

# Annual Report 2025

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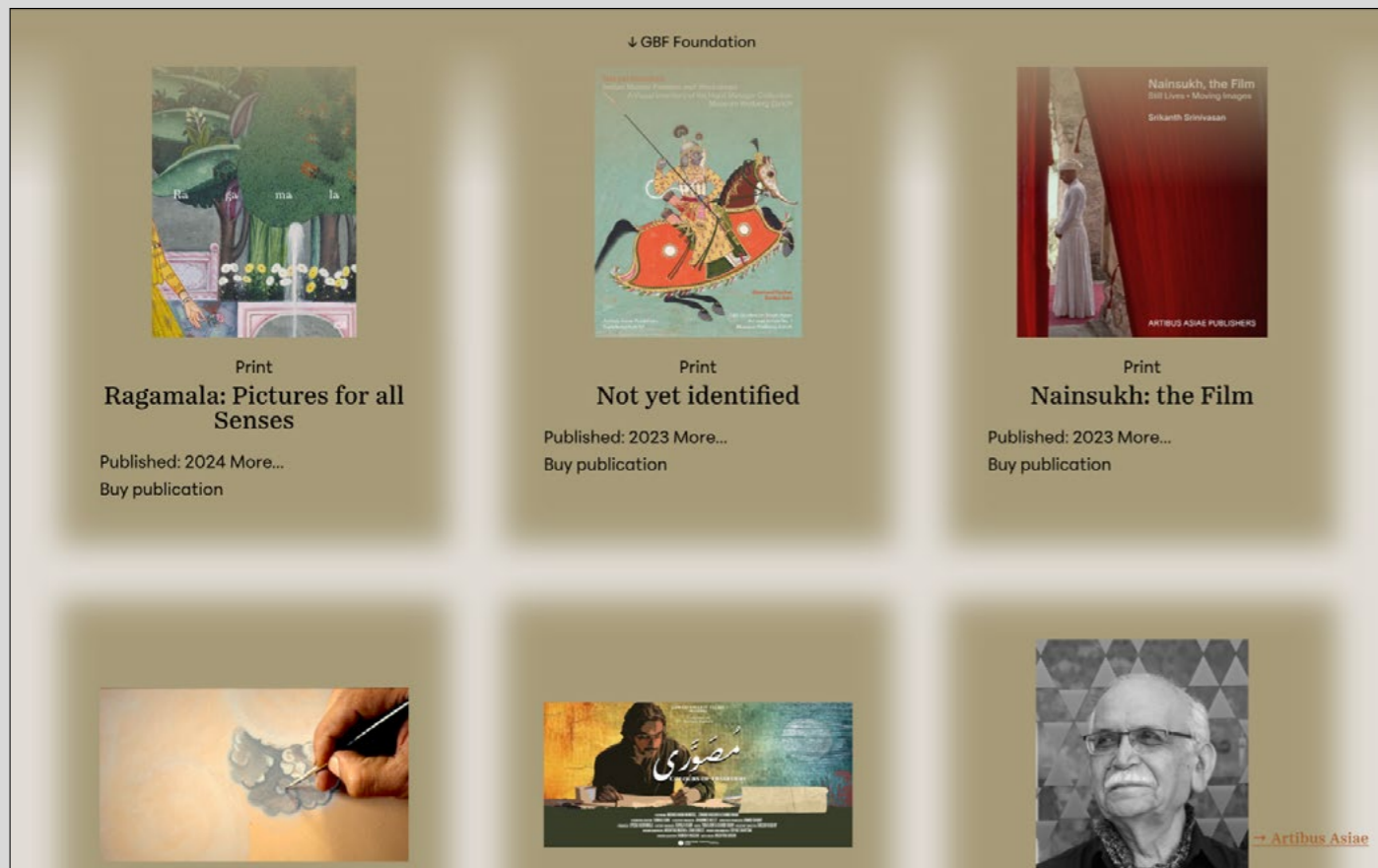
The new GBF Foundation marks its first anniversary this year. I am proud of what the Foundation achieved during its inaugural year. The annual newsletter gives an overview of the most significant projects and developments.

I thank the board of trustees for their generous and continued support. I further thank Sonika Soni for compiling the report, Surucchi Khubchandani for editing, and Chiara Zarotti for the layout.

Johannes Beltz



Home Page of the Website



Media Library Section of the Website

## Website Launch

The official website of the GBF Foundation was launched in early April 2025 and has since reached a global audience. Designed with flexibility and accessibility in mind, it supports dissemination of activities of GBF and its mission statement to a varied audience.

The homepage of the website provides access to four main sections:

### A. NEWS

This section is the most dynamic, offering regular updates on the Foundation's activities and programs while also serving as an online archive of past initiatives.

### B. RESIDENCY

The Residency Programme is a core component of the GBF initiative. This webpage facilitates adequate information on the three-month residential programmes. The inaugural residency, *One Object in Question*, received thirty-seven applications, the majority of which were submitted through the website.

### C. MEDIA LIBRARY

This section houses the print and film outputs produced by the GBF Foundation.

### PRINT

To date, this section features five publications, each linked directly to the Museum Rietberg online shop.

#### A Dubious Place

Eberhard Fischer  
Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2025  
GBF Studies on South Asian Art and Artists, Vol. 3

#### Ragamala: Pictures for All Senses

Johannes Beltz, Annette Bhagwati, and Sonika Soni  
Zurich: Museum Rietberg/Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2024

#### Not Yet Identified Indian Master Painters and Workshops: A Visual Inventory of the Horst Metzger Collection

Eberhard Fischer and Sonika Soni (eds.)  
Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2023  
GBF Studies on South Asian Art and Artists, Vol. 1

**Nainsukh: The Film**  
Srikanth Srinivasan  
Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2023  
GBF Studies on South Asian Art and  
Artists, Vol. 2

**Sacred Lotus and Reflective Mirror:  
An Interview with B. N. Goswamy**

#### FILM

The Foundation's films are available to view online through the Media Library. The section also provides details for booking 4K theatrical screenings and screening rights. Three films have been released to date.

#### **Nainsukh**

Directed by Amit Dutta

#### **Portrait of a Cloud: Mindscape of an Indian Miniature Artist**

Directed by Harsha Vinay

#### **Musavvari: Colours of a Tradition**

Directed by Jawad Sharif

#### D. INFO

This section offers an overview of the Foundation's mission and goals, acknowledges the enduring friendship of the "G.B.F.," and includes a detailed list of credits.

# Musavvari: A Ten-Day Intensive Workshop on South Asian Painting Techniques

11–20 August 2025 | Museum Rietberg

*Musavvari*—a term that encompasses both the practice and vocation of painting within South Asian and Islamic traditions—was the focus of a ten-day intensive workshop hosted by the Museum Rietberg. Led by artists Murad Khan Mumtaz and Manish Soni, the workshop introduced participants to historical, material, and technical aspects of *Musavvari*, with a close engagement with the museum's collection.

A group of twelve participants from fields including conservation, art history, education, and artistic practice collaborated through discussions, object study, film screenings, and hands-on training covering the full painting process. The workshop fostered cross-disciplinary exchange, deepened understanding of regional developments within the tradition, and strengthened appreciation of *Musavvari* in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Participants: Naveed Sadiq, Kath-e-eja Talha, Danièle Gros, Amélie Couvrat Desvergnés, Alessandra Vichi, Lea Peterer, Luna Beltz, Meera Charlotte Bhagwati, Vera Torachidis, Vera Fischer, Indranil Banerjee, Sandra Sattler, Caroline Widmer.

In the media: Two interviews showcased at the *ArtRadio* YouTube channel, and press coverage in *Spectrum*, *The Sunday Tribune*.

## Instagram Presence

The official Instagram page was launched in early April 2025, in tandem with the official website. Since then, 20 posts including 9 engaging video reels have been posted, with each post receiving an average of 3,000 views.

The platform has generated consistent engagement in form of queries, comments and expression of appreciation, while offering a global audience short updates and previews of the GBF Foundation's activities.

In 2026, the Foundation will double the frequency of posts and expand collaborations with relevant individuals and institutions to reach a wider audience.



Musavari Workshop Snippets

## SIK-ISEA Collaboration

In 2025, a collaborative research initiative with SIK-ISEA (Swiss Institute for Technical Research on Art) undertook the scientific analysis of eight paintings.

### A. FIG. 1, 2, 3

Three paintings from mid-eighteenth-century Mewar were used for comparative pigment analysis and technical photography. The results of this analysis formed the basis of the technical study undertaken by the *One Object in Question* fall scholar, Indranil Banerjee. The comparative findings will be presented in his proposed article.

### B. FIG. 4, 5

Two paintings (Fig. 4, 5) have been analysed in preparation for Spring 2026 resident of the *One Object in Question* residency program.

### C. FIG. 6, 7

Two paintings have been analysed as part of the ongoing Kota master workshop study. The results of these works (RVI 2017) will be presented in an upcoming publication.

### D. FIG. 8

A provincial Mughal *muraqqa* (album) folio was analysed to examine the layered construction of this two-sided album page. The findings may inform future exhibitions or scholarly essays.

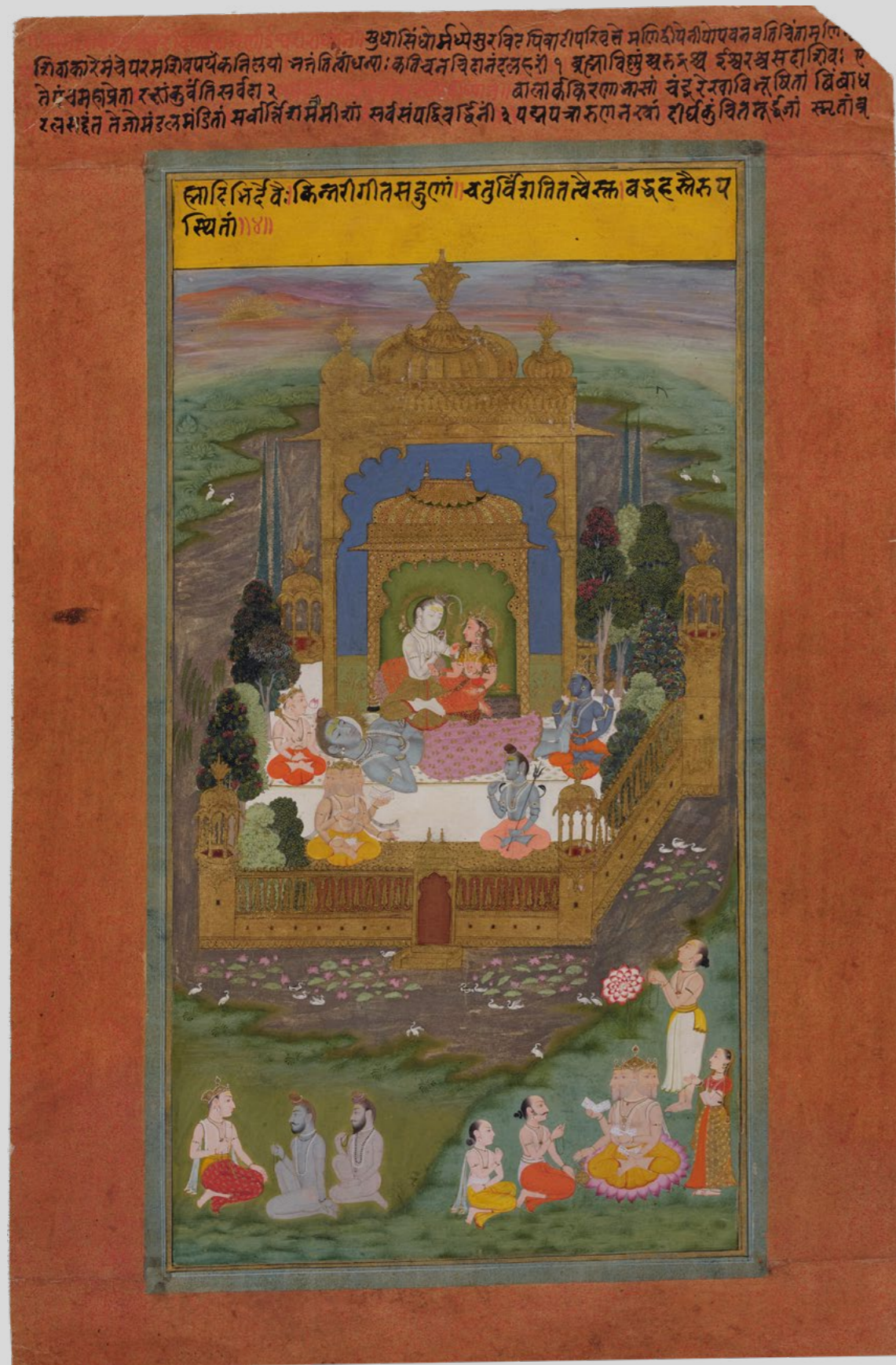


Fig. 1  
 Master at the court of Maharana Sangram Singh II  
**The Goddess on the Jewel Island**  
 Folio possibly from a large formal series  
 Udaipur, 1720-1730 CE, 30.20 x 19.60 cm. (image)  
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 939  
 Purchased with funds from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Fig. 2  
 Not yet identified Mewar master  
**The Goddess on the Jewel Island**  
 possibly a folio from a Saundaryalahari manuscript  
 Udaipur, c. 1750 CE, 30.20 x 19.60 cm. (image)  
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 806  
 Purchase with funds from the City of Zurich



Fig. 3  
 Not yet identified Mewar master  
**Yashoda Awakening the Boy Krishna**  
 Illustration for Sursagar manuscript by Surdas  
 Udaipur, c. 1700 CE, 37.00 x 25.50 cm (overall)  
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 905  
 Purchase with funds from the City of Zurich



Fig. 4  
 Master of the first generation after Nainsukh of Guler  
**The house of the Pandavas is set on fire**  
 Folio from the "large Guler-Basohli Bhagavata Purana" series  
 Basohli, c. 1775 CE  
 Museum Rietberg, REF 50  
 Long term loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Fig. 5  
**The Burning Mountain**  
 Folio from the "Fifth Bhagavata Purana Series"  
 Pahari region, c. 1760-1770 CE, 27.90 x 38.00 cm (image)  
 Museum Rietberg, REF 48  
 Long term loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer



Fig. 6  
 Not yet identified Kota Master  
**Mukhari Ragini**  
 Folio from the Kota Narayana Ragamala Series  
 Kota, c. 1770 CE, 19.00 x 12.00 cm. (image)  
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 2017  
 Gift of Horst Metzger

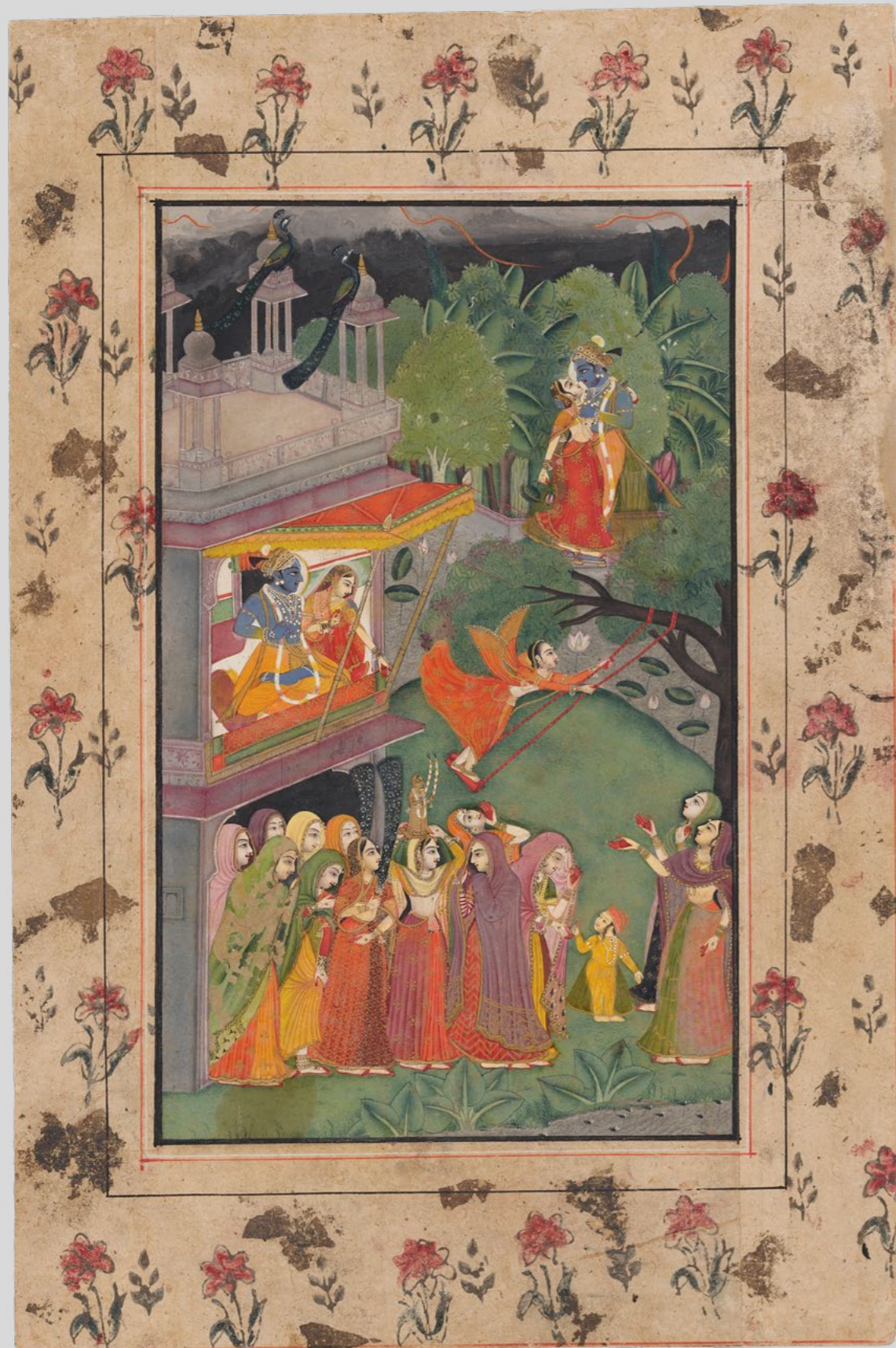


Fig. 7  
 Not yet identified Kota Master  
**Shravana, the month of rains**  
 Folio possibly from a Barahmasa Series  
 Kota, c. 1770 CE, 35.40 x 23.50 cm (overall)  
 Museum Rietberg, 2023.229  
 Gift of Eva and Konrad Seitz



Fig. 8  
 Not yet identified Mughal workshop  
**Seated Lady with Turban Jewelry**  
 Album leaf with calligraphy on the reverse  
 Mughal, c. 1760-1780 CE, 21.40 x 14.40 cm (overall)  
 Museum Rietberg, 2022.433  
 Legacy of Raymonde Alice Juon



## 'One Object in Question' Residency Program

Duration (in Zurich): 10.08.2025 – 11.11.2025

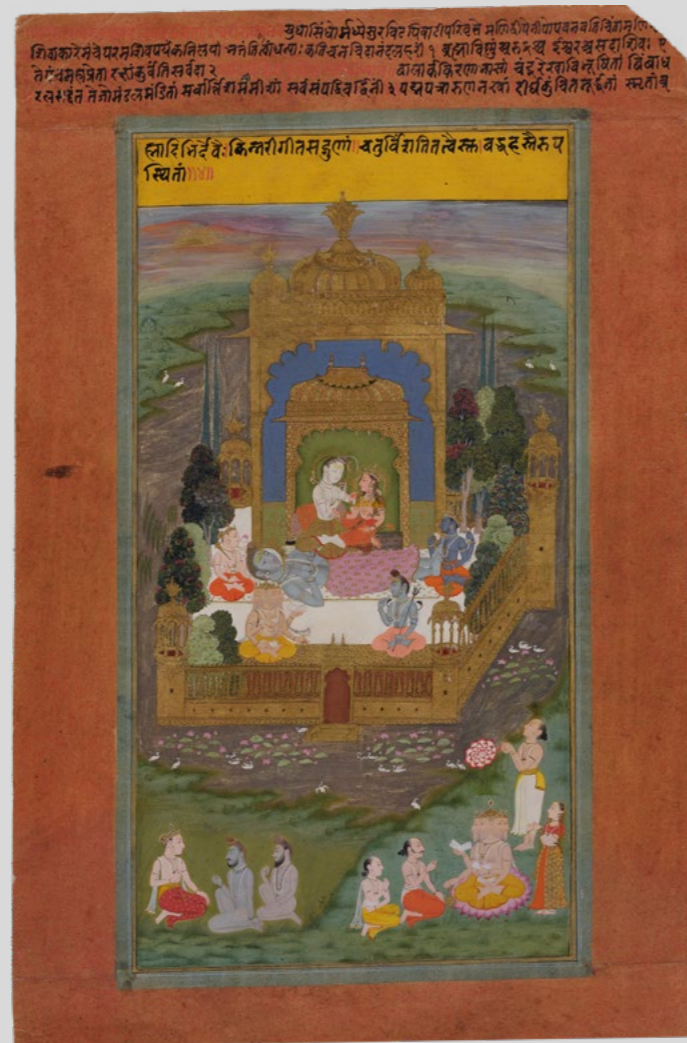
Focusing on one mid-eighteenth-century Mewar painting, *Goddess on the Jewel Island*, Indranil Banerjee developed a research methodology which could also enrich the broader discipline of Indian painting studies. Rather than examining the painting only in relation to other existing versions or copies, the study introduces a less explored perspective in South Asian art history: understanding early modern paintings through their relationship with regional sculptural traditions.

Despite the temporal gap between medieval sculptural traditions in western India and early modern Rajput painting practices, Shaivite sculptures and temple sites remained active and visible well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This continued presence suggests that the painters were familiar with them. Building on existing scholarship that shows how artists engaged with existing pictorial traditions and the built environment, this study introduces the concept of “intermedial response” to explore how sculptural forms and iconographies were consciously translated into painting. Such engagements can be seen in paintings from the period of Sangram Singh II, including examples in the Museum Rietberg. The study argues for artistic agency, emphasizing deliberate structuring and assembly of visual elements rather than unconscious borrowing.

Banerjee presented his findings and research methodology at the Museum Rietberg on 30 October 2025 in an open presentation for museum staff, followed by a presentation on 6 November 2025 for the GBF Trustees. He successfully defended his approach and is now developing an article, along with future research projects based on this methodology. The forthcoming article will incorporate scientific analysis of the painting conducted at SIK-ISEA.



Indranil Banerjee at his final presentation



Master at the court of Maharana Sangram Singh II  
The Goddess on the Jewel Island  
full caption, see p. 12

## Research Project

An ongoing research project on works by the artist Saroj Rathod (1935/36-2009), alongside themes and connections in Chamba Rumals, emerged from the SOAS-Museum Rietberg collaboration. The research will inform a proposed exhibition, tentatively titled “Needle Paintings”.

### RESEARCH UPDATES

#### A. DHRUPAD MEHTA'S UPDATE ON SAROJ RATHOD:

In 2025, the research initiated in 2024 entered a more focused phase of primary investigation into the life and art practice of Saroj Rathod. From February onwards, the work involved archival analysis, art historical study, and tracing provenance to understand the scope and circulation of her practice. First-hand conversations were conducted with Saroj's family members and close associates as well as representatives from institutions holding her works. These interactions offered crucial insights into how her works were produced, received and valued across domestic, institutional, and international contexts.

The research brings together these materials to examine how caste and gender shape artistic practice and its reception. It also critically addresses hierarchies of medium and the role of patrons and institutions in shaping art historical and cultural narratives.

#### B. BHAVYA GAUR'S UPDATE ON CHAMBA RUMALS:

In 2025, Bhavya Gaur's research on Chamba Rumals reached a significant milestone through international collaboration. Through close mentorship with Dr. Eberhard Fischer, she expanded her methodological approach by incorporating object-based analysis, including sketching as a research tool.

Her summer visit to Zurich allowed her to handle historic textiles firsthand, bridging the gap between academic theory and curatorial practice. With primary research complete, she is looking forward to bringing the intricate world of Chamba Rumals to a global audience through an upcoming publication in 2026.



Researchers Dhruvad Mehta (top) and Bhavya Gaur (bottom) are fully engaged in the projects for developing articles as well as the exhibition content.

## GBF Travels



**A. SONIKA SONI**  
 Destination: London  
 Travel Dates: 19–23 March 2025  
 Purpose: Talk on “Ragamala: An exhibition as a Business Module”  
 Venue: Bayes Business School (formerly Cass), City St George, University of London  
 Meetings with: Francesca Galloway, Maithili Parekh, Malini Roy



**B. JOHANNES BELTZ AND SONIKA SONI**  
 Destination: Vienna  
 Travel Dates: 27–28 March 2025  
 Purpose: Attending the seminar on “Mantram Projects”  
 Venue: Institut für Südasien-, Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde, University of Vienna



**C. JOHANNES BELTZ**  
 Destination: India  
 Travel Dates: 8–14 December 2025  
 Purpose: Opening of the exhibition “Networks of the Past” (CSMVS), and workshop on “Curation in Museums” (Somaiya University)  
 Venue: CSMVS, KJ Somaiya Institute of Dharma Studies Somaiya Vidyavihar University, Mumbai

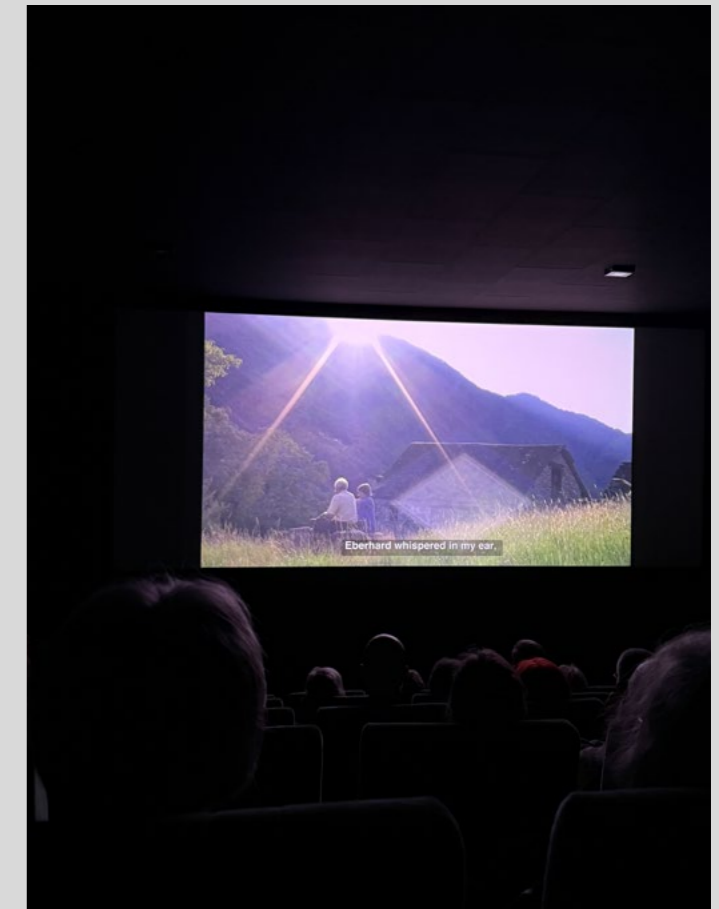
## New Release

Eberhard, as seen by Amit  
A Feature Film  
Screened at: Kino Cameo, 8th October 2025  
Directed by: Amit Dutta

This film is a portrait of Eberhard Fischer, a Swiss ethnographer, art historian, and field researcher. Eberhard served as the director of Museum Rietberg for twenty-seven years (1973-1998). Now in his eighties, his lifelong passion has been to engage with artistically minded individuals across cultures and social worlds.

From documenting mask carvers in West Africa at the age of eighteen to his later collaborations with Indian art historians such as Haku Shah, Dinanath Pathy, and B. N. Goswamy, Fischer's work consistently joined scholarship with friendship. His sustained fascination with the eighteenth-century Pahari painter *Nainsukh* led to a collaboration with filmmaker Amit Dutta on *Nainsukh* (2010), followed by a series of short films that explored art-historical questions through close attention and process. Over fifteen years of friendship, Dutta gradually turned the camera inward to reflect on Fischer's life, ideas, and legacy, drawing on archival material and shared memories as a deep creative bond unfolds with precision.

*Text by Amit Dutta*



Snippets from the screening and discussion of  
"Eberhard, as seen by Amit" in Winterthur

# Integration of the Publication Foundation into the GBF Foundation

In 2025, the Publication Foundation merged with the newly established GBF Foundation. As a result, Artibus Asiae is now published and operates under the aegis of the GBF Foundation. From 1st January 2026, Barbara Hefti will join the GBF Foundation as accountant and publication manager.

# Impressum

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