The Mughal Empire
1526 - 1707

Established by Babur, a Muslim from Central Asia, in 1526 with the help of the rulers of Persia (modern Iran)

Expanded by his grandson, Akbar (r. 1556-1605), who conquered northern and central India and laid the real foundation for the empire

The Mughals, during most of their dominance, were known for strong central government and tolerance of all religions

The Mughals grew very wealthy from trade with Europeans, the Ottoman Empire (Turks) and along the Silk Road

The empire expanded into part of southern India under Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707), but declined after 1707

Source: The Art of the Mughals, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Portrait of Akbar
by Manohar,
c. 1604,
Hermitage Museum

Akbar Hears a Petition
by Manohar, c. 1604,
H: 10 inches, India,
Freer & Sackler Galleries
Basic Beliefs of Islam

- Monotheistic - a belief in only one God, Allah, who is omnipotent.
- The overall purpose of humanity is to serve Allah, to worship him alone and to construct a moral lifestyle.
- The Koran or Qu’ran is the holy book of Islam, the written revelation from Allah to the prophet Muhammad in the 6th century.
- Muslims believe in a final judgment when individuals will be judged according to their deeds.
- Mosques are the main places of worship and also serve as social and political centers, sometimes with libraries, schools and hospitals.
- There are many sects of Muslims.

Source: website: ThinkQuest.org

Masjid-I Jahan-Numa (World Reflecting Mosque), Commissioned by Shah Jahan, 1650, Delhi, India
Web: Wikimedia

The Art of the Mughal Empire

- Akbar (r. 1556-1605) was the first Mughal (Muslim) patron of the arts and Persian, Muslim and Hindu artists in his royal workshops collaborated to develop the Mughal painting style.
- Akbar commissioned numerous illustrated manuscripts that combined Persian, Indian and European elements.
- Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) expanded patronage of the arts, promoted individual artists and encouraged careful plant and animal studies.
- Shah Jahan (r. 1628 - 1658) is most celebrated for his architectural achievements, especially the Taj Mahal.
- Aurangzeb (r. 1658 - 1707) banned music and painting from his court, based on his strict Islamic beliefs.

The Spy Zambur Brings Mahira to Tawariq (Muslim), Unknown Mughal Artist, c. 1570 (Akbar), H: 29 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Harivamsa (The Legend of Hari Krishna - Hindu), Unknown Mughal Artist, c. 1590-95 (Akbar), H: 11.5 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Harivamsa (The Legend of Hari Krishna - Hindu), Unknown Mughal Artist, c. 1590-95, H: 11.5 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Alexander Visits the Sage Plato, Attributed to Basawan, c. 1597-98 (Akbar), H: 10 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Alexander Visits the Sage Plato, Attributed to Basawan, c. 1597-98 (Akbar), H: 10 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Carpet With Pictorial Design, Unknown Mughal Artists, late 16th century (Akbar), H: 27 feet, W: 9 feet, Metropolitan Museum of Art
Leaf from the Razmnama (Hindu), Unknown Mughal Artist, c. 1616-17 (Jahangir), H: 15.5 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Leaf from the Razmnama (Hindu), Unknown Mughal Artist, c. 1616-17, H: 15.5 inches, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Drawing of a Female Figure, Nar Singh, 1589-1604, H: 3.5 inches, Mughal Dynasty, Freer & Sackler Galleries

Portrait of Shah Jahan on Horseback, Payag, 1628-58, H: 15 inches, India, Metropolitan Museum of Art


The Emperor Aurangzeb at a Royal Hunt, Bhavanidas, c. 1700, H: 23 inches, Mughal, India, Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Emperor Aurangzeb at a Royal Hunt, Bhavanidas, c. 1700, H: 23 inches, Mughal, India, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Huqqa Base, Unknown Deccan Artist, c. 1680, H: 7 inches, India, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Kalamkari Wall Hanging, Unknown Mughal Artists, c. 1640-50, H: 99 inches, Mughal, India, Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Mughal Empire (1526-1757) exhibited the beginnings of modern culture as it is currently defined:
- Urbanization
- Individualism
- Objective approach to nature
- These phenomena were also present in:
  - Renaissance Florence (1400-1600)
  - Edo or Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868)
- However, modernity didn’t last in India because there was no large middle class and the caste system discouraged upward mobility.

Mughal artists lived in a culture where:
- Politics: a strong central government was controlled by the Shah
- Politics: the Shah and his courtiers were great patrons of the arts which flourished
- Religion: Muslim rulers governed a Hindu country but all religions could create artworks for their worship
- Religion: Buddhist temples were destroyed, but Hindu and Muslim temples were built
- Economics: the Mughal Empire grew rich from trade with Europeans, Turks and countries along the Silk Road
- Economics: the Shah, courtiers, and wealthy merchants were all patrons of the arts
- Economics: Government officials commissioned artworks that they used as bribes for advancement.
- Economics: artists were highly skilled in painting, metalwork, stone and architecture.

Mughal artists lived in a culture where:
- Social Organization: artists were highly skilled craftsmen.
- Social Organization: Under Shah Jahangir individual artists were recognized and honored for their work.
- Social Organization: Guilds, workshops and individual artists were known by the aristocracy who were their patrons.
- Artistic Influences: artists were employed by a royal patron and taught by a master artist in a workshop.
- Artistic Influences: artists from many cultures - Persian, Hindu and Muslim - worked collaboratively in the same workshops.
- Artistic Influences: many architecturally splendid monuments were built and enjoyed by everyone.
Mughal artists lived in a culture where:

- International Influences: Persian (Iranian) artists worked and taught in Mughal India.
- International Influences: European traders brought their artworks and artists to India where they were welcomed in the courts.
- International Influences: Trade along the Silk Road brought goods from China, the Ottoman Empire and Central Asia to Mughal markets.

This ends our third presentation on the Art of India, The Mughal Empire.