

Confronting the Other in the Nationalist Art History Narratives and National Museum of India

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As part of the struggle to achieve Indian Independence and to rewrite Orientalist narratives of history, Indian art scholars in the early decades of the 20th century authored a Nationalist art history that found a voice first in the pages of the art history journal, *Rupam*, and, in the late 1940s, promotion in the National Museum of India.¹ This Nationalist art history was forged out of criticism of earlier art historical narratives of Indian art created by Orientalist scholars around the turn of the century, and was tested in and by the mission, goals, and activities of the National Museum of India. As such, the National Museum became an arena for playing out and examining the separation that had been built, intellectually and philosophically, between India and Britain in the field of art history. This, I contest, was one way that India dealt with its complicated history with a ruling Other as it forged its new independent identity. As the confrontation with the Other was played out in the realm of interpretation and appreciation of Indian art, the museum revealed certain successes and limitations of the rewritten, re-appropriated art history. In my paper I discuss the Nationalist art history as an intellectual separation from colonial rule and the colonial Other, and then discuss the successes and limitations of the promotion of this art history in the institution of the National Museum.

1 The scholars I cite in my thesis in developing the British scholarship at the turn of the century considered themselves “Orientalists” and had training in Indian history and art history. It is for this reason that I, like Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her work, refer to them as such. The authors who contributed to *Rupam*, the art journal upon which I base my argument for the development of the Nationalist art history, are not as individuals necessarily Indian Nationalists. The scholarship in the journal as a whole, however, is – or is sympathetic and supportive of the Nationalist movement – and I use the term “Nationalist” broadly to indicate its anticolonial viewpoint.

Introduction

The story I seek to tell here not an institutional one, but rather it is the story of evolving discourses about object interpretation, and of the National Museum's role in promoting these discourses on a visible, national scale. In the process, the museum was forged out of a dialogue between what appear to be contradictions among these discourses. These contradictions, and the methods the museum's organizers use to handle them, reveal the ways in which art historical narratives – both Orientalist and Nationalist – provided the philosophical and methodological approach of the institution.

This story is an outcome of a new Nationalist art history developed in relation to India's past colonial narratives, and the National Museum's negotiation between them in its project of enshrining the state-sanctioned, post-independence version. It is a story of reworking an art history and giving it tangible shape in the institution of the museum. Although rooted in the art history put forth by *Rupam*, published in India between 1920–1930, the Nationalist art history narrative did not move directly from being housed in the pages of a journal to being enshrined within the walls of a museum. Rather than working completely in concert with the Nationalist art history, the National Museum ironically relied on older, colonial versions as well – those authored by British Orientalists in the late 19th century. The art history narrative that the museum arrived at and packaged was, like the National Museum itself, a result of both “old guard” approaches and Indian Nationalist critiques. My work describes how object narratives and museums can navigate between past, present, and a wished-for future to do the work of symbolically unifying and homogenizing the peoples of a nation, negotiating between a colonial past and an independent present, and in the process explore the complicated ways in which the Other is inextricably intertwined with the nation.

Orientalist Constructions of an Indian Art History

Orientalist constructions of, and relationships with, Indian art objects in the late 19th century tell much about what Britain sought to achieve in the colony. To the colonizers, India was a place that needed to be organized, ordered, and assigned a history.² It was a place, in these interpretations, that was static, unchanged, and deeply religious. It was seen as a form of traditional, pre-industrial Europe, with defined periods of progression and subsequent decline, as well as a place to be studied and observed for its mysterious, Western-influenced past.³ It was available to be mined for the exotic, fine craftsmanship that satisfied European demands for foreign goods and resources.

In my analysis, I draw mainly on the works of Percy Brown, Sir George Birdwood, Sir George Watt, James Fergusson and Hermann Goetz – sources that focus largely on what Birdwood deemed Indian “industrial” arts.⁴ In their writings, these scholars create a gulf

2 Many scholars have focused on these ideas. See Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Romila Thapar, “Politics and the Rewriting of History in India,” *Critical Quarterly* 47 (1-2): 195-203; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

3 The Western-influence I refer to here is the supposed one of the Greco-Romans (see the following section). See the works of Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

4 By “industrial” arts Birdwood referred to decorative, ornamental art forms that, in his opinion, were not governed by the same rules of “decorum” that “high” arts were subject to. Birdwood, according to Mitter, was not attacking the forms of Indian art per se but rather the religious meanings of these forms. Birdwood compared Hindu temples to Gothic cathedrals, stating that the architecture of the former “expressed no noble universal ideas.” When confronted with a statue of the Buddha as a counterargument to his claim that

between fine and ornamental or “industrial” arts – arts with a utilitarian or functional purpose – by discussing the function, history and craft of the pieces, and their religious iconography. Throughout their careers, most of these scholars held to their conviction that fine art did not exist in India. Brown stated in an exhibition catalogue that fine arts in India were “little known and less practiced.”⁵ Birdwood infamously held to his conviction that fine arts did not exist in India – although he produced several monographs on the subject of Indian art, and was instrumental in representing India at the International Exhibitions from 1857 to 1901.

These scholars read Indian art/archaeological objects as “evidence” of particular historical narratives that helped justify imperial rule. They presented the contradictory readings of India-as-past on the one hand – static, unchanging, rooted in religion and unquestioned heritage; and India-as-museum on the other – a somewhat fragile showcase of crafts, goods, and methods.

Firmly Fixed and Incapable of Change: India-as-Past

One way of imagining India in art historical/archaeological scholarship at the turn of the 20th century was that the country, its people, and its people were firmly fixed in the past. Western scholars imagined they had stepped into a zone untouched by the changes that had recently brought such a huge impact upon the European social and political landscapes – namely, industrialization.⁶ The religion, social structure, and cultural environment of India, in this model, had existed as it was for countless years and, because of being set in its backwards-looking ways, was impenetrable to change. Any change at all was a decline from a more pious religious past, rather than progression towards a progressive future.⁷

Scholars locked India in the past in part by the designating objects not as “fine art” but rather as “archaeology.” This designation placed analytical focus not on aesthetics but on religious iconographical motifs. Furthermore, it emphasized a discussion of the utilitarian or functional roles of the pieces, while also denying the presence of any individualized artistic expression. Cultural value in this narrative was assigned to the bygone “golden age” of the Gupta period.⁸ From this supposed “golden age,” Indian art, culture, and social structure had declined into the present “depraved” age contemporary with colonial rule. Past cultural greatness, evidenced in art (“archaeological”) objects, was largely associated with Buddhism and Greco-Roman influence, and its value and influence was seen as unavailable to present-day Indians. When art created in the period contemporary to these scholars is discussed, it is generally to bemoan the decline in artistic skillfulness and to underline the loss of a “golden age” in the past. This mysterious past, it was believed, had to be instead uncovered, retrieved, and interpreted – in a sense, rescued – by colonial scholars. The need for Indian past to be “rescued” reveals a contradiction inherent in this model of India – India is a landscape untouched by modern influences, but, at the same time, is severed from its own distant past of

fine art did not exist in India, Birdwood reportedly stated “a boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionless purity and serenity of soul.” See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922, Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51-52 and corresponding footnote.

5 See Partha Mitter 1994, 285.

6 See the comments of Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 78, 80.

7 See the comments of Birdwood on the “change and decay” of Hindus from the time of the Ramayana to the present, in *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880), 1.

8 The Gupta dynasty lasted from c. 320-mid 400s, although some scholars push it later, into the 700s. Much of the art is from the later period, but by this time the dynasty had lost many of its territories. There is little indication of direct imperial patronage during this period, and many of the statues appear to be commissioned by a variety of individuals.

cultural greatness. The past that India was supposed to have been locked in, then, is a constructed past falling between India's actual history of earlier great empires and India's imagined future of potential industrialization. Throughout this narrative, India is a passive recipient of outside, Western influence – its culture was elevated when Greco-Roman style entered, and degraded when the vehicle for this influence, Buddhism, departed.

In Need of Preservation Against Outside Influences: India-as-Museum

Although on the one hand India needed to be shaped by the cultural and intellectual influences of the West, on the other India was in need of preservation from outside influences. Orientalist scholars at the late 19th/early 20th centuries viewed India itself as a museum of early Europe – untouched and unchanged by industrialization, available for research and observation. Simultaneously, India was sufficiently exotic and fragile enough to need preservation against the stronger forces of the West. Through objects collection, codification, and presentation, this unchanging, exotic “past” civilization could be studied and viewed, and historical narratives interpreted.

These scholars looked to “traditional” societies like India to fill their nostalgic need for a time untouched by industrialization, and any “corrupting” or “cheapening” influence on Indian artists and artisans was seen as negative. They wanted to find an India that was exotic and traditional enough to meet European, industrial-era demands for custom and ritual. India and its arts should ideally represent what Europeans had lost in the Industrial Revolution.⁹ Every “cheap toy and earthen vessel” was, in India, a work of art, because they were hand, not machine, wrought.¹⁰ The maintenance of tradition was no longer available in the West, but, with some care and guidance on the part of the colonizers, it was possible to maintain it in India. India and its art were looked to as a last bastion of simple, uncorrupted, “traditional” style. India was, in a sense, a gallery of old-style ways and old-style arts to be viewed, studied, and preserved (and exploited) by the West. The “quality” of these Indian arts is highly dependent on the pieces’ “traditional” characteristics and lack of “foreign” influence. Indian art was expected to exist as in a museum case; art had to be sufficiently “ancient” and devoid of outside influence. Present-day artists should embrace supposed cultural stagnancy and make their arts and wares as though untouched by the passing of time, in an act of preservation.

These narratives of India-as-past and India-as-museum cast India as a country that, although once great, had fallen into decline. Its present condition was hopelessly separated from both the glorious “golden age” of past empires and from the superior culture of Europe. It was instead not a site for promise, growth, or potential, but a site in need of management, and a site for nostalgia for an invented past and romantic notions of an exotic land. As such, India was unable to author its own histories and to read into them strength, equal status with the West, and active influence on the art histories of other nations and regions. This Orientalist art history, as I show in the following section, was directly contested by later scholars (Indian and Western) in the art journal *Rupam* in efforts to establish an indigenous art history.

9 See the comments of Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80.

10 However, “this is not meant to rank the decorative art of India with the fine art of Europe.” George C. M. Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1880), 131.

Rupam: The Creation of a Nationalist Art History

The scholarly art journal, *Rupam* was published between 1920 and 1930 in conjunction with the Indian Society of Oriental Art of Calcutta, which was led by Rabindranath Tagore.¹¹ The Indian Society of Oriental Art sought to make India an active creator of its own unique artistic tradition.¹² Correspondingly, the editors of *Rupam* sought to rewrite Indian art history and the meanings of historic art pieces. The journal featured articles by Indian and Western scholars in English. During the shaping of the Nationalist movement and the struggle for Indian Independence, *Rupam* worked to construct the types of dialogues that became the basis of the decision-making process in the building of collections and exhibits of the National Museum. Several recurring writers for *Rupam* later played direct roles in the founding and operations of the museum, most notably V.S. Agrawala and C. Sivaramamurti.¹³ Like the National Museum, *Rupam* was a collaboration of Western and Eastern scholars. Indian scholars appearing in the journal were, by and large, Nationalist-minded, Western/English-educated male art scholars, many of whom were – or would soon be – affiliated directly with museums and exhibitions of Indian art. Westerners whose articles appeared in the journal were art scholars who, having been more adequately and rigorously trained in South Asian languages, history, and art styles than their predecessors, wished to set the art history record straight by critiquing and revising earlier, outdated Orientalist scholarship. The desire of these Western scholars to reshape old arguments while projecting a new way of approaching Indian art objects proved useful to the Nationalist agenda.

In authoring a new art history, scholars addressed, discounted, or rewrote earlier notions. *Rupam* scholars then promoted a new art history in line with the Nationalist agenda and vision for the nation. This new indigenous art history was a new way of interpreting Indian art that was based on a continuity with Indian's "glorious" artistic and cultural past, and the affirmation of Indian art as a separate but equal entity in terms of the art of the West – one whose influence played a role in the shaping of world art history. Further, it evoked a cultural unity – or, perhaps, homogeneity – of the nation and its people.

Breaking with the Past: Shaking Off the Outmoded Work of Earlier Scholars

Rupam contributors targeted earlier colonial scholars – Birdwood, Watt, Brown –referring to the "mystic imaginations" and "lack of taste" of these "certain amateurs," stating that this earlier work has resulted in many "mistaken viewpoints."¹⁴ They denounced notions of a lost golden age by drawing on the works and time periods valued by Orientalist scholars and establishing direct links between that past and the present day, denoting the vibrancy and skill alive in contemporary Indian art. Indian art objects were discussed as "fine art" rather than as "archaeology," denoting modernity and progression,¹⁵ making them more immediately comparable to the fine art of the West, and offering a sense of continuity between past and present. The spiritual or religious nature of the objects was de-emphasized; the discussion was

11 After 1930 the journal was published as *The Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*.

12 See Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India: 1850 – 1922: Occidental Orientations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 12-13.

13 Agrawala organized the Delhi Exhibition of Indian Art, 1948; Sivaramamurti managed the transition of the Exhibition's art collection to the National Museum in 1956. Agrawala, originally a Sanskritist, served as antiquities curator of several Indian museums and championed the Hindi language movement. Sivaramamurti acted as keeper of the archaeological collections of the Government Museum in Madras and the India Museum in Calcutta before worked with the National Museum.

14 E. Blochet, "On a Book of Kings of About 1200 A.D.," *Rupam* (41), 1930: 4.

15 See Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 59.

instead moved instead towards one of aesthetics. Historical foreign influence on Indian art was mitigated by focusing instead on the influence that Indian style and art philosophy have had abroad, particularly in East Asia; the history of art in India was effectively rewritten in *Rupam* to be active rather than passive.

Establishing a New Art History in the Pages of *Rupam*

This new indigenous, Nationalist art history recast ideas about past glory and forgotten skill and expanded the heritage of a rich Indian culture into the present day. Since art, as I demonstrate in the following section, would have a new role as cultural educator following Independence, scholars had to emphasize its universal appeal and ability to speak to a wide audience. At the same time, it had to be uniquely Indian, and just beyond the scope of what a Westerner trained in Classical art could grasp (and therefore critique). Being unique meant that Indian art had some tangible value in the discourse on world art history; this value would aid India in its broader struggle for its identity as an independent nation.

Art therefore had to act as a vehicle for teaching and communicating “Indianess” while serving as a repository for Indian identity. The new art history had to signal progress and autonomy, and indicate forward-looking modernity anchored in uniquely Indian tradition. It had to break with stereotypes about Indian backwardness without losing a uniquely Indian identity. In order to do this, it had to first be established as a high cultural form (no longer with the designation of “primitive” or “traditional”), and an equal player with equal import as Western art. Secondly, a grasp of its motifs and designs had to be deemed available to all Indians as part of their cultural heritage. Thirdly, Indian art in the Nationalist art history model had to act as a vehicle for educating the masses via its presence in museums. Here, objects are recast to serve as “evidence” of a very different story than the one they were called upon to tell before and around the turn the century. These new narratives set the stage for the interpretation of Indian art, culture, and history sanctified in the National Museum.

The National Museum: Reworking the Past, Promoting the Future

The successes and limitations of the Nationalist art history are visible in the ways in which the National Museum assembled an art history narrative – in its promotion of a national heritage, and in its performance of the social roles it was called upon to play.

The specific goal of the National Museum was to establish, house, and display an Indian national heritage of art objects. As a state-sanctioned institution, the National Museum, along with the national heritage it presented, served social roles in the newly-independent nation – communicating both inwards and outwards to the Indian people and to the outside world. In its role as keeper of national heritage, the museum inherited the various narratives surrounding these objects that I discuss in previous chapters – those authored by Orientalist scholars, and those formulated in the pursuit of a new art history in *Rupam*. In establishing its exhibition and collection strategies and its own art historical narrative, the museum negotiated these earlier narratives and arrived at a version informed by both the colonial and the nationalist pasts. Rather than rejecting one narrative for the other, the museum – itself the result of a conjunction of colonial and nationalist efforts – showcased imperialist methods alongside nationalist ideologies. This negotiation revealed the lasting historical influence of the former, and the inherent limitations of the latter.

I focus on a narrow scope of the National Museum’s history – from 1947 to 1949. This, I contend, is the moment when the approach, policies, and focus of the National Museum were decided. This moment occurred when the decision was made to transform the objects and philosophy behind the temporary, traveling “Exhibit of Indian Art” into the core collection and philosophy of a permanent, state-sanctioned institution. The exhibit, shown in London in 1947–1948 and in Delhi in the state rooms at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the final months of

1948, consisted of objects borrowed from museums and private collectors across India. At the close of the exhibit, requests were released to the loaning museums and collectors, urging them to surrender object ownership to what was to become the National Museum.¹⁶ A few months later, in August 1949, the National Museum was inaugurated. Until the mid-1950s, it essentially remained a permanent version of the temporary exhibit – consisting of the same pieces, and remaining in the state rooms. In the years to follow, it would actively increase its staff and collections.¹⁷ I focus on the short span of time when the exhibit, without changing significantly its content or display, was deemed representative of the art history of the nation and came to be renamed the National Museum. In developing my argument and exploring the philosophy and policies of the National Museum, I rely on the *Exhibition of Indian Art, Held at the Government House November 6 – December 31, 1948*, and on the related *Indian Art Through the Ages*.

Assembling an Art History Narrative

The National Museum's art history was based largely on the philosophies of the art history established in *Rupam*, but was packaged in a fashion more akin to the scholarship of earlier Orientalist scholars writing at the turn of the century. The image of India promoted by The National Museum adhered to the goals of the Nationalist art history in that, like the art journal, the museum sought to celebrate and glorify India's past greatness, present potential, and active role in world art history. At the same time, the museum's collection and exhibit methods were based on those suggested by Orientalist scholars and used in colonial-era British museums in India. Closely following Indian Independence, at a time when one might expect a decided rejection of the nation's colonial past in its struggle to promote its own identity, the museum instead negotiated between the two art histories. The National Museum adhered to each of the Nationalist art history goals previously described, even as it relied on colonial-era museological methods in achieving the presentation of these goals.

The National Museum, like *Rupam*, acknowledged and celebrated a past "golden age" while linking it to modern, present day potential for greatness. This was achieved by the museum's efforts to expand the past "golden age" to encompass not just a segment of Indian history – the Gupta period, for example – but instead Indian history in its entirety. This method eliminated the need to discuss periods of greatness as though they were contained within periods of cultural decline. Instead, the history of India is depicted as one long stretch of high culture, one vast blanket "golden age" that covered all of Indian art and cultural history from the Harrappan civilization to the present day.

V.S. Agrawala's introduction to the *Exhibition of Indian Art* guide achieves this with its celebratory tone and discussion of the "golden age" of the Gupta period.¹⁸ Agrawala states that the Gupta period was not the beginning and end of great art and culture; rather, it merely

16 In at least one case, that of the Central Asian Antiquities Museum at New Delhi, a museum ceased to exist because its entire collection was subsumed by what became the National Museum. The fact of this "request" (or, perhaps, demand) for ownership is widely documented; see I.D. Mathur, "National Museum of India: A Retrospect," *National Museum Bulletin No. 9*, (Delhi: National Museum, 2002) for an institutional perspective. See also Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), Chapter 6 but especially page 179.

17 In 1955 building began on the new (and current) location of the National Museum at Rajpath and Janpath. In 1957 control of the museum was shifted to the Ministry of Education; following this shift the museum began to significantly increase both its staff and its collections using funds from the Art Purchase Committee.

18 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Held at the Government House, November 6-December 31, 1948, Catalogue* (New Delhi: Department of Archaeology, 1948).

“ushered in the Golden Age of Indian art” that went on to extend into the present day. According to the guide, the objects in the exhibit attest that artistic greatness was achieved at all points in India history. Accordingly, each time period and genre discussed by Agrawala was given equally high status. Thus, he remarked on the “highly developed civilizations” at Mohenjodaro and Harrappa, and described Chola period (10–13th century) bronzes as the “highest examples of metal casting,” Rajasthani pictorial art from the Rajputana era (16–17th century) as indicative of the “Indian genius,” the Ajanta cave paintings as the “national pictorial archives of India.”¹⁹ Even the Mughals – long downplayed, demonized, or ignored by both earlier British and Indian nationalist scholars – were recast by Agrawala as “enlightened patrons of art, under whom architecture, painting, textiles, and carving burst into a new efflorescence.”²⁰ Agrawala finds not a limited period or specific genre in which Indian artistic greatness is evident, but instead an extended list of examples across time and genre.

Agrawala also relates Indian present with Indian past by drawing an unbroken line between the two. Thus we are told that the history of fine Indian textiles extends from the Vedic period unbroken into the 19th century. Agrawala also states that the history of Indian art opened “in the Indus Valley, in the third millennium B.C.,” by “the highly developed Mohenjodaro and Harrappan civilizations,” thereby claiming the ancient advanced inhabitants of the subcontinent as Indians, as though the nation of India and the concept of a national art had been conceived of in the third millennium.²¹ The greatness of the past, whether it was of the Vedic period or of the ancient Indus Valley civilizations, can be accessed by modern-day Indians through more recent art.

This connection with the modern day is strengthened in other publications affiliated with the National Museum’s collections. The booklet, *Indian Art Through the Ages*, was published in 1948, at the time of the exhibition in Delhi. It contains Agrawala’s text verbatim from the official exhibit guide, but features an additional nine-page section on modern Indian painting.²² This additional section consists of a brief introduction to the Bengal and Bombay schools of painting, words of praise for the artists by art historians (including *Rupam* editor Gangoly and several frequent contributors), and eight pages of full-color prints of the paintings of artists such as Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Gaganendranath Tagore, and Jamini Roy.

There were no modern Indian art works on display in the Delhi exhibit – although several had been featured in a smaller section of the London exhibit – but the book includes them within the fold of its timeline of great Indian art. By following a description of the museum’s much older collections with a section on modern, nationalist artists, the text creates a direct line between ancient art (Harrappan, Gupta, Chola) and modern art (works by Tagore, Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose). The booklet places the works of Tagore, Mazumdar, and Chowdhury within the fold of the expansive “golden age.” It calls upon the greatness of the past to lend legitimization to the present, stating that both are connected to a common Indian cultural greatness.

The approach used in by Agrawala and the *Indian Art Through the Ages* booklet is made clearer by contrast with the text of the London exhibit guide. The tone of Basil Gray’s introduction to the exhibit paintings is decidedly less celebratory in tone, as he discusses the

19 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x-xxvi.

20 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xix. This approach has the related effect of creating a national unity; I discuss this created unity later in the present chapter.

21 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x.

22 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948). These nine pages are significant, considering they make up almost half of the total number of pages in the booklet.

“small influence” of Gujarat and Rajasthan, and the “not yet fully developed” style employed by painters in the Mughal tradition.²³ Gray, head of the Oriental department at the British Museum between 1945–1969, described the influx of quality and significance that occurred throughout Indian art history. He, like Watt and Birdwood before him, spoke of “golden ages” and subsequent artistic declines that punctuated Indian art history. Art from different ages is judged, rather than being described as having equal significance or quality – and some of it falls short. By omitting the rise-and-falls of Indian art and cultural history, the Delhi exhibit guide instead puts all Indian art on the same high-quality level and expands the “golden age” onward, unbroken, into the present day.

In addition to addressing and establishing India’s long history of greatness, the Nationalist art history also made India an active player in world art history. In the same manner, the National Museum promoted this active role in its presentation of the interactions between the West and India, and between East Asia and India. Much as in the pages of *Rupam*, the National Museum presented Indian art as separate in philosophy but at least equal in stature to Western art. Through its collections and displays, it simultaneously neutralized the portrayal of India as passive receiver of artistic and cultural influence and promoted the nation instead as an active player in world art history.

Where *Rupam* established India’s active and equal status by noting differences between Indian art and Western art – focusing on the accessibility and innate spirituality of the former and the frivolous eliteness of the latter – the National Museum established this status instead by noting similarities.²⁴ In his introduction to the Delhi catalogue, Agrawala described Indian art using Greco-Roman metaphors (“springing into full magnificent form like Minerva born in panoply”), in effect equating the motifs and spirit of the two traditions and conflating the greatness of the Western tradition with that of India.²⁵

At other times, divisions between Indian and Western styles are diminished or removed completely. Artists are described as being above the language and confines of nationality.²⁶ In the section on modern painting in *Indian Art Through the Ages*, artists are presented as sophisticated pickers and choosers of stylistic influences from Europe, China, and Japan. Thus, Abanindranath Tagore was introduced as being capable of appealing not only to “the Hindu mind,” but was also able to “perfect” and incorporate the artistic techniques of both Persia and Japan.²⁷ Gaganendranath Tagore was described as “the most idealist and imaginative cubistic and impressionistic artist.”²⁸ A quote from Stella Kramrisch states that the art of Jamini Roy utilized the “universals of form which are understood by all who know art, whether from the East or of the West.”²⁹ Similarly, D.P. Roy Chowdhury “combines harmoniously and very ably the technical features of both Eastern and Western art.”³⁰ Artistic trends are read not as specific to “West” or “East,” but as non-region-specific universalities.

23 Basil Gray, “Painting,” in *The Art of India and Pakistan: A Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition Held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1947-8*, ed. Royal Academy of Arts and Leigh Ashton, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1950), 95.

24 The exhibit and museum guides continued to discuss the accessibility and innate spirituality of Indian art, but its effect is more towards establishing a national unity; see my section on the formation of a national heritage in this chapter.

25 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x.

26 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), 24.

27 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

28 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

29 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

30 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 24.

Furthermore, in these quotes Indian artists were depicted as active agents, rather than passive receivers, who were in the pursuit of a uniquely Indian art. The artists and their art were spoken about in the same breath and as having the same level of status as those of the West. Modern Indian artists were not passive receptors or followers of the stylistic influences of other nations' art; they instead acted as connoisseurs of world art trends, past and present.

Art, both Western and Eastern, and the similarities between them were talked about in broad and general terms that encompassed all time periods and all regional variations. In effect, the difference between the two is watered down and neutralized. This, in addition to the equated status of Indian artists in the above quotes with artists the world over – both in the East and in the West – had the effect of referring to a broad world art history, in which Eastern and Western artists are equal players.

Where in *Rupam* foreign influence is downplayed or countered, in the Delhi exhibit and in the museum it is ignored altogether. There is no mention whatsoever of any pivotal or devastating outside stylistic influence – Western or otherwise – in the Delhi guide. When outside influence is mentioned, as it is in *Indian Art Through the Ages* in the section on modern painting, a decidedly Indian grounding of the schools is first established – “some of the artists have imitated modern European styles but their work is essentially Indian in character.”³¹ Further, “for the first twenty-five years, the school was Oriental in inspiration and technique, but later some of the artists were influenced by modern European and more specifically by French schools.”³² These comments affirm the “Indianness” of the modern Indian painting while reducing Western artistic influence, and all but canceling out that of the British. The history of Western stylistic influence on Indian painting schools and works of art is explained away as something Indian artists dabbled in, together with “Chinese and Japanese styles,” as part of their “spirit of the quest” in exploring new inspiration.³³ Western influence is represented as something that Indian artists experimented with – not succumbed to – in the course of their work.

The neutralization of Indian vs. Western stylistic and historical differences and “foreign invasion” in the guide to the Delhi exhibit is more obvious when it is compared to the approach of the London guide. The London guide clearly distinguished between “Western” and “Indian” art styles and described stylistic influence as flowing from West to East. It devoted much time to discussions of Western influence on Indian art, listing the impacts chronologically and thus presenting a long history of Indian development that resulted from Western guidance. Basil Gray, for example, inserted Western stylistic and aesthetic influence into his history of Indian painting, remarking on the “profound effects” that the Jesuit missionaries and their illustrated Bibles had on horizon and perspective in Mughal paintings.³⁴ Indian art is portrayed as a fragile thing, which, for better or for worse, had a history of succumbing to stronger outside influences. Mughal styles, for example, “obscured traditional Indian designs,” and Persian art had lasting and very significant impact.³⁵ The

31 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), 24.

32 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1948), 24.

33 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1948), 24.

34 Basil Gray, “Painting,” in *The Art of India and Pakistan: A Commemorative Catalogue of the Exhibition Held at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1947-8*, ed. Royal Academy of Arts and Leigh Ashton, (New York: Coward-McCann, 1950), 95.

35 Royal Academy of Arts, ed. 1950, 201 and 89, respectively.

London guide searched Indian art for evidence of the artistic influences of “foreign invaders,” while implying and describing India’s inability to counter this artistic infiltration.³⁶

Even as it worked to achieve the goals of the Nationalist art history formulated in *Rupam* – displaying examples of past achievements to signify present greatness and presenting India as an active, equal player in world art history – the museum utilized methods that were decidedly Orientalist-derived. This resulted in the performance of the Nationalist art history, packaged in the format of earlier colonial scholarship. The museum’s collection focus was overwhelmingly on ancient objects – the same objects valued highly by Orientalist scholars – to the exclusion of modern works, although in the Nationalist narrative and in *Rupam* modern art plays a significant role. The original Delhi exhibition that came to form the core of the National Museum’s collection was heavily concentrated on pre-18th century sculpture, bronzes, and paintings. Such a collection focus might be read as an answer to the emphasis on “golden age archaeology” by Orientalist scholars. Having a strong “archaeological” core of objects within the collection enabled the National Museum to tap into a certain historical space within national narratives.³⁷

The museum relied on older, Orientalist ideas not only in terms of its collection and focus, but also for direction in its organizational structure. According to the Delhi exhibit and the museum guides, the display was organized in the manner promoted by Watt in the Victorian era, but rejected by *Rupam* scholars in the 1920s and 1930s – by type of object rather than by chronology or regional context.³⁸ The display was organized in the broad categories of sculpture, paintings, bronzes, and textiles. The choice to display objects in this way can be read as an incorporation of older ideas, a negotiation between the methods established in the first, British-run museums in India and the newer methods set forth by Indian art historians and scholars.

The National Museum, then, was shaped by several key elements of the art history presented in *Rupam*. It too strove to present the art history of India as being part of a long tradition of cultural greatness, one that developed alongside or independent from – rather than as a result of – Western art and stylistic influence. However, the museum reveals not only the tenets of a Nationalist art history, but also the history authored by turn-of-the-century Orientalists. As such, the art history promoted and presented by the National Museum reflects both its colonial and nationalist past and present. The National Museum went beyond simply repackaging and promoting art history narratives, however, and in the following section I explore how the tenets of the museum’s art history narrative were used to enact and display a national art heritage of India. This national heritage, like the art history displayed in the National Museum, was the result of both Orientalist and Nationalist discourses. These two strands of thought, taken together in the museum, inform the creation of India’s national art heritage.

36 What constitutes “non-foreign” India is difficult to decipher; British contributors to the London exhibition guide separate “Indians” from “Sikh, Nepalese, and Muslim invaders.” Muslim influence, for example, is described as having “obscured ‘traditional’ Indian designs” – “traditional” Indian designs being “hand painting, brocading, resist dyeing, and embroidery.” Royal Academy of Arts, ed. 1950, 96-97.

37 Kristy Phillips, *The National Museum of India: A Monument to and of the “Nation”* (unpublished paper presented at NaMu conference, Korrköping, Sweden, February 27, 2007), 3.

38 For Watt’s original organizational suggestions, see Sir George Watt, *Indian Art at Delhi, 1903, Being the Official Catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition, 1902-1903* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903). For an attack of Watt’s suggestions in *Rupam*, see G., “Review of the Catalogue of the George Eumorfopoulos Collection of Chinese, Korean [sic] and Siamese Paintings by Laurence Binyon of the British Museum,” *Rupam* (41): 1930, 19. This method of display organization continues to be used in the current exhibits of the National Museum.

Promoting a National Heritage

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, envisioned the National Museum to be a place where Indians could collectively take pride in their pasts while being inspired towards the future.³⁹ The National Museum was a public, accessible, state-sanctioned, institution that acted as presenter and preserver of the nation's art and art history. In the institution of the museum, the tenets of the Nationalist art history were given a state-sanctioned and more visible face than they had in the scholarly journal. Objects that were deemed representative of the nation's art were appropriated from museums and private collectors in India for inclusion in the National Museum. In accordance with its role as *the* national museum of India, the museum was responsible for collecting and assembling the objects that were to be considered India's national heritage, and for making them accessible to the public.⁴⁰ Through the museum, objects were designated as national resources that belonged to the people of the nation via the National Museum.

The very existence of publications like *Indian Art Through the Ages* is one example of the reliance on the National Museum to provide a definitive art history and national art heritage. The booklet consists of text produced explicitly for the National Museum's collections and exhibit; there is, however, no mention of the National Museum or of the original author, Agrawala. That exhibit itself becomes the history of Indian art "through the ages," the definitive art history of the nation, and the description of it is quoted without citation as though it were absolute fact. That the National Museum has the authority to assemble and write the history of Indian art, and collect the objects that make up the nation's art heritage is recognized by the Indian government in publishing the booklet.

In order to comply with the mission and purpose of the National Museum, the national heritage it presented and preserved had to be accessible to the public. Just as Indian art had earlier been touted as a necessary component to Indian cultural and spiritual life – unlike the "elitist" art of the West, accessible only to the select few – the museum was expected to be a readily-available and integral part of the lives of the Indian people. Objects had been appropriated from smaller, more remote institutions and from the private collections of individuals in order that the national heritage of India might be viewed and appreciated by a larger segment of the population. Admission prices are listed in the Delhi guide as having been at the cost of four annas per person, with lower prices for children and students. The exhibit was advertised as being open every day of the week except Saturday, for an average of 6 hours a day. The sales counter sold reproductions of art images and photo prints, in addition to the exhibit guide. A series of fourteen lectures was carried out in the span of two months. Looking at the guidebook, the exhibition had every appearance of being reasonably accessible to the public.⁴¹

In addition to being – or at least appearing to be – a physical space that was accessible to the public, the museum had to present and arrange its content to be accessible to the masses. In order to the claim the existence of a national heritage in a country with such diversity as

39 For more on Nehru's role in the formation of the National Museum, see Kristy Phillips, *The National Museum of India: A Monument to and of the "Nation."* (paper presented at NaMu conference, Korrkoping, Sweden, February 26-28, 2007).

40 Preziosi and Farago argue that the very concept of a "national culture" is made possible by national museums. See Donald Preziosi and Claire J. Farago, *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishers, 2004), 5.

41 In reality, however, its accessibility was limited. Lectures were specialized and given mostly in English; the building was in the protected governmental sector of Delhi; limited hours and admission prices required leisure hours and disposable income. For a more on these difficulties and a description of the role that architecture in particular played, see Kristy Phillips, *A Museum for the Nation: Publics and Politics at the National Museum of India*, (unpublished PhD dissertation at the University of Minnesota, 2006).

India, and to select the items that would represent this heritage, the National Museum downplayed regional, religious, and class difference. It did this by referring to a fictive homogenous “Indian” experience, by discussing art in terms of aesthetics rather than iconography, and by erasing the distinction between folk or industrial and fine art.

Just as *Rupam* did twenty years earlier, the National Museum spoke about Indian art as being inherently appealing and accessible to Indians, in effect unifying Indians and homogenizing their interests and experiences. The museum projected a common Indian ownership of all periods, styles, influence, and times by praising each with equal enthusiasm in its catalog (“each specimen seems to offer a rich feast to the eye”), by referring to what was projected as a common and overwhelming “nation-wide interest” in the Delhi exhibit, and by discussing the museum pieces’ ability to “reveal the mind of the Indian people” as though a collective mind existed.⁴² Art in India, according to the Delhi guide, acted as “a mirror” of Indian society and was necessary for the “comprehension of all that India has stood for through the ages.”⁴³ Art itself is called “a chapter of pre-eminent glory in the history of the Indian people,” as though there was one history of India and one homogenous Indian people.⁴⁴ Indian society, according to the Delhi guide, was a single entity with a common experience, rather than a conglomeration of regional, religious, and class differences, and was capable of being represented by the set of art objects housed in the National Museum.

The guide could discuss a homogenous Indian experience partly because of its reference to the aesthetic, rather than iconographical, elements of Indian art. This designation is akin to the efforts of *Rupam* to steer the discussion from “archeological” to “artistic.” The objects in the National Museum’s collection were discussed in terms of aesthetics, the appreciation of which was available to all Indians, rather than in terms of a specific religion, which would have emphasized difference. Focusing on aesthetics – form, stylistic motifs, and technique – diffused or avoided discussions of religious iconography.

Each section describing a different genre in the Delhi guide devotes more time to discussions of form and technique than to discussions of religious motifs. The guide states that objects were chosen for their “intrinsic aesthetic appeal” – because of this aesthetic appeal the objects are denoted as “something great” with the power to “move millions with [their] emotional and spiritual appeal.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, the meaning and significance attached to the pieces is aesthetic. Thus, the most notable features of paintings with Jain and Hindu motifs are not their iconographical meanings, but rather the execution of the facial features and artistic perspective.⁴⁶ Similarly, any “divine majesty” evident in the *yaksha/yahkshi* sculptures in the collection are a result of their aesthetically “magnificent form, rather than [of their] spiritual expression.”⁴⁷

Just as in *Rupam*, any reference to religion used the vague and inclusive language of “spirituality.” Art containing religious motifs was described as representative not of specific – and therefore segregated – religious beliefs, but rather the general and “universal” qualities of

42 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), iv-v.

43 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), ix.

44 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, iv.

45 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Held at the Government House, November 6-December 31, 1948, Catalogue* (New Delhi: Department of Archaeology, 1948), ix.

46 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Held at the Government House, November 6-December 31, 1948, Catalogue* (New Delhi: Department of Archaeology, 1948), xv.

47 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, x.

“humanity, spirit of freedom,” “order hope, strength, and beauty.”⁴⁸ Painted works in general were said to “form the comprehensive record of the religious and emotional life of the people” – all Indian religions and emotions were gathered into a collective experience that unites “the [Indian] people” as one communal entity.⁴⁹ As in *Rupam*, the Ajanta cave paintings – held in esteem by both Orientalist British scholars and later Nationalist scholars – are called the “national art” of India, accessible to all Indians regardless of their religion.⁵⁰ In establishing a national heritage, the National Museum rendered religious art approachable and applicable to all Indians, regardless of their individual religious beliefs.

Similar to the way in which it erased religious difference by ignoring it or referring to it vaguely as “spirituality,” the National Museum erased the dilemma of designating objects as “industrial” or “fine” art by raising the status of crafts to that of art. Because the design and form of folk art was often rooted in regional variation and was created by traditional artisans, and fine art was largely the domain of the elite and educated, discussing “folk art” alongside “fine art” – and giving equal importance to each – de-emphasized regional and class difference.

The modern painters discussed in *Indian Art Through the Ages* text were said to have staged the modern “revival of the art forms of India” following careful study of both the “Ajanta and Bagh, Mughal, Persian, and Rajput paintings” and “folk and village art.” Courtly arts and traditional crafts were given equal significance in their power to influence these esteemed modern artists. Although ancient sculpture and courtly paintings outnumbered crafts by far in the museum’s collection, what region-specific crafts were featured were given equal time and parallel status with ancient and courtly art. The *patola*, or silk sari specific to the region of Gujarat, for example, was given its own section in the Delhi exhibition guide and called a “marvel of technical skill.”⁵¹ Dacca muslins are described as having “attained the status of a national art, backed by the most intricate process of spinning, weaving, darning, washing, and packing;” the Dacca weaver’s skill has “never been beaten either in India or out of it.”⁵² In the National Museum, well-constructed, representative crafts are as much a component of national heritage as ancient sculpture and courtly fine arts.

In this way, the museum incorporated objects with specific regional and religious meanings and values into the fold of a common “Indian” experience by canceling their specific contexts. Objects on display became not indicators of difference but of a collective experience that was meant to be celebrated. Creating this fictive common Indian experience, and pretending that the whole of the Indian population was welcome and able to join in its celebration, was important to the museum’s mission of presenting and preserving India’s national heritage. In doing so, the museum was able to take on specific social roles in the service of the nation. In the following section I discuss how National Museum, as keeper of the national heritage, performed its appointed social roles.

Performance of the National Museum’s Social Roles

Due to its location in the institution of the national museum, this resulting heritage is put to social use and has particular social roles to play. As preserver and protector of India’s national heritage, the National Museum was called upon to perform several social roles. Housed in the institution of the museum, art history was thus capable of meeting the demands of the nation.

48 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), 2.

49 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1948, 5.

50 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xiv.

51 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xxiii.

52 Archaeological Survey of India 1948, xxii.

Accordingly, the National Museum served as “proof” that India was a civilized nation to those outside its borders, and acted as an education center to those within. As such it was an arena for both inward and outward communication – presenting a public face of the nation to itself as it sought to educate and inspire pride in its citizens, and presenting a unified front and glorious heritage to its viewers from other nations.

The National Museum, by its very nature, occupied a unique place in the political landscape, and played an important role in the efforts of nation-building. It acted as a staged environment for the performance of an Indian art history narrative in the public sphere – and by its authority as an official, state-sanctioned institution, it lent authority and “official” status to the narrative it presented.

It also served as “proof” that the newly-independent nation was civilized and on par with other independent nations, especially with European countries.⁵³ The 1948 Delhi Exhibition of Indian Art, as the immediate precursor to the formation of the National Museum, was described as evidence that “India [could] take her due rank as a first-class artistic power.”⁵⁴ According to this guide, the National Museum allowed Indian art and the nation of India itself to be taken seriously. Housed in the high-profile institution of the National Museum, Indian art was “imparted a high status in the cultural life of new India.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, the National Museum was cited as a means for India to retrieve its own past – the implication being that its past had to be rescued from colonial powers and colonial-authored histories.⁵⁶ It was a vehicle for lending legitimization to an indigenous art history, and to the self-ruled nation. The National Museum could serve as a stage upon which a glorious past and a promising future were exhibited, both for the consideration of citizens of the nation and for an outside (Western) gaze.

While this role served Indians both directly – as state-sanctioned keeper of the national heritage – and indirectly – as an institution that garnered legitimacy from outside of India – the museum’s second social role, that of educator, was of more immediately direct significance. The museum was deemed capable of educating the masses by presenting art in a way that would allow it to serve as a “university for the illiterate.”⁵⁷ Coomaraswamy, as quoted in the Delhi exhibition guide, stated that the art that represents the “well-known land of our own experience” is the best for educational purposes – that Indian art, because of an inherent understanding of it by Indians, can and should be used to convey spiritual, historical, and cultural meanings to the Indian people.⁵⁸ According to the guide, the simple act of viewing Indian art provides, for Indians, an invaluable history lesson. Indian art, then, has the natural ability to educate Indians on the subject of Indian history and culture – and museums, as the stewards of art, act as educational sites.

Thus the National Museum was called upon to manipulate art – itself “necessary for understanding the soul of India” – in order to teach Indians about the nation’s past history and achievements.⁵⁹ The National Museum, then, performed the role that *Rupam* suggested – and

53 Kavita Singh, “The Museum is National” in *India: A National Culture?* Sen, Geeti, ed. (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 2003), 176.

54 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), ix.

55 Archaeological Survey of India, *Exhibition of Indian Art Catalogue* (New Delhi: Ministry of Education, 1948), ix.

56 Singh 2003, 176.

57 Ordhendra C. Gangoly, “Bharat Kala Bhavan, Benares,” *Rupam* (41) 1930: 24.

58 Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, 1948), xvii.

59 India, *Indian Art Through the Ages* (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1951), 1.

as an institution went beyond what the journal was capable of doing. *Rupam*, while it promoted itself as a space accessible for wide-scale participation, debate, and interaction, was in actuality a scholarly journal that appeared only in English and with a limited circulation and readership. The National Museum, housing, as I show in the previous section, a national heritage that appealed and applied to every Indian, saw itself as truly accessible and therefore capable of fostering social improvement.

Conclusions: Addressing the Past and Moving Towards the Future

The success of the art history promoted by *Rupam* was visible in the museum's commitment to its mission – if not in the realization of this mission. The institution was symbolic of the belief in its ability to retrieve India's past and to link it and its glory to the present. Like *Rupam*, the museum believed firmly in the unifying abilities of the history of art in India, and the ways in which it was capable of furthering the cause of the nation, and its art, in the present day. The National Museum was successful in its commitment to promoting this belief on a larger, more accessible scale.

In a more tangible way, the museum was successful in providing a space for holding the artifacts deemed by *Rupam* to be of national significance, against smaller institutions and private collectors. In this way the assemblage of a national heritage was possible, and objects representing it were protected against a loss of visibility and public access in the public sphere. The museum continues to serve as a space for the safekeeping of an increasing number of collections representative of India's national heritage.

The museum reveals that the Nationalist art history was limited in that, although it provided the philosophy for approaching the topic of Indian art, it did not offer a method for the realization of it in terms of museum collecting and exhibiting policies. As a result, the art history promoted by *Rupam* is more evident in the publications produced by and in affiliation with the museum – while the exhibits and collections of the museum are more akin to the methods and approaches proscribed by Orientalist narratives. Instead of calling into question the narratives of colonial scholars like Birdwood and Watt, as *Rupam* did, the museum employed these approaches, even as they stand in contrast to the philosophies of the Nationalist art history.

As a legacy of this colonial packaging of Nationalist ideas, the museum even today retains a dated look. The core exhibit, in essence an expanded – not modified – version of the original 1948 Delhi exhibit, remains organized by object type in sacrifice of a chronology or regional context. Collections are heavily focused on ancient sculpture. Conferences at the National Museum, such as the one held on July 26, 2006 entitled, "Indian Museums and National Integration," discuss ways of expanding its audience and diversifying its collections – in short, of achieving the goals of the Nationalist art history – but the public face of the museum remains largely unchanged.

This art history, strong in its ability to unify India in theory and to celebrate an active, glorious Indian past, falls short in providing a tangible means of achieving its goals in the setting of the museum institution. Relying on earlier Orientalist narratives to package the Nationalist art history compromised and undermined its message, and revealed the limitations of the history promoted in *Rupam*. As such, the museum, in achieving its goals and performing its institutional roles, incorporates the somewhat restrictive methods of its colonial past alongside the art history endorsed by the newly-independent nation. One main goal of the Nationalist art history, however, remains intact and unfettered; this goal is achieved in the museum's authority to collect art and its interpretation in the service of the nation and its people. As such, the spirit of *Rupam* – that is, the negotiation with and struggle against past ideologies of the Other and present politics of the Other – is one among the entities preserved in and by the National Museum of India, and as such is kept alive, active, and accessible.

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