

South Asia is a region known for a truly amazing diversity of humanity, ecology, and cultures. In particular, it is home to some of the world's most historical and innovative artistic traditions. Trying to account for many different modes and media of expression, not to mention their reception and circulation, has led scholars to reconsider how we talk about art. The result was the development of a new field, visual cultural studies.

Visual culture studies is deeply interdisciplinary, drawing on art history, media studies, anthropology, cultural studies, feminist theories, and philosophy, to name only a few. Visual cultural scholars often use these varied fields to challenge distinctions that would prevent someone from considering how different media, old and new, interact and influence one another. It also subverts divisions between “high” and “low” cultural forms.

In blurring traditional categories of inquiry and description, visual cultural studies attempts to move beyond simplistic formulations of representation and reception to consider the complex ways in which visual forms circulate, morph, and acquire new meanings. It is therefore as much interested in marketing and advertisements as traditional crafts or contemporary art.

This exhibit draws inspiration from visual cultural studies to represent some of the expressive traditions of South Asia, which cumulatively span thousands of miles and as many years. In bringing together any selection of visual culture there is spectrum of modern to traditional. While there is often an impulse to label media as either traditional or modern by contrasting, for example, painting and photography, this exhibit hopes to trouble some of these assumptions.

Items in this exhibit represent a wide variety of media and expressive traditions from across the region. Placing them together allows unexpected synergies and similarities to become apparent even as sub-regional particularities are evident. As you examine the items collected here, notice how certain themes manifest across media and sub-regions. But also pay attention to how each instance of the theme is inflected by these differences.

The majority of items here are part of the University of Texas at Austin Libraries' collections, but represent only a small portion of library holdings. Interested viewers can find more items through the library website and this exhibit's bibliography, available online.

South Asian painting has long relied on techniques of framing and zoning to present a narrative of events. The adoption of comics and graphic novels is thus not entirely surprising, but does represent new, global influences in storytelling and illustration technique.

On this shelf:

Lent, John. *Asian Comics*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2015.

Selections from *Mythology Series*. New Delhi: Campfire Graphic Novels. 2010-13.

Tales of Hanuman. New Delhi: Amar Chitra Katha, 1994.

Vehicle art is a visual form that is both deeply modern and traditional. Many vehicle artists are classically trained and utilize styles or themes specific to a particular area or lineage, but they are just as likely to incorporate images and scenes from popular culture.

On this shelf:

Lasnier, France. *Rickshaw Art in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: University Press, 2002.

Elias, Jamal. *On Wings of Diesel: Trucks, Identity and Culture in Pakistan*. Oxford: Oneworld Press, 2011.

While photography may seem like a preeminently modern medium, many photographers in the region are inspired by traditional South Asian media, particularly painting and lithography.

On this shelf:

Facsimile from Pinney, Christopher. *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Desai, Poulomi and Parminder Sekhon. *Red Threads: The South Asian Queer Connection in Photographs*. London: Millivres Prowler, 2003.

Punjabi, Suresh with Christopher Pinney. *Artisan Camera: Studio Photography from Central India*. Chennai: Tara Books, 2013.

Folk arts are widely popular in much of South Asia. Of all the media here they are perhaps the most loyal to tradition, but are continually developing to accommodate new subjects and themes.

On this shelf:

Facsimile from Dayal, Bharati. *Madhubani Art*. Indian Art Series. New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2015.

Askari, Nasreen and Rosemary Crill. *Colours of the Indus: Costume and Textiles of Pakistan*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1997.

Shelle. *Heroes, Gundas, Vamps & Good Girls: Hindi Pulp Cover Art*. Chennai: Blaft Publications, 2009.

South Asia is famous for the intricacy and beauty of its many sculptural traditions, many of which date back thousands of years. The care for detail is a feature that other forms mimic from their sculptural forebears.

On this shelf:

Cummins, Joan, ed. *Vishnu: Hinduism's Blue-Skinned Savior*. Nashville: Frist Center for Visual Arts, 2011.

Tingley, Nancy with Nutandhar Sharma. *Celestial Realms: The Art of Nepal from California Collections*. Sacramento: Crocker Art Museum, 2012.

Painting is a medium with a long and rich history in South Asia. Classically trained painters can be found doing everything from faithful recreations of famous images or reviving old styles with new techniques to experimenting with new technologies.

On this shelf:

Facsimile from Bangdel, Dina, ed. *Embodied Enlightenment: Samundra Man Singh Shrestha: Contemporary Newar Paubha Paintings*. Kathmandu: Bodhisattva Gallery, 2016.

Bandaranayake, Senake and Albert Dharmasiri. *Sri Lankan Painting in the 20th Century*. Colombo: National Trust of Sri Lanka, 2009.

Wille, Simone. *Modern Art in Pakistan: History: Tradition, Place*. New York: Routledge, 2015.