

***From Floor to Ceiling:***

***A symposium on South Asian floor-drawings and murals***

Half day, Friday, 25 and full day Saturday, 26 October 2013

Boardroom, University of Westminster (309 Regent Street, London W1B 2HW)

(Includes an external trip to the The British Library (96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB))

CREAM and SAAG are delighted to be joining forces to run this one and a half day symposium in Autumn 2013. The purpose of this event is to spark debate and encourage collaboration and exchange on the vast but, thus far, under-researched area of South Asian floor-drawing and mural traditions and their contemporary manifestations.

Anna L. Dallapicola has pointed out in *Indian Painting: The Lesser Known Traditions* (2011) that until not very long ago, scholarship in the West has largely focused on the courtly arts of India, especially the Mughal, Deccani, Rajasthani and Pahari painting traditions. Yet, there are rich and vibrant arts that unfold in myriad contexts. Several of these arts, which are frequently assigned to the category of 'folk' or 'tribal' arts, take place on domestic floors, walls and ceilings. These spaces ensure that the art remains ephemeral, thus rendering documentation and study all the more problematic, notwithstanding the fact that as a part of social rituals, such practices oftentimes continue to be located on the margins of academic enquiry. Although this is not always the case, in many instances, floor-drawing and mural traditions are closely interlinked, and the relationship between the two may sometimes be pertinent.

Other concerns may touch upon the transitions of such arts from the domestic context to public spaces, or from amateur makers to professional artists, where oftentimes the purpose of the activity is radically changed, and where the ephemeral becomes permanent for the purpose of a market. As the makers rarely call themselves artists, issues may be raised about the validity of approaches which argue that such practices should be regarded as art. We are keen to encourage such debate, as international scholarship in this area is nascent, and such discussion will help formulate more informed ideas. The ephemerality of these traditions also warrants a closer scrutiny of the materials used – their durability, or lack of it – bringing issues of heritage, preservation and conservation to the fore. This area of research lends itself to diverse approaches, including anthropological and ethnographic perspectives, art historical interpretations, aesthetic views, practitioner-based narratives that may focus on the creative process, gendered accounts and material culture studies. *From Floor to Ceiling*, which proposes to bring out the varied approaches that may be adopted in the study of floor- and wall-drawings and paintings, includes screenings of short films and a wide range of papers.

**Malini Roy** explains William Archer's discovery of Maithil wall paintings in Bihar in 1934; during a special viewing, she shows us the British Library's holdings of Archer's photographs, Maithil works collected by Archer and new works presented to the institution in 1975. **Gauri Bharat** explores how domestic plastering and painting practices contribute fundamentally to Santal notions of dwelling in Jharkhand. **Vijaya Nagarajan** provides an overview of key ideas embedded in the *kolam* ritual of Tamil Nadu (e.g. ritual pollution, auspiciousness and ecology), before explaining the four primary ways in which mathematical properties have intersected with the design geometry of this art form. **Sanyukta Shrestha** analyses Caa-Cin, a door-painting tradition carried out by the Pun artists in the Newah community of Nepal. He explains the symbology inherent in the distinct Buddhist and Hindu traditions of the Newahs before

critically examining how contemporary practices are threatening the livelihood of the Puns.

**Aurogeeta Das** reveals how notions of authenticity and innovation in Andhra Pradesh's floor-drawing practices are arrived at, by fore-grounding *muggu*-makers' discourse on ritualism, aesthetics, materiality and temporality. **Richa Navani** considers the symbols used in early pan-Indian mural traditions and investigates their use in the work of India's Neo-Tantric artists, especially by questioning the idea of private and public spaces in art and symbolism. **Anna Laine** and **Hari Rajaledchumy** explore the absence of floor-drawings in London's public spaces among the Sri Lankan and Tamil Diaspora, by presenting findings from a participatory art event that they co-organised with a community centre in a suburban shopping area.

**Anjali Duhan Gulia** examines the decline in Haryana's contemporary wall painting tradition by focussing on how the once communitarian rural Jat wall-paintings are being replaced by mass-produced popular images. **Deepak Shimkhada** discusses a relatively unknown group of mural paintings from the Hanuman Dhoka Palace in Kathmandu, arguing that on the basis of Nepal's tumultuous dynastic history and the artistic style in which they were created, it could be established that they were painted circa 1848. **Tracey Black** questions how William Archer's 'discovery' and documentation of Maithil wall paintings in Bihar isolated them from a wider set of interlinked domestic ritual practices, leading eventually to commercialised folk painting, which she also examines critically.

**John Reeve** from the Institute of Education will moderate a round-table discussion before **David Park** presents a lecture on the Courtauld Institute of Art's mural conservation project in Bhutan, carried out in collaboration with the Bhutanese government's Department of Culture. Professor Park explains the many complex challenges involved and considers the historical and technological reasons for the decline in Bhutan's wall painting standards since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

We are especially pleased to be collaborating with the South Asian Literature Festival, which will be running events concurrently with our symposium. Further updates about this exciting collaboration and other details will be posted here as they develop in the run-up to the event, so please make sure you check this page regularly in the coming weeks. There has recently been a growing awareness of the lesser-known traditions, to use Dallapiccola's phrase. *From Floor to Ceiling* hopes to contribute to such interests by foregrounding the variety of arts in diverse spaces in South Asia.

Please circulate to anyone you think may be interested in attending.

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*Centre for Research and Education in Art & Media (CREAM), University of Westminster*

CREAM has a portfolio of research across the disciplines of visual arts, ceramics, photography, film, experimental media, music and fashion. CREAM has been a key participant in debates on practice-based research in audio-visual media and was a founding member of the AHRC-funded initiative, AVPhD. CREAM runs a lively programme of seminars and visiting speakers, and has organised ground-breaking conferences and symposia in collaboration with other institutions. These include 'The Making of a Modern Indian Artist-Craftsman: Devi Prasad' (book launch, talk and conversation); 'Indian Arts on Film' (seminar and screenings); 'Forgotten Era: Parsi Theatre and Early Indian Cinema' (talk and discussion); *Bhopali* (film screening and discussion); and 'Evolving African Film Cultures: Local and Global Experiences' (a conference).

*South Asian Arts Group (SAAG)*

SAAG is an informal network of academics, curators, artists and arts professionals, who share an interest in the arts and visual/material cultures of South Asia and the diaspora. SAAG provides a space for interaction, conversation and exchange for people interested in South Asian arts in the UK. Through an annual gathering – held at a different location in the UK each year – participants of SAAG will foster contacts, partnerships and friendships with a view to building interactions across different disciplines and approaches to South Asian arts.