







Debra Diamond

yoga | The Art of  
Transformation

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Organized by the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, the exhibition travels to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, February 22–May 18, 2014, and the Cleveland Museum of Art, June 22–September 7, 2014.

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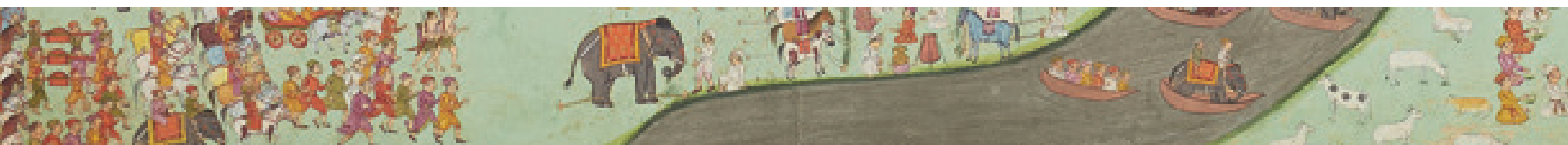


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# Foreword

*Yoga: The Art of Transformation* invites wonder at India's extraordinary artistic heritage. It also inaugurates a field of scholarly inquiry. By examining yoga as an enduring practice that adapts to changes in place and time, this exhibition seeks to illuminate a central, though still imperfectly understood, facet of Indian culture. The scope of this project is ambitious, determined by the wealth of objects—ranging from temple sculptures to medical textbooks—that manifest yogic constructs and the perceptions of its practitioners. These objects constitute a visual archive which offers abundant evidence that yoga is more than a philosophical school, a purely Hindu tradition, a spiritual science, or an exercise regimen. By bringing together radically disparate objects, *The Art of Transformation* prompts us to look beyond such calcified categories as wonder and resonance, high art and popular culture, indigenous and exogenous, authentic and exploited, and to consider how yoga unfolded in history.

Let me invite you to contemplate two objects in the exhibition. One is a magnificent sculpture of the deity Bhairava from a thirteenth-century Hindu temple (cat. 1b), the other a garish early twentieth-century postcard that depicts a yogi on a portable bed of nails (cat. 22g). Although wildly dissimilar, both project yogic identities that were, when they were made, novel. The Bhairava, a masterpiece of carving from the Hoysala dynasty in the Karnataka, demonstrates one of the means through which orthodox Hinduism incorporated the transgressive teachings of Tantric yoga. The postcard's photograph records a recently created performative practice—the aerial yoga, if you will, of its day. Produced by a Baptist missionary society, it was part of a flood of mass-produced images that identified yogis (and Hinduism and India) as superstitious and backward. It is a troubling artifact; however, the aspirations of yogis who posed on spiked beds and the role of mechanical reproduction in creating dubious stereotypes cannot be summarily ignored. They are part of yoga's history.

*The Art of Transformation* acknowledges the importance of yoga's Hindu traditions, while being fully attentive to the discipline's multiple manifestations within diverse sectarian, religious, courtly, and popular settings. This broad approach sheds light on yoga's core constructs and transformations over some two thousand years on the subcontinent, including its more recent emergence in the transnational arena. Today, yoga is universal. Deeply meaningful to Indians who cherish it as their legacy and to practitioners around the world who recognize its transformative potential, it also lies at the center of heated debates over authenticity and ownership. Shining light on yoga's manifold visual expressions, the exhibition does not define a singular yoga or determine authenticity. Rather, it aspires to enrich dialogue and inspire further learning about yoga's profound traditions and enduring relevance.



To our great delight, the exhibition will travel to the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and the Cleveland Museum of Art; I warmly acknowledge their directors, Jay Xu and David Franklin respectively, for this latest in a series of collaborations to expand the study and appreciation of Asian art in the United States.

The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery gratefully acknowledges the generosity of lenders to *Yoga: The Art of Transformation*. Fionnuala Croke, director, and Elaine Wright, curator, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin; David Franklin, director, and Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, curator, Cleveland Museum of Art; Maharaja Gaj Singh II and Kr. Karni Singh Jasol of the Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur-Marwar; and Martin Roth, director, and Rosemary Crill and Susan Stronge, curators, Victoria & Albert Museum, have been unstinting in their loans of key artworks. In Europe, we also thank Neil MacGregor, director, British Museum; Klaas Ruitenbeek, director, Museum für Asiatische Kunst; Albert Lutz, director, Museum Rietberg Zürich; Mechtild Kronenberg, head of department, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin; Christoph Rauch, head of the Oriental department, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin; and Ted Bianco, acting director, Wellcome Trust, London. In Australia, we acknowledge Tony Ellwood, director of the National Gallery of Victoria.

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The seeds for this exhibition were planted, appropriately, when Debra Diamond, our associate curator of South and Southeast Asian art, was working on our exhibition in 2008, *Garden and Cosmos: The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur*. Her scholarship, research, and passion for the material helped create an extraordinary aesthetic experience for multiple audiences. While Debra has led the charge, it is my pleasure to thank the entire staff of the Freer and Sackler. They combine the highest levels of expertise with a passionate commitment to the museums' goals, and have been critical to this project's success. These are challenging times for many museums, ours included, and yet our staff have tackled this ambitious project with unparalleled creativity, demonstrating an equanimity and dedication worthy of true yogis.

Julian Raby

The Dame Jillian Sackler Director of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art