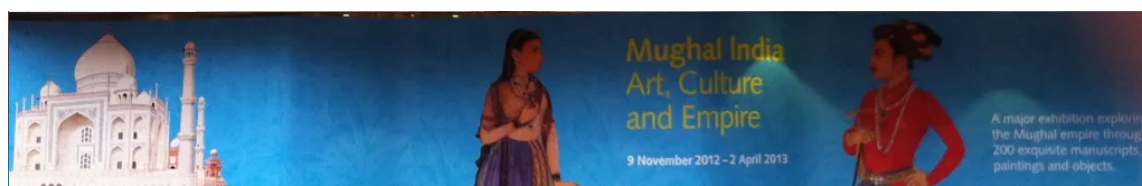


# Exploring Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire at the British Library - State of the Art

*About the Author Posted by elisabettamarabotto*

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*Elisabetta Marabotto of Saffronart in conversation with Malini Roy, curator of the current Mughal exhibition at the British Library, London*



Mughal India Art, Culture and Empire, British Library, London

**London:** On display at the British Library until April 2013, 'Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire' celebrates the Mughal empire for the first time in its entirety, from its beginning to its eventual decline (1526-1858).

The exhibition, divided thematically, explores the rich cultural heritage the Mughals left in the fields of art, architecture, literature and science, and it also celebrates the patrons that made these innovations and discoveries possible.

I had the pleasure of meeting Malini Roy at the British Library and asking her few questions about the exhibition.



Malini Roy, Curator of Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire, British Library, London

**Q:** The exhibition Mughal India covers the entire Mughal period for the first time. Why did you decide to cover the entire period and not just focus on a certain aspect or time frame?

**A:** I decided to focus on the whole Mughal Period because no one really looks at the entire period. Also, my interest and research is on the late Mughal Period and I wanted to include it in this exhibition and the British Library has an extensive collection covering the entire period.

**Q:** How many works are on display? What is their provenance?

**A:** There are circa two-hundred works on display. Most of

them are from the British Library Collection, the rest are from institutions and museums' collections such as the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the British Museum (London), the Royal Asiatic Society (London), the Bodleian Library (Oxford), the India Office Library Collection (London) and the Royal Collection (Windsor).

**Q:** What are the highlights of the exhibition? What is the most significant work for you?

**A:** There are many highlights of the exhibition [which you can enjoy in the slideshow at the end of the interview] so it is quite difficult to choose a few. Personally I really like “A Panorama of Delhi by Mazhar ‘Ali Khan”. It is an impressive five meter long painting showing the Delhi panorama drawn from the view point of the Lahore Gate of the Red Fort. Also, the playful “Squirrels in a Plane Tree” is one of my favourite works.



A Panorama of Delhi by Mazhar 'Ali Khan. Image Credit:  
© The British Library Board



Squirrels in a plane tree. Image Credit: © The British Library Board

**Q:** At the beginning of the year the Ashmolean Museum presented 'Visions of Mughal India: The collection of Howard Hodgkin', and the Fondazione Roma Museo is currently showing: 'Akbar: The Great Emperor of India'. Now the British Library is hosting 'Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire'. It is evident that there is a great interest in Mughal India. What is your opinion on this?

**A:** The interest in Mughal art and culture has been constant. It is one of the most celebrated periods of Indian history. However the last exhibition dedicated to the entire Mughal Period dates 1982 and was held at the Victoria and Albert Museum: 'The Indian Heritage: Court Life and Arts under Mughal Rule'. So we wanted to remind people of our collection of Mughal miniatures and show these fine works of art.

**Q:** To whom is this exhibition directed? How many visitors are you expecting? How has the response been so far?

**A:** Traditionally, British Library exhibitions attract traditional museum visitors. However we have had a quite diverse audience so far, many art and primary school students came to see the exhibition. The response has been very positive, we had very positive reviews from newspapers, art magazines and the exhibition is listed as one of top exhibitions at the moment in London. And we are definitely meeting our target with an average of 360 visitors per day.

**Q:** What is the main message behind this exhibition?

**A:** I wanted to showcase the wonderful collection the British Library has and that people don't know about and also celebrate some of the greatest patrons of Indian art and architecture that created some of the finest artworks which still witness their grandeur. Also since now the interest seems to be more on modern and contemporary Indian art I wanted to bring the Mughals back under the spot light.

Mughal India: Art, Culture and Empire is definitely a must see if you are in London. The exhibition will make you experience traditional Mughal life during your visit and educate you through superb works of art.

More information on the exhibition can be found on the British Library [website](#). Below you can enjoy a slideshow of highlights from the exhibition.



Jade gem-set flywhisk handle. Private Collection,  
Courtesy of Simon Ray, London. Image Credit: © The  
British Library Board

*Dr. Malini Roy is the Curator of Visual Arts at the British Library. Her field of research focuses on later Mughal painting and Company paintings produced during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the provinces of Awadh and Bengal as well as at the Mughal capital of*

*Delhi.*



Portrait of the Prince Dara Shikoh (1631-32)



Crown of the Emperor Bahadur Shah II, (mid 19th c), on loan from the Royal Collection Trust.



Instructional poem for pigeon -fanciers by Valih Musavi.



Elephant trampling a tiger. Image Credit:© The British Library Board



Akbar Shah II listening to singers and musicians. Image Credit: © The British Library Board