

PRESS RELEASE

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PEACOCK IN THE DESERT: THE ROYAL ARTS OF JODHPUR, INDIA OPENS AT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM OCTOBER 18, 2018

Immersive exhibition explores five centuries of the artistic and cultural heritage of the city of Jodhpur and its people



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SEATTLE, WA - The Seattle Art Museum (SAM) presents *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India* (October 18, 2018–January 21, 2019), showcasing five centuries of artistic creation from the kingdom of Marwar-Jodhpur in the northwestern state of Rajasthan. Organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in partnership with the Mehrangarh Museum Trust of Jodhpur, the exhibition features 250 objects from the 16th to the mid-20th century including intricate paintings, decorative arts, elaborate tents, canopies, textiles, jewelry, and weapons, presented with photos and videos that evoke the impressive setting of the Mehrangarh Museum.

Peacock in the Desert presents a vision of a cosmopolitan court culture that relies on art as an essential aspect of its rule. Established in the 15th century, the city of Jodhpur was ruled by the Rathores for over seven centuries. The objects on view, many of which have not been seen beyond palace walls or traveled to the United States, tell the story of this vast desert kingdom.

The exhibition traces the kingdom's cultural landscape as it was continuously reshaped by cross-cultural encounters, notably by two successive empires who ruled India: the Mughals and the British. These encounters introduced objects, artists, languages, architectural styles, and systems of administration that influenced the complex royal identity of the Rathore dynasty.

His Highness Maharaja GajSingh II of Marwar-Jodhpur established the Mehrangarh Museum Trust in 1972 and has overseen its evolution from a historic fort to a popular destination for visitors to Jodhpur from around the world. Both he and his daughter, Baijilal Shivranjani Rajye of Marwar-Jodhpur, will visit Seattle to see the exhibition in October.

SAM previously collaborated with the Mehrangarh Museum Trust on the popular exhibition *Garden and Cosmos: The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur* (January 29–April 26, 2009) at the Asian Art Museum.

"*Peacock in the Desert* opens an evocative window on the kingdom of Marwar-Jodhpur," says Kimerly Rorschach, SAM's Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and

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CEO. “We’re grateful for the opportunity to present an experience of this multi-faceted court culture to Seattle audiences.”

“The city of Jodhpur is not frozen in time, and royalty is not just about bling and splendor,” says Karni Singh Jasol, director of the Mehrangarh Museum Trust. “Ours is a museum of the 21st century, dedicated to promoting awareness of a vibrant and hard-working royal endeavor. With this exhibition, visitors have the opportunity to experience the colors, sights, and sounds of our unique culture, as well as our history of continual patronage throughout the centuries.”

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Peacock in the Desert is organized into six thematic sections. For the first time since the museum’s expanded building opened in 2007, the special exhibition begins in a spacious gallery on the third floor before continuing in the fourth floor special exhibition galleries.

Tradition and Continuity: The Royal Wedding Procession



Visitors are welcomed to the exhibition with a dramatic recreation of a royal wedding procession on the museum’s third floor. This immersive setting introduces visitors to the crucial role that marital alliances played in the lives of the citizens of Marwar-Jodhpur and in the development of the region’s aesthetic traditions. Life-size horse and elephant mannequins fill the space, adorned with an elephant *howdah* (seat), wedding regalia, and royal insignia.

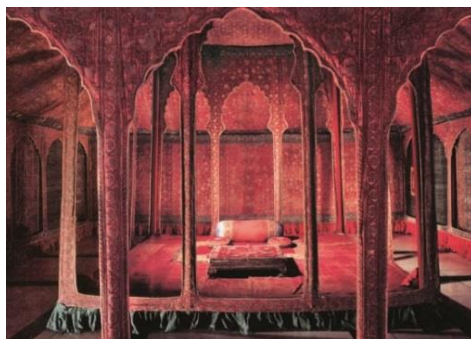
Video projections feature preparations for a 21st-century wedding and an aerial view of the Mehrangarh fort which encloses palaces, temples, and courtyards.

The Rathores of Marwar



A photographic montage introduces the desert landscape of Marwar-Jodhpur, its diverse peoples, and the exhibition’s central protagonists: the Rathore clan that ruled the region from the 13th to the mid-20th century. Two sculptural highlights include a gilt wood and glass *mahadol* (palanquin) that underlines the Rathores’ emphasis on dignified processions for kings and queens, and a large cradle for Krishna that demonstrates their spiritual leadership.

Conquest and Alliance: The Rathores and the Mughals



The arrival of, and eventual takeover by, the Mughal Empire in 1561 began centuries of political and military alliances between the Mughals and the Rathores. This section examines the movement of objects throughout these alliances in the 16th and 17th centuries, presenting ornate sabers, daggers, and rifles alongside 17th- and 18th-century paintings and illustrations of the court and portraits of kings. The section begins with the extraordinary 17th-century *Lal Dera* tent, one of the oldest, if not the only, intact Indian court tents in existence.

Zenana: Cross-Cultural Encounters



(pavilion). A sequence of paintings emphasize the unique role of women as patrons of festivals that marked the seasons.

In this section, paintings, carpets, textiles, and jewelry evoke the setting of a royal *zenana*, the women's wing of a Rathore palace. Here, the *zenana* is explored as a hub of language, exchange, and culture led by the women of the court. They played a crucial role as agents of cultural change and patrons of the arts, preserving cultural traditions of festivals and dress throughout the centuries. Among the furnishings shown in this section is an exceptional wood *baradari*

Durbar: The Rathore Court



and textiles, finely crafted arms and armor, and 18th- and 19th-century paintings on view.

As Mughal influence began to decline in the late 18th century, artists, craftspeople, and nearby dynastic kingdoms were attracted to Jodhpur due to its increased stature. This shift is seen in paintings of *darbars* (royal receptions) staged by the Rathores. Alongside these developments came the growing trend of exchanging artworks as gifts. This led to a period of intense creativity in artistic production and a cross-fertilization of Mughal and Rathore styles, seen in the woven canopy

The Raj



A dramatic transformation in Jodhpur is triggered by India's encounters with the British Empire in the 19th century. By 1876, Queen Victoria took the title of Empress of India and set off a new wave of European aesthetics. Merging with traditional Indian garments, paintings, and jewelry, an imperial hierarchy was emphasized during the era known as the Raj. During the 20th century, the Maharajas of Jodhpur became renowned for innovative patronage. In 1944, Umaid Bhawan Palace was completed and is now operated as a hotel by the Taj Group. Today, this legacy continues with the current leader of Marwar-Jodhpur.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

A 296-page exhibition catalogue (including 380 color illustrations) published by Yale University Press will be available for purchase in October in SAM Shop (\$85.00). Also titled *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India* (ISBN: 978-0-300-23296-7), it is written by Karni Singh Jasol and edited by Angma Dey Jhala, with contributions by Peter Alford Andrews, Robert Elgood, Catherine Glynn, Shailka Mishra, and Giles Tillotson. It features a foreword by His Highness Maharaja GajSingh II of Marwar-Jodhpur.

RELATED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

In conjunction with the exhibition, SAM will present a dynamic lineup of programming, including Art Beyond Sight and docent tours, programs for schools and educators, and a series of public programs co-presented with SAM's Gardner Center for Asian Art and Ideas as well as community partners.

The programs will highlight performance, visual art and community traditions from Rajasthan. A free community celebration, featuring a curator talk, will be held on Thursday, October 18. SAM will also host an exciting edition of its Diwali Ball, an annual fundraising event being held this year on Saturday, October 20.

TICKETING INFO

Museum Hours

- Closed Monday and Tuesday
- Wednesday 10 am-5 pm
- Thursdays 10 am-9 pm
- Friday-Sunday 10 am-5 pm

Holiday Hours

- Closed Thursday November 22 (Thanksgiving Day)
- Open Friday November 23 (day after Thanksgiving)
- Closed Monday December 24 (Christmas Eve)
- Closed Tuesday December 25 (Christmas Day)
- Additional holiday hours may be announced.

Daily Prices

- \$24.95 Adult
- \$22.95 Senior (62+), Military (with ID)
- \$14.95 Student (with ID), Teen (13-17)
- FREE for children (12 and under)
- FREE for SAM Members

First Thursday Reduced Ticket Prices

Special Exhibition ticket prices are reduced by more than 50% on the first Thursday of the month. Tickets to SAM Collections and Installations are free.

Head to visitsam.org/peacock for the most up-to-date ticketing information.

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION AND SUPPORT

Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India is organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in collaboration with Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur, India. The exhibition premiered at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (March 4–August 12, 2018) before traveling to SAM. It will next travel to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada (March 9–September 2, 2019).

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Image credits: *Maharaja Abhai Singh on Horseback*, ca. 1725, Dalchand, Jodhpur, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 14 1/8 x 19 5/8 in., Mehrangarh Museum Trust, photo: Neil Greentree. Photo by Neil Greentree. Installation view of *Peacock in the Desert: The Royal Arts of Jodhpur, India* at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, photo: Will Michels. *Palanquin (Mahadol)*, ca. 1700–30, Gujarat, gilded wood, glass, copper & ferrous alloy, 100 3/8 x 143 3/4 x 57 1/8 in., Mehrangarh Museum Trust, photo: Neil Greentree. *The Lal Dera*, late 17th to early 18th century, Mughal, silk velvet, silver gilt thread, cotton backing, 286 3/4 x 290 1/8 in., Mehrangarh Museum Trust. *Women of the Zenana Watch a Dance Performance with Bakhat Singh*, ca. 1736, Nagaur, opaque watercolor and old on paper, 17 3/4 x 25 in., Mehrangarh Museum Trust, photo: Neil Greentree. *Maharaja Man Singh Playing Polo with Royal Ladies*, ca. 1827, Shivdas Bhatti, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 21 1/4 x 15 1/4 in., Mehrangarh Museum Trust, photo: Neil Greentree. *Portrait of Maharaja Jaswant Singh II*, 1895, Bert Harris, oil on canvas, Umaid Bhawan Palace, photo: Neil Greentree.

ABOUT SEATTLE ART MUSEUM

As the leading visual art institution in the Pacific Northwest, SAM draws on its global collections, powerful exhibitions, and dynamic programs to provide unique educational resources benefiting the Seattle region, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond. SAM was founded in 1933 with a focus on Asian art. By the late 1980s the museum had outgrown its original home, and in 1991 a new 155,000-square-foot downtown building, designed by Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates, opened to the public. The 1933 building was renovated and reopened as the Asian Art Museum in 1994. SAM's desire to further serve its community was realized in 2007 with the opening of two stunning new facilities: the nine-acre Olympic Sculpture Park (designed by Weiss/Manfredi Architects)—a “museum without walls,” free and open to all—and the Allied Works Architecture designed 118,000-square-foot expansion of its main, downtown location, including 232,000 square feet of additional space built for future expansion. The Olympic Sculpture Park and SAM's downtown expansion celebrated their tenth anniversary in 2017.

From a strong foundation of Asian art to noteworthy collections of African and Oceanic art, Northwest Coast Native American art, European and American art, and modern and contemporary art, the strength of SAM's collection of approximately 25,000 objects lies in its diversity of media, cultures, and time periods.

ABOUT THE MEHRANGARH MUSEUM TRUST

Mehrangarh Museum Trust is India's leading cultural institution and center of excellence, established in 1972 by the 38th Custodian of Marwar-Jodhpur, H. H. Maharaja GajSingh II, to make the Fort come alive for visitors. Today, Mehrangarh Museum has a unique importance as a repository of the artistic and cultural history of the large area of central Rajasthan, Marwar-Jodhpur, ruled by the Rathore dynasty. The Museum displays one of the most important and best-preserved collections of fine and applied arts from the Mughal period of Indian history, during which the Rathore rulers of Jodhpur maintained close links with the Mughal Emperors. Apart from the Museum, the Trust is at the forefront of conservation and restoration, a generous patron of the arts and music and a lively center of academic study. Mehrangarh Museum Trust is a recipient of the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award in the field of Architectural Conservation, Cultural Heritage and adaptive reuse.