures.

In the nineteenth century, Maharaja Man Singh (reigned 1803–43), the ruler of Jodhpur, orchestrated the rise to power of the Naths, the religious order that originated hatha yoga in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The court painting in this period represents Nath teachings and legitimized Man Singh’s reliance on the Naths as spiritual teachers and political advisors. Man Singh’s succession to the throne in 1803 marked a new period when court artists were challenged to translate complex religious ideas into visual form. They created magnificent large paintings, almost four feet in width, that illustrated such complex concepts as the Absolute—the formless, universal essence in Hindu belief (also known as Brahman). Throughout India’s long history, artists rarely attempted to draw or paint the idea of Brahman. Works in Garden and Cosmos are virtually unprecedented in Indian art for visually presenting something that is believed to be without form. With a minimal style and stunning color, these exceptional paintings embody a richly creative period in the history of Indian art.
PART I

Look carefully at the images on the poster. Describe them in detail.

A Looking
- What colors do you see in the paintings?
- What shapes do you see?
- What are the different parts of the composition?
- What figures do you see?
- What do you notice about the figures?

B Interpreting
- What is the relationship between the figures and the other parts of the composition?
- How is color (including gold) used in the composition?
- How is space used?
- Do these paintings look like anything you have seen before? Please describe.
- What do they not look like to you?

C Exploring
- What questions do you have about these paintings?

PART II

The Emergence of Spirit and Matter
Attributed to Shivdas
Folio 2 from the Shiva Purana
India, Jodhpur, ca. 1828
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
Mehrangarh Museum Trust, RJS 2599

In the first half of the nineteenth century, artists in the royal court of Jodhpur, the capital of Marwar in northwestern India, developed an entirely new style of religious paintings. Maharaja Man Singh was deeply devoted to a Hindu tradition of yogis called the Naths. The maharaja (ruler) ordered his artists to create these paintings so he and the members of his court could learn what was special and important about Nath ideas and beliefs.

Before Man Singh’s reign, Nath teachings and hatha yoga were not widely known in the Jodhpur court. Hatha yoga was an esoteric tradition, meaning teachers passed it on only to the students they considered to be worthy of receiving instruction and learning its secrets. In an attempt to communicate the profound religious ideas of the Nath yogis, artists were challenged to produce images of concepts that have never actually been seen, such as the creation of the universe. Most likely, these paintings began with a learned Nath yogi explaining ideas and telling stories to the workshop artists. The painters then translated those concepts and tales into visual images.

The paintings below depict one of many creation stories in the Hindu traditions. They appear in the Shiva Purana, an ancient collection of stories about the deity Shiva and his role in creating
In this Hindu account of the formation of the cosmos, the Absolute (Brahman) exists prior to the creation of the universe and simultaneous with the created universe. Here, the Absolute—a formless, supreme, immeasurable essence—appears as a field of gold.

Spirit (or consciousness) is depicted as the male deity on the left, and Matter is represented as the female deity on the right.

Spirit and Matter practice a highly disciplined form of meditation together.

Spirit and Matter send out cosmic waters from their heads. The waters cover the Absolute above while they gradually pool into waves below.

Spirit and Matter lie back upon the cosmic waters and produce the twenty-four elements that are essential to experience. These elements are represented as small multicolored beings. Among the twenty-four elements are the five senses: sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell.

Spirit and Matter come together to form the sleeping Vishnu, from whose navel a magnificent lotus flower grows. Brahma, the Hindu god of creation, emerges from the lotus, confused about how he came to be there and questioning his origin.

In looking for his origin and his creator, Brahma searches the stalk and petals of the lotus for two hundred years. When he does not find the answer to his questions in the outside world, he sits within the center of the lotus and directs his search inward, meditating for twelve years.

Not pictured: Vishnu reveals to Brahma that Shiva is not only Brahma’s creator but also the creator of everything in the universe.
PART III

Giving Visual Form to the Formless

How can you express something visually if it has no physical form? Look closely at the series of paintings on the poster. Examine the images again after you read the information above. What are some of the things with no physical form that the artist has shown? Below, note all the examples in these paintings.

Example:
Image #1: The Absolute (Brahman) is depicted as a field of gold.

Using your knowledge of artworks, advertising, and other examples of visual communication, list at least five things you have seen in which visual form is given to concepts that have no physical form. Such concepts are called abstract and include emotions and ideas, such as love, evil, and time.

Example:
What is it? Light bulb (Usually shown over a person’s head)
What does it depict? Gives visual form to the birth of an idea

How have other artists represented abstract concepts in visual form? What abstract concept would you choose to represent? Have other artists represented that concept in visual form? If so, how would you do it differently?

VOCABULARY

Abstract
Expressing an idea that has no physical form.

Brahma
A primary Hindu deity considered to be the creator of the universe. Brahma should not be confused with Brahma, the Hindu concept of the Absolute.

Brahman
In the Hindu tradition, the all-pervading, formless, and eternal essence of the universe from which all things come and to which they all return. Brahmā is often described in the Sanskrit language as neti, neti (“not this, not that”) because it is beyond the ability of humans to understand it.

Esoteric
Secret knowledge that is passed down only to those who are deemed worthy or are initiated into a tradition.

Meditation
The mental discipline of focused concentration, with the goal of achieving spiritual awareness.

Shiva
A primary Hindu deity, Shiva plays many roles. In some stories he is considered the creator of the universe. Nath yogis identified with Shiva because he meditates and practices yoga.

Vishnu
A primary Hindu deity, Vishnu is worshiped as the protector and preserver of the universe. Many Hindu religious stories recount Vishnu’s appearance on earth to save it from demons, among other things.

Yoga
In Hindu traditions, yoga is a form of spiritual, mental, and physical conditioning that requires strict concentration and discipline of mind and body, with the goal of liberation from worldly concerns. For the Naths, who originated and practiced hatha yoga, the goal was to unite the individual body with Brahma, which resulted in immortality, supernatural powers, and the ability to be all-knowing.
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Freer and Sackler Collections
www.asia.si.edu/collections/default.htm

Online Exhibitions
www.asia.si.edu/exhibitions/online.htm

Tour Information
www.asia.si.edu/education/ToursForStudents.htm

Online Resources: Publications
Asian Art Connections: A Resource for Educators
www.asia.si.edu/education/onlineguides.htm
An online version of the semiannual newsletter.

The Art and Archaeology of Ancient China: A Teacher’s Guide
www.asia.si.edu/education/onlineguides.htm

The Art of Buddhism: A Teacher’s Guide
www.asia.si.edu/education/ArtofBuddhism.pdf

Arts of the Islamic World: A Teacher’s Guide
www.asia.si.edu/education/islam.pdf

The Arts of Japan: A Teacher’s Guide
www.asia.si.edu/education/onlineguides.htm

Devi: The Great Goddess (Hinduism)
www.asia.si.edu/education/devi/index.htm

Japan: Images of a People
smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japan_images_people/index.html

Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion
www.asia.si.edu/education/pujaonline/puja/start.htm

Teacher Resources for Sale
Sackler Gallery Shops
All teacher resources listed below are for sale in the Sackler shops. Order these materials online at www.freersacklershop.com, by phone at 202.633.0535, or by fax at 202.633.9838. In addition to Freer and Sackler publications, the shops also stock children’s books on Asia that our education department recommends.

Intersections: Japanese Art and the West
A Teacher’s Guide
Appropriate for grades 9–12. Explore the ways that Japanese art and Western art have intersected, beginning in the late nineteenth century. $20

The Arts of Japan: A Teacher’s Guide
Appropriate for grades 4–12. $20

The Art and Archaeology of Ancient China: A Teacher’s Guide
Appropriate for grades 3–12. $20

The Art of Buddhism: A Teacher’s Guide
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Appropriate for grades 4–12. $20

Silk Road Resource Packet
Appropriate for grades 4–12. $12

Video
Puja: Expressions of Hindu Devotion
Appropriate for grades 6–12. This award-winning video introduces Hindu worship through moving images and interviews. 1996. 20 min. (close captioned) $10

CD-ROM
Chi’s Adventure in Ancient China
Appropriate for grades 3–6. Join Chi the chimera as he introduces viewers to ancient Chinese civilization through objects from the Freer and Sackler collections. $10

CD
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An audio CD of stories told by Freer and Sackler volunteers who have cultural ties to countries along the ancient Silk Road. Features stories from China, Japan, Turkey, and Bangladesh. $10

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THE FREER GALLERY OF ART AND ARTHUR M. SACKLER GALLERY at the Smithsonian Institution together form the national museums of Asian art for the United States. The Freer Gallery also houses a collection of American art from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the world’s most important collection of works by James McNeill Whistler.

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TOURS

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To request a tour, please submit a tour request form online at www.asia.si.edu/education/TourRequestForm.htm.
In our popular family program, children ages eight to fourteen accompanied by an adult use an activity book to explore an exhibition and then create a related art project to take home. These free family programs take place on the dates and times listed at www.asia.si.edu and do not require a reservation. This fall, ImaginAsia offers programs related to Garden and Cosmos: The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur.