

In the Shadow of the Golden Age: Art and Identity in Asia from Gandhara to the Modern Age

Edited by Julia A.B. Hegewald

This volume examines and debates the validity and usefulness of the concept of the golden age when investigating, structuring and categorising Asian and Islamic art. The book contains contributions from fifteen renowned international specialists in the visual arts and humanities working on material from a wide range of periods and regions throughout Asia and the Islamic world. Instead of concentrating on the so-called 'high points' and 'golden ages' of art, which have so far stood at the centre of art-historical enquiries, this text focuses on visual expressions of confrontation with the 'other' during times of change. These challenging but artistically often very fertile periods were marked by intense efforts by communities in search of new identities. Through their art and frequently through the re-use of old symbols in new settings they have succeeded in redefining themselves so as to strengthen their religious, cultural or political position. In the history of art, these less investigated phases raise new issues, which contribute significantly to the discipline.

What happened to Gandharan art after its main flowering came to an end in its traditional heartland? How does Hindu temple architecture react to a majority Christian cultural environment in Goa? In which ways do new rulers and religions, for instance, in medieval South India, Thailand and at Angkor, relate to the sacred places and icons of previous cultures and religious groups and how do the deposed and dispossessed deal with their loss and react to the new?

The confrontation with the 'other' has been particularly pronounced during periods of colonisation. How did British officials and Indian artists commissioned by them represent the different facets of the empire, how was world art exhibited and interpreted in the West and how were (and are) categories such as 'masterpiece' or 'golden age' employed to classify and judge art? A particularly fertile area of enquiry is also the modern age in which traditions appear to be threatened by globalisation and changes in value.

The diverse examples of modern artistic expressions and from traditional art under threat, taken from the Islamic world, from India, Nepal, Tibet, Cambodia and Thailand presented in this volume, suggest impressive acts of survival and creative adaptation, which enable continuity and the endurance of forms, meanings and practices under new disguises far beyond periods defined so far as 'golden ages'.

The book has been enriched with a Foreword by Partha Mitter, has a valuable glossary and is beautifully illustrated. It offers novel insights to the specialist and introduces a fascinating new area of enquiry to the general reader.

Contributors:

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