



VILLE DE
GENÈVE

PRESSRELEASE

Exhibition
Flavours of the Arts
From Mughal India to Bollywood
Musée d'ethnographie de Genève – MEG Conches
27th of May 2011 – 18th of March 2012

Through a selection of exceptional objects and documents, the exhibition "Flavours of the Arts" looks at the close relationship between music, painting and film in the culture of Northern India. The arts are seen as dynamic processes reflecting changes in a society which is both anchored in its traditions and receptive to modern impulses. It teems with forms and styles which show the vitality of a culture in continual metamorphosis.

Classical India produced many treatises on aesthetics. They often expound the theory of the nine flavours (*nava rasa*) underlying the emotions, which are thought to be inherent in all artistic expression. It was in the time of the Mughal Empire, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, that court artists and musicians developed the most refined applications of this theory, as is shown by the miniatures and instruments in the first section of the exhibition.

Are there equivalents to be found in the folk traditions of rural India or in recent Indian films? Visitors will find clues as they explore the second section presenting pictures sung by Bengali village women and then plunge into the resolutely contemporary world of the Bollywood film studios.

Through its original approach and extensive use of audiovisual documents, the exhibition calls on all the senses. Its rich and varied content invites visitors to taste the many flavours of the arts in India.

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EXHIBITION TEXTS

THE FLAVOURS OF MUGHAL INDIA

After the conquests of Genghis Khan's Turkic and Mongol hordes in the thirteenth century and then Timur in the following century, the Mughal Empire was founded in northern India in 1536 by Bâbur, one of Timur's descendants. It lasted over three centuries. This long Muslim hegemony left an enduring imprint on art and culture in India. The most famous political figure in this period was the emperor Akbar, who came to the throne in 1556. Indian but also Persian, Turkish, Arab and even European artists and thinkers mingled in the court of this enlightened despot. Music, stringed instrument making and painting flourished in Akbar's court: Miyân Tânsen, a highly talented singer, musician and composer is held to have renovated the art of music in the sixteenth century, while the Persian artists Mir Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd as-Samad helped establish the art of Mughal miniatures.

This golden age of the arts continued through the reigns of Akbar's son Jahangir, and grandson, Shâh Jahân, before declining under the intolerant, belligerent emperor Aurangzeb. 1857 marked the end of the Mughal India and its incorporation in the British Empire. But many families of painters and musicians continued to draw on this source, transmitting their art from generation to generation and developing its forms down to the present day.

Stringed Instruments in Northern India

Musical instruments were mentioned in the *Vedas*, India's earliest sacred texts. Musical scenes frequently figure in Greco-Buddhist low reliefs carved over two thousand years ago, while the *Nâtya-shâstra*, a treatise on the performing arts written at the beginning of the Christian era, first divided musical instrument into four families:

<i>tata</i> (taut, stretched):	stringed instruments (chordophones)
<i>avanaddha</i> (covered):	drums (membranophones)
<i>susira</i> (hollow):	wind instruments (aerophones)
<i>ghana</i> (solid):	cymbals, bells, gongs, etc. (idiophones)

The *râgamâlâ*, Miniatures on a Musical Theme

The close links between music and painting can be seen in the art of miniature painting which flourished in the Mughal courts. *Râgamâlâ*, literally a "garland of *râga*", is the name given to a pictorial genre which seeks to give visual form to the atmosphere or emotional content of a musical theme. It is expressed in a series of miniatures each representing a *râga* or *râginî*. The *râga* are gods and the *râginî* their 'wives'.

A complete series of *râgamâlâ* is comprised of six *râga*, each with five or six *râginî*. Their themes are highly stereotyped, mainly courtly, martial or bucolic scenes, often focused on a hero (*nâyaka*), a heroine (*nâyikâ*) or a pair of lovers, staged according to the stylistic conventions of the miniaturist's school. The *râgamâlâ* refer explicitly to the theory of the *rasa*, and each *râga* or *râginî* expresses a flavour and a particular aesthetic emotion.

THE COLOUR OF THE SOUNDS

The *rasa* or the Flavours of the Arts

One of the basic notions in Indian aesthetics is *rasa*, which was first mentioned in the *Nāṭya-shāstra*, a treatise on the performing arts probably written at the very beginning of the Christian era. The Sanskrit word *rasa* means the "flavour," "sap" or "essence" of any aesthetic sentiment. Although *rasa* is inherent in the work, its perception – or savouring – triggers in the audience the experience of an emotional state called *bhāva* (nature, state and, by extension, sentiment). For it to develop fully, the work must be performed according to the rules before a discerning, receptive audience. Although it was originally intended for the theatre, the theory of the *rasa* was rapidly applied to the other arts, particularly poetry, music and painting.

Traditionally, there are nine basic *rasa*, but they represent only the dominant trends, which can be associated in many ways, just as a blend of different spices heightens the flavour of a dish. These nine *rasa* are:

<i>shringāra</i>	erotic
<i>hāsyā</i>	comic
<i>karuṇā</i>	pathetic
<i>raudra</i>	furious
<i>vīra</i>	heroic
<i>bhayānaka</i>	terrifying
<i>bībhatsā</i>	disgusting
<i>adbhuta</i>	marvellous
<i>shānta</i>	serene

Tilak Gitai

Tilak Gitai was born in 1949 into a family of artists linked to the maharajas of Bikaner and now lives in Jaipur. He claims affiliation with the Rajput school of Kishangarh, a town located between Jaipur and Ajmer. The refined style of the Kishangarh school developed in the court of the maharajah Kishan Singh (1609-1615) in the seventeenth century. It flowered in the eighteenth century, after the arrival of several painters from the Delhi court, so offers a synthesis of the Mughal and Rajput styles, as Tilak Gitai's miniatures demonstrate today. Ivory painting first emerged in the nineteenth century, apparently as a specialty of the Mughal school in Delhi.

Tilak Gitai's Miniatures

This series of six miniatures on ivory painted by Tilak Gitai was acquired by the MEG in 1987. They show the six main *rāga* according to the Painters' System: *Bhairava*, *Hindola*, *Megha* (or *Megha-malhār*), *Śrī*, *Dīpaka* and *Malkauns*. Gitai's approach is unusual in that he takes the theory of the correspondences between music and painting to the extreme. He has established principles of equivalence, which he applies methodically in his miniatures:

- the association of colours with the notes of the *rāga*,
- the pictorial description of the times of day and the seasons with which the *rāga* are associated,
- the concordance between the number of characters in the painting and the notes of the melodic scale,
- the ordering of the paintings in a series according to their time sequence,
- the choice of musical instruments shown in the painting depending on the musical atmosphere of the *rāga* depicted.

Music

Indian music is based on two main notions: melody (*râga*) and rhythm (*tâla*). The notion of harmony as we know it in Europe has never been developed in Indian music.

The *râga*

The term *râga*, which defines a melodic mode, suggests a spiritual mood, in other words, an atmosphere or an emotional climate induced by a particular melodic structure. In technical terms, each *râga* has an ascending (*âroha*) and a descending scale (*avaroha*), each with five to seven notes, based on a ground note which serves as a drone.

In the classical tradition of northern India, the performance of a *râga* leaves room for much improvisation. It is usually divided into two sections: *âlâp* (conversation), with a free rhythm, and *gat* (march, movement), played with a percussion accompaniment.

Each *râga* is associated with a time of day and sometimes to a period in the lunar calendar, a season or a special feast day. These can be seen in the visual representation of the *râga* called *râgamâlâ*.

The *tâla*

The rhythmic structure of a piece of music is called *tâla*. Each *tâla* has a fixed number of beats called *mâtrâ*, some accented and others deadened.

A *tâla* is identified by a basic rhythmic pattern, made up of a series of strokes, on which compositions and rhythmic variations are constructed. These compositions are memorised with the help of conventional syllables, each corresponding to a particular stroke on a drum or rhythmic instrument.

MINSTRELS OF RAJASTHAN

Bhopâ and Bhopî

Bhopâ and Bhopî are Rajasthan's wandering storytellers. They belong to the Nayak Muslim community and go from village to village, usually in couples, singing the epic tale of the hero Pabujî. The villagers often call on them when they are stricken by illness or misfortune, because they believe in the prophylactic virtues of the story. They unroll a long strip of painted canvas called a *pad* and attach it to two stakes. Pabujî and his four companions are in the centre of the painting, surrounded by smaller scenes telling the main episodes of the tale. The performance usually begins in the early evening and can go on all night. The singer plays the fiddle *râvanhatthâ*, while his wife, also a singer, holds an oil lamp near the canvas to light up the episode he is singing about.

The Legend of Pabujî

Pabujî was the son of Prince Dadhal Rathor and the celestial nymph Deval. He is said to have lived in the village of Kulu, near Jodhpur in Rajasthan, in the 14th century. When he was twelve, his mother gave him a mare. In return, Pabujî promised to protect her. His brother-in-law Khici was jealous and stole Deval's cattle. Pabujî then kept his promise: he postponed his marriage, set off to confront Khici and victoriously brought the herd back to his mother. Khici was furious and came back with his army to attack and decimate Pabujî's clan. Pabujî escaped but his brother, Buro, was killed. Buro's widow gave birth to a son, named Rupnath, then threw herself on her husband's funeral pyre. When he turned twelve, Rupnath met Deval, who told him the truth about his origins. Rupnath took his revenge by killing Khici. He is still revered as a hero today.

SINGING PICTURES OF BENGAL

The Painted Scrolls of the Women of Naya

The Patua or Chitrakar are a Moslem community living in the village of Naya in West Bengal. They practice a tolerant form of Islam, impregnated with Sufism and Hindu spirituality and are specialised in the art of *pana*, singing pictures. This tradition, which seemed to be dying out, was recently revived by the women of the village, who paint and sing stories inspired by Bengali legends and great epics like the *Mahābhārata*. They have enriched their repertoire with social themes, such as hygiene, contraception, AIDS or the exploitation of women, as well as current events or historic disasters: the sinking of the Titanic, the attack on 11 September 2001, war in Afghanistan or the tsunami in 2004. This striking art form forcefully expresses the view that myth and reality merge.

THE LOVE OF BEAUTY

Parvathy and the mystic path of the Bauls of Bengal

Parvathy Baul was born in Bengal into a family of Brahman astrologers. After studying singing and dancing as a child, she was admitted to the University of Shantiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore. That was where she discovered the world of Bengal's wandering mystic bards, the Bauls. She was so intrigued by their lifestyle and teaching that she gave up her studies to follow them. Initiated by the master Sanathan Das Baul, she soon showed exceptional aptitude both spiritually and in her performance of the Bauls' sung poems.

She has never stopped painting and her highly creative work is anchored in the folk arts of Bengal. She is often invited to sing the Baul repertoire in India and throughout the world and has held several exhibitions of her paintings. She divides her time between her wanderings, frequent visits to her masters in the villages of Bengal and periods of retreat devoted to meditation and deepening her art.

The Love of Beauty (*Rûpânurâga*)

This set of six panels was painted by Parvathy Baul for the MEG between 2010 and 2011. In an expressive, luminous style, it illustrates the famous legend of the love of Râdhâ and Krishna, which is very popular in Bengal. Parvathy has a lively, fertile imagination and takes her inspiration from Bengal's erotic and mystic poetry, particularly Jayadeva's emblematic *Gita Govinda*. Entitled *Rûpânurâga*, "The Love of Beauty", the work is not only pictorial but also poetic, musical and choreographic, because the paintings are intended to be sung and danced.

BOLLYWOOD: KINETICS OF THE EMOTIONS

Bollywood films produced in the Indian metropolis of Bombay (Mumbai) are now famous the world over. Yet little is known about the way they are made. Gestures, acting and scenarios are invented through interaction between the actors on the set in front of the camera, rather than when the script is written. Each one of the gestures and micro-expressions that bring the film alive has its importance and meaning. The art of Indian cinema lies in this precision work, in which the least movement – the bat of an eyelid, the slight sway of a hip, a change of direction – conveys a new emotion.

Bollywood Attitude

In India, the actors' postures, attitudes and movements, invented directly on the set, are called *filmi*. Sequences shown in slow motion highlight the importance of gestures and micro-expressions in *filmi* expressiveness. These four sequences have been shot during the making of a choreography. During the shooting of *Takshak* ("The Cobra", director: Govind Nihalani, 1999), the choreographer takes over the set with his team of assistants and invent sequences on the spot, interacting with the director (sitting at the camera). The assistants break down the succession of figures to make them easier for the star to learn. Between the shots, long moments of rehearsal take place, where the assistants give to the choreographer ideas for dance steps before acting as mirrors for the lead actress when the scene is filmed. Most of the time, the dancers are asked to perform the same figures in the background while the lead actress will break the dance step with a *filmi* variation or a small gesture in the foreground.

Rasa Films

This installation gives a demonstration of feelings expressed by two actors, one from popular hindi films (the lookalike of a comedy actor named Johnny Lever) and another one from *Kūṭiyāttam*, a form of dance theatre in Kerala. Both of them mime specific emotions (anger, fear, etc.). Each emotion is related to a specific colour that changes accordingly. Both actors seem to play on similar effects but in fact their approaches to face plasticity are very different. In *Kūṭiyāttam*, the eyebrows, eyes and even the mouth are trained separately by exercises designed to work the face muscles and produce independent movements. Film stars do not go as far as *Kūṭiyāttam* actors in combining micro-movements and breaking down facial expressions. However, slow motion reveals the subtlety of the micro-movements that come into play in *filmi* expressiveness and the necessity for a film actor to produce strong emotional contrasts.

RENDEZ-VOUS AT THE MUSEUM

Exhibition

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From Mughal India to Bollywood

27th of May 2011 – 18th of March 2012

Preview

26 May 2011 at 18 pm

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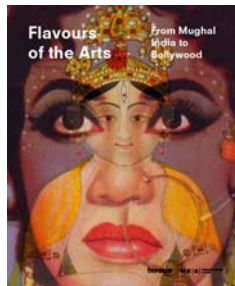
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With its prodigious range of art forms, India fascinates and often disconcerts people who try to pierce its mysteries. This pertinently illustrated book focuses on the close relationship between music, painting and film in northern Indian.

Classical India produced many treatises on aesthetics, expounding or commenting on the theory of the nine flavours (*nava rasa*), the emotions inherent in all forms of artistic expression. It was the court artists and musicians of the Mughal Empire from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries who developed the most refined applications of this theory, as is shown by the miniatures and musical instruments presented in the first part of this catalogue.

Are there equivalents to be found in contemporary Indian art and music, in both rural and urban environments? How do village artists in West Bengal see these "classical" models, when they reinterpret the great myths of the past in their paintings or tell those of the modern world in their own fashion? And what debt do the famous Bollywood film productions owe to the ancient theory of the *rasa*?

These questions are part of a fundamental anthropological exploration of cultural identity and the way relationships are constructed between art and society, tradition and modernity, in all countries and in all periods. Rich and varied in its scope, this intriguing book invites readers to taste the many flavours of Indian arts.

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