

Material Culture and the Making of South Asia II (A006810)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 6.0

Study time 180 h

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2)

English

Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

De Clercq, Eva

LW21

lecturer-in-charge

Mondini, Sara

LW21

co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

[Master of Science in Teaching in Languages\(main subject Oriental Languages and Cultures\)](#)

crdts

offering

6

A

[Master of Arts in Oriental Languages and Cultures\(main subject India\)](#)

6

A

[Exchange Programme Oriental Languages and Cultures](#)

6

A

Teaching languages

English

Keywords

Material culture, visual culture, South Asia, SWANA region, art, architecture, museums, collections, identity, modern art, contemporary art, Indian art, arts under the British Raj

Position of the course

This course examines modern and contemporary South Asian art within a historical and critical framework, focusing on the formation of artistic practices from the colonial period to the present. It engages with visual production in relation to imperialism, nationalism, and global modernity, addressing artistic movements, institutions, and modes of patronage. The course is positioned within broader academic debates on art history, postcolonial studies, and visual culture, and contributes to current discussions on the decolonization of art-historical narratives and methodologies.

Contents

The course moves from early European encounters with South Asian art to the more complex, though still partial, appreciations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century artistic production. An analysis of European perceptions introduces the imperial project of elite "westernization" and traces artistic developments from colonial influence to the construction of Hindu national identity. Particular attention is devoted to artistic production during the Raj, examined through the interplay of colonialism and nationalism and the tensions, relationships, and contradictions that shaped the introduction of Naturalism, Primitivism, and Modernism in India. Through the study of colonial cultural institutions, nationalist ideologies, and artistic movements, the course explores the role of patronage and artistic production in the formation of the Indian nation and of "Indian identity." The course examines artistic developments from early European encounters with South Asian art through colonial and nationalist formations to contemporary practices, including the global recognition of Indian artists and the establishment of the Kochi Biennale. While maintaining its primary focus on South Asia, the course also considers selected artistic and historical connections with the wider Indian Ocean world and the SWANA (SouthWest Asia and North Africa) region. Topics addressed include the decline of "Oriental art," the emergence of women's

voices in Indian art, issues and trends related to the musealization of modern and contemporary art in South Asia, the biennialization of art, so-called "Adivasi productions," and the critical problems connected to their definition. Attention is also given to transregional exchanges and cultural networks linking South Asia to neighboring regions across the Indian Ocean.

Initial competences

The course does not require specific competences, the necessary background for the comprehension of the proposed analysis will be provided.

Final competences

- 1 To be able to critically analyze modern and contemporary artistic production in South Asia.
- 2 To have the ability to understand and describe artistic movements, tendencies, and dynamics from the second half of the nineteenth century to the early twenty-first century, together with their underlying ideologies
- 3 To be capable of analyzing works of art within their historical and political contexts, taking into account their role in processes of identity formation.
- 4 To understand the role of early museum collections of modern and contemporary art in India in the promotion of artists and movements.
- 5 To critically reflect on the political, social, and religious implications of artistic developments, as well as on the exhibition policies of galleries and museums.
- 6 To recognize the importance of visual production for the study of societies and historical periods.
- 7 To engage critically with theoretical approaches formulated by art critics and art historians.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

The course will adopt a thematic approach. Through the analysis of movements, art objects and poetics, discussions and a critical approach will be encouraged. There will be no recordings of the classes.

Study material

Type: Syllabus

Name: Syllabus

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Type: Slides

Name: Slides

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

References

Essential readings:

Course notes and slides

Selected chapters from:

- Brown, Rebecca M. Art for a modern India, 1947-1980. Duke University Press, 2009;
- Dadi, Iftikhar. Modernism and the art of Muslim South Asia. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. The Making of a New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850-1920. Cambridge University Press, 2017;
- Lenssen, Annela, Sarah Rogers, and Nada M. Shabout, eds. Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018;
- Mitter, Partha. Much maligned monsters: A history of European reactions to Indian art. University of Chicago Press, 1992;

- Mitter, Partha. Art and nationalism in colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental orientations. Cambridge University Press, 1994;
 - Mitter, Partha. The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde, 1922-47. Reaktion Books, 2007;
 - Sunderason, Sanjukta. Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization. Stanford University Press, 2020.
- Further readings will be indicated during the course.

Course content-related study coaching

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Presentation, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

A written assessment (2.500 word) (essay): an essay on a topic agreed with the professor and which explores one of the topics discussed during the lectures, or a topic related in some way to the course contents, to be submitted before the oral examination (before the start of the exam period). The professor is available to provide guidance and any necessary in-depth studies. A 15-minute presentation: a short composition on a theme agreed with the professor and which deepens one of the productions or themes discussed during the lessons to be presented to the class. Assessment will be by means of the assigned works and of a final oral examination (4/5 questions) on the approached themes; great importance will be given to the students' attendance and active participation to lessons and discussions. The acquired knowledge, the appropriate use of technical vocabulary, the ability to critically approach the proposed readings and themes and bring them in relation to the acquired knowledges will be assessed during the final examination.

Calculation of the examination mark

Active participation and presentation 20%

Essay: 30%

Oral examination: 50%

Facilities for Working Students

Class attendance: To be discussed with the teacher

Online facilities: Lectures will not be recorded but sufficient online learning material will be provided

Catch-up exam: It is possible to take the exam at a different time within/outside the regular exam period

Feedback: Possibility to receive feedback at another time: by appointment

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and Philosophy