

## ITP Report

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Mumbai, India

ITP Duration: 4 weeks – 20<sup>th</sup> September – 14<sup>th</sup> October 2022

ITP Museum: The British Museum, London and the National Museums NI, Belfast

Sponsor: Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust



The International Training Programme at the British Museum is six weeks long which was this time due to COVID-19 divided in two parts – two weeks on online course material and four weeks on training in person in UK.

The online programme was designed in 8 sections each with various modules which had videos by colleagues from the British Museum and UK partner museums.

1. Collection Management
2. Audiences
3. Conservation, Preventive Conservation and Scientific Research
4. Permanent Displays: The Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic World
5. National and International Loans
6. Temporary Exhibitions - Tantra: enlightenment to revolution
7. Museum Management
8. Going Digital

These modules were beneficial and will be a reference point for the future as well. These are great discussions about various functions and activities of the British Museum. It helped me understand how the British Museum governs and manages itself. The British Museum is one of the oldest museums of the world. It has a vast world collection as well as reach. Over the past many years, the British Museum has collaborated with many museums including my museum – CSMVS, Mumbai.

### **ITP Fellows**

To join this year's 14 other ITP fellows from 12 countries, I reached London on Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The training at the British Museum began on Tuesday, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Over the course of one month, ITP fellows spent three weeks in the British Museum and visiting other museums.

Working for over a decade in museums in India I have had a few opportunities to meet museum professionals outside of India but mainly from Europe. This was the first time I got to interact on a one-on-one basis with museum professionals from countries in Asia, Africa and South America. Most of us are young democracies or nations formed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To our parts, the idea of museum and preserving objects like it belongs to a museum is a borrowed idea from Europe. It is true that journey of museums has been inconsistent and often lacking. The ITP therefore provides an excellent platform to interact with fellow professionals not just from the UK but also from other countries.



### **Interaction with BM staff**

As a Curator, my role at CSMVS is mainly that of research, exhibition and collection management. Though at CSMVS we are often involved in other aspects of museum management and education, the role is of course limited. During the course of the ITP in the British Museum, I got to understand how various departments work such as education, governance, community interaction, interpretation, temporary and international exhibitions, strategic planning, marketing. Most of these sessions began with presentations by the speaker from a particular department following interesting conversations between the speaker and the fellows. One of the best parts of these sessions were the active encouragement by the BM staff to engage with fellows in dialogues who were keen to know how a particular department or function works in our respective country/museum.

The highlight of these interactions was the Reimagining the British Museum session. It was quite exciting to hear about the future of the BM and how it is being shaped or reshaped.

### **BM Curator**

During the ITP at the BM, I got to spend time in the South Asia department interacting with the curators. Not only did I spend time with the South Asian curators, I also got to see the stores and reserve collection. Our group (who were from South Asia) were given a curatorial walk through and a sneak peak into the future projects.

In CSMVS, I am part of the Curatorial team of the Ancient World Gallery wherein we are collaborating with the British Museum and Berlin State Museums and taking objects on loans from various departments of these two museums. The ITP gave me the opportunity to interact with curators from other curatorial departments as well. I got to interact with Dr. Irving Finkel and Dr. Jonathan Taylor, Dr. James Fraser who is curating the much-awaited temporary exhibition Luxuries as well as Dr. Zeina Klink-Hoppe who gave us a fabulous talk and tour of the 'Shattered Glass of Beirut' exhibition.

We were also given tours of the following exhibitions: Feminine power; the divine to the demonic and Hieroglyphs; unlocking ancient Egypt, by the curators.

As a curator, these talks and visits were extremely important because this gave me a chance to discuss with academics about curatorial skills and challenges.



Feminine Power with Belinda Crerar, Curator: International Exhibitions, International Engagement



Spending the day with Sushma Jansari, Tabor Foundation Curator: South Asia Collections in the Asia Department



'Shattered Glass of Beirut' exhibition

### **ITP Highlights**

The ITP engaged the fellows in various ways. Every year the fellows are asked to work with one object and apply their learning to it. This year some changes were brought in as the fellows were asked to decide on a theme and select one object around that theme. The fellows shortlisted on 'Food and drink' which could be used later as a trail for the visitor. Each fellow selected an object which was on display. I selected a contemporary porcelain art object (Fish and Chips) by the Japanese artist Ms Hosono Hitomi who had used the very modern-day story of migration to talk about food, which is tangible but incorporates many intangible stories and aspects. It was quite challenging and intriguing to work with this object which is not from my country or culture yet so universal. Also challenging, was the video shoot where we presented the object selected.



Chips - 2018,3018.1; Fish - 2018,3018.2

Another interesting activity we were given was to write a social media post and a blog. Each fellow was given a day when they were to make a social media post (in a social media platform they use) about that ITP day. We also wrote a blog which got posted in Facebook to the ITP page and on the ITP website.

### **Museum Visits**

The fellows visited many museums during our stay, some as part of the ITP and some independently. We were given a task to visit an exhibition/museum and make a small presentation. With two fellows, Beatrice Bamigbade and Yanoa Carrasco, I went to see the temporary exhibition titled “Inspiring Walt Disney: The Animation of French Decorative Arts”. We were given a few parameters on which we were asked to judge the exhibition based on what we had learnt during the four weeks of the ITP. The exhibition was about French influence on Walt Disney movies like Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella.

We were also taken on day trips to visit various museums. I went to the Fitzwilliam Museum and Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge with some of the ITP fellows. With Dr. Mark Elliot we discussed the challenges of shifting their collection to their new store. On another day the entire team was taken to the Victoria & Albert Museum. There we were given an overview of the future of the V&A and some of their programmes about repatriation and retribution. The team also got to see the temporary exhibitions like “Africa Fashion” and the very interesting “Hallyu! the Korean wave”.

On the free days, I visited other museums in London as well. The ITP team also took us to Stonehenge.

We also visited Kenwood House and was generously hosted by Frances Carey.



Guided tour by tour guide at the V&A Museum





“Hallyu! the Korean wave” at V&A Museum



Mark Elliott, Museum Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge



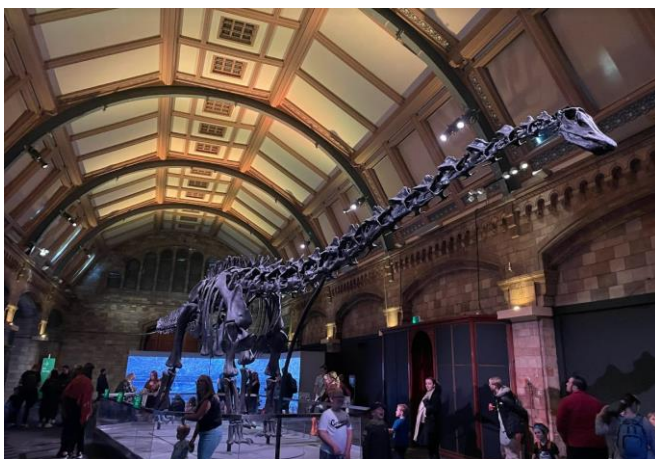
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford



Natural History Museum



Stonehenge visit



At Kenwood with Frances Carey

### **UK partner museum – National Museum Northern Ireland**

For the UK partner museum, I had selected to visit the National Museums Northern Ireland. I wanted to use this opportunity to understand how museums in these regional geo-political blocks with their own rich and diverse cultural history work. Having worked in regional museums myself, it is fascinating to see how colleagues of these institutions face the challenge of being relevant to the strong local identity of being from Northern Ireland which has such a strong sense of a regional identity within the United Kingdom and working around the 21<sup>st</sup> century political, national and global demand from multi-cultural societies to be homogeneous as well as diverse.

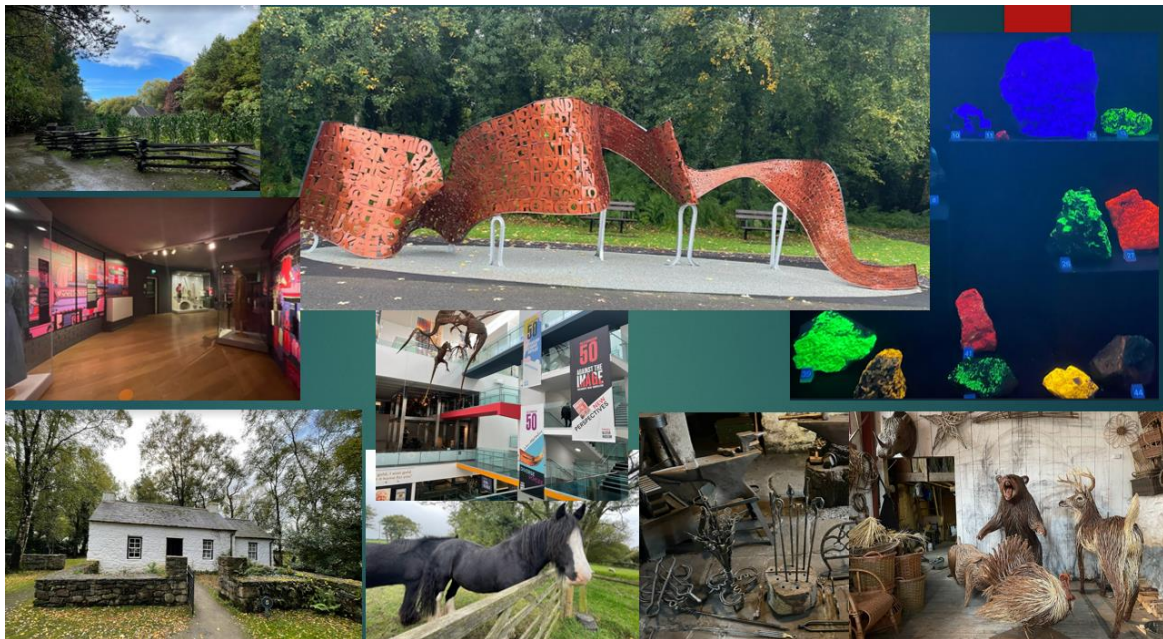
One must remember CSMVS has borrowed the name of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj who is revered in Maharashtra, a state in India where the museum is, even though we do not have objects



belonging to him except a few coins. Many citizens from this state who visit CSMVS, often expect to see the regional history or ask to learn about the history of the city of Mumbai.

My visit to these groups of Ulster museums was a very different experience. In India we do not have a typical open air museum park. The visits to the American Folk Park at Omagh and the Ulster Folk Museum in Belfast and interacting with the craftsmen there was very exciting. Another important and interesting experience was the exhibition at the Ulster Museum on the recent civil history of the place.

We also interacted with various staff of the museum about community engagement, education, curation, documentation and collection management. I am grateful to the Louise Smyth and other members of the museum for their time and engagement.



National Museums Northern Ireland — Ulster Museum, Ulster Folk Museum, Ulster Transport Museum and Ulster American Folk Park

### **ITP and I**

I want to thank the entire ITP team Claire Messenger, Anna Cottle, George Peckham and Senior Fellow Roshan Mishra for their hospitality and support. I would also like to thank my sponsor, the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust. The ITP was truly a great experience as it gave me an opportunity to see the fabulous British Museum and its rich world collection. It also allowed me to participant in frank conversations with various museum professionals. We need to understand that countries and professionals will differ on many issues and practices, but it is important to have open dialogue. In the past two years humanity has suffered tremendously. War and conflict are on-going but pandemics are just as possible in spite of the medical advances, even in developed nations. But through all of this, the museums and its members have passionately stayed connected with the public. There were many challenges. The world and its dynamics are ever changing and changing often and faster than one is able to keep up with. To the world, the museum may look slow paced but in the past decade museums world over have changed tremendously.

I have learnt this first-hand in my museum and also here at the ITP I learnt that museums all over are facing the same challenges. So, our solutions are the same. On the other hand, museums have to be developed according to one's own culture.

In the course of one month, I got an opportunity to see different kinds of museums and interact with many museum professionals. I got an opportunity to discuss various problems facing museums across the globe and learn about the creative solutions museums are bringing to the table, especially in this fast-changing world.

There are a few things that I would like to apply in my museum but foremost is a more active engagement with communities. Being a museum that hosts what we understand in India as classical Hindu art, we rarely engage with people. Our engagement is mainly through labels explaining the high art. It will now be a conscious effort to connect objects with people and make the texts in galleries more people focussed rather than object focussed.

But my biggest take away from the ITP was what I was told in Belfast, that the museum is a Safe Place where people can have conversations. It is something I would like my museum to be.