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What: “Yoga: The Art of Transformation”

Where: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

When: Oct. 19, 2013–Jan. 26, 2014

Description: All over the world, millions of people practice yoga to find spiritual insight or better health. Practitioners and non-practitioners alike are aware of yoga's origins in India. But very few know of yoga's goals and means of transforming body and consciousness, its profound philosophical underpinnings, its presence within Jain, Buddhist, and Sufi as well as Hindu traditions, or the surprisingly diverse social roles played by male and female yogic practitioners over centuries.

The Art of Transformation, the world's first exhibition about yoga's visual history, will explore its diverse meanings from its early roots to its emergence on the global stage. 90 masterpieces of sculpture and painting, dating from the third to the 18th century, will illuminate yoga's central tenets as well as its obscured histories. Some 40 colonial and early modern photographs, books, and films will reveal how yogis became despised during the 19th century and how yoga was transformed in early 20th-century India as a democratic practice open to all.

Objects: *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* includes objects from 25 museums and private collections in India, Europe and the United States, amassing one of the most remarkable surveys of Indian art.

Date range: 1st century CE–1940, with a majority from the 8th–18th century CE

Object count: 134 objects

Media and format (select list): Stone, bronze and marble sculpture, paintings, illustrated manuscripts, scroll, photographs, film, books and printed materials, posters and postcards

Curator: Debra Diamond, *Associate Curator of South and Southeast Asian Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

Tour: The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery will be the first venue for *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*. Additional tour locations include:

- San Francisco Asian Art Museum, San Francisco: Feb. 21–May 25, 2014
- Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland: June 22–Sep. 7, 2014

**Exhibition
Overview:**

Introduction

Sculptures and paintings of human and divine teachers of yoga introduce the exhibition and show yoga transcending boundaries of gender and religion.

Highlights include a luminous marble sculpture of a meditating Jina and a shimmering Jodhpur painting of *Siddhas* (associated with hatha yoga) creating the cosmos.

Tantra

Temple sculptures illuminate tantra and its incorporation into yogic traditions.

Highlights include a voluptuous flying yogini from north India, a trio of life-size yogini goddesses from a south Indian temple, and two extraordinary sculptures of the skull-bearing deity Bhairava.

The Path of Yoga

Two galleries explore the means and practices of achieving yogic transformation in pre-modern India.

Highlights include a powerful Chola dynasty bronze of the Hindu deity Narasimha meditating with a *yogapatta* (strap), ten folios from the first illustrated treatise of yoga postures (1600–1604), mesmerizing court paintings of masters of yoga embodying the cosmos and monumental images of the subtle (yogic) body.

Yoga in the Indian Imagination 1570–1830

Exquisite paintings and manuscripts created in Hindu and Islamic courts reveal how yogis became deeply and diversely embedded in Indian culture. Many draw upon social perceptions of yogis that were pervasive for centuries.

Highlights include an exquisite bifolio from the Gulshan Album of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, the spellbinding Yogini with Mynah from Bijapur and superb paintings of yogis as battling ascetics, romantic heroes, or as the serene embodiments of ragas (classical music compositions).

Yoga in the Transnational Imagination 1850–1940

This gallery explores the exoticized and often sinister yogi that dominated public discourse and popular representations between 1850 and 1940.

Highlights include an albumen print of “yogis” staged and photographed by Collin Murray (for Bourne and Shepherd) and Thomas Edison’s Hindoo Fakir, the first movie made of an Indian subject.

Modern Transformations

This exhibition concludes with the yoga renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th century when the rudiments of modern yoga — as non-sectarian, as a health practice and as posture sequences — developed in India.

Highlights include two of Thomas Harrison's photographs of Swami Vivekananda, who brought an ecumenical and philosophically focused yoga to America in 1893, and what may be the earliest film of Krishnamacharya and his student B.K.S. Iyengar demonstrating posture sequences.

Events: **Title:** Yoga and Visual Culture: An Interdisciplinary Symposium

Type: Symposium

Date: Nov. 22–23, 2013

Location: Meyer Auditorium, Freer Gallery of Art

Description: Explore yoga's histories, meanings, transformations, and practices through the lens of visual culture at this public symposium. Twenty years ago, yoga was largely understood as a monolithic and unchanging tradition. While today we have a far richer understanding of yoga's historical transformations and trans-sectarian manifestations, visual culture—ranging from sectarian, court, and popular imagery to architecture and photography—remains its least-explored archival resource.

Over a two-day period, fifteen scholars from a range of disciplines will present new research on diverse aspects of yoga's visual culture. Five symposium sessions are organized around topics such as "Yoga and Place" and "Yoga and Print Culture." Individual paper presentations will alternate with discussions and time to explore the landmark Sackler exhibition *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*.

Catalogue: "Yoga: The Art of Transformation" will be available October 2013, published by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution (*dist. Smithsonian Books/Random House; available in paperback and cloth; 360 pp.*).

Description: "Yoga: The Art of Transformation," the world's first examination of yoga's visual history, will explore yoga's meanings and transformations over time; its goals of spiritual enlightenment, worldly power and health; and the beauty and profundity of Indian art. Unique among scholarly art catalogues, "Yoga" speaks to the global yoga market and is the first art book to provide a visual context for yoga's origins and developments. In addition to seven major essays, the book includes 250- to 1,500-word catalogue entries describing each artwork or related group of artworks (e.g., folios from a single manuscript or works related to a yogic practice, such as meditation). These entries illuminate the works' individual qualities by situating them, for the first time, within intersecting historical, artistic, and yogic networks.

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Organization: *Yoga: The Art of Transformation* is organized by Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian.

Lenders:

- Catherine Glynn Benkaim, Beverly Hills, California
- The British Museum, London
- The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ireland
- Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland
- Robert J. Del Bontà, San Francisco
- Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit
- William M. and Gloria Huyck, Jr., Los Angeles
- Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur, India
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis
- Museum Reitberg Zürich, Zürich, Switzerland
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
- National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, Maryland
- National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia
- National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland
- Cynthia Hazen Polsky, New York, New York
- Margot and Thomas J. Pritzker, Chicago
- Dr. Kenneth X. Robbins, Potomac, Maryland
- San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio
- Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin
- Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museen für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin
- Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Berlin
- Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco
- Victoria and Albert Museum, London
- Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia
- Walters Art Museum, Baltimore
- Wellcome Library, Asian Collection, London

Hours: 10 am–5:30 pm daily, except Dec. 25

Admission: Free