

ROM

Friends of Global South Asia

Spring 2026

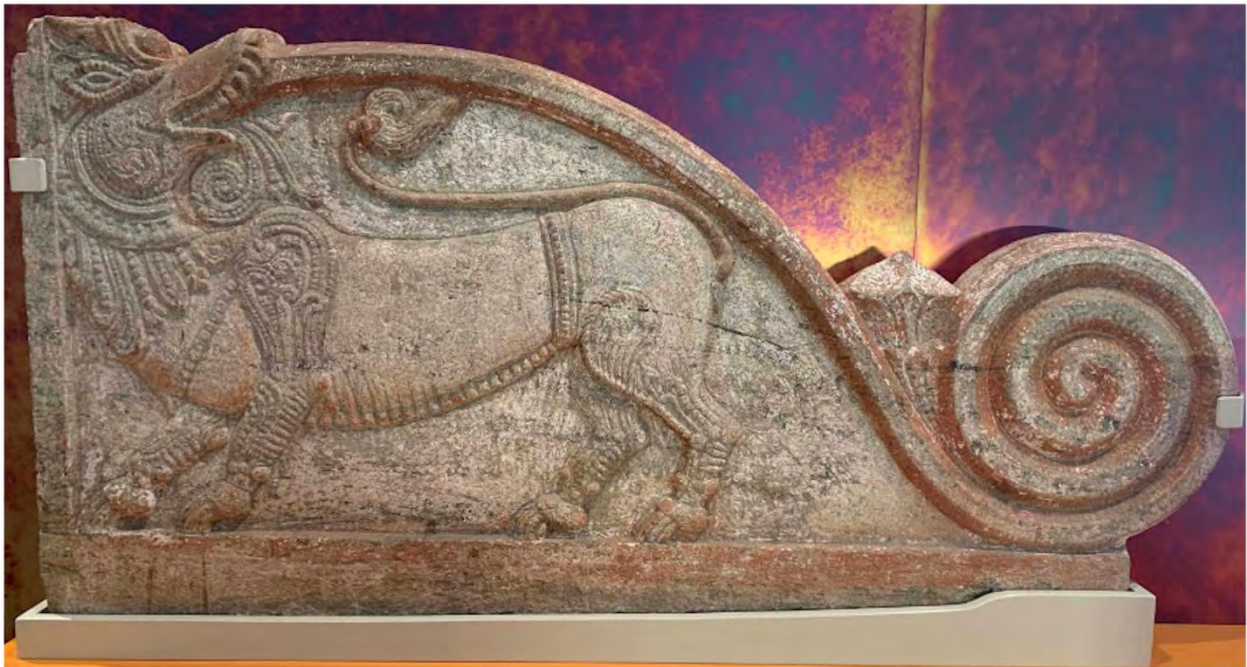


Figure 1: Balustrade of a female Yali, pigment on dolomite, Sri Lanka, 16th century CE, 72.5 × 145 × 12 cm., 2006.86.1.

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends of Global South Asia,

It's been a cold, wet spring, but FGSA has been keeping busy since our last newsletter. We have hosted two tours as described below and we hosted our annual behind-the-scenes tour for donors with the curator, Dr. Deepali Dewan. It is such a special event. Make sure you have donated and joined FGSA so that you can attend this private tour!

We are also excited to follow along as ROM fundraises to build the museum's new suite of South Asia galleries, which will open in a few years. Contact us if you are interested in donating this amazing endeavour! – Piali Roy, Chair, FGSA

Encounters with Memory, Place & Practice



Figure 2: Artist Zinnia Naqvi speaking during the FGSA tour of *Island of Strangers* at Susan Hobbs Gallery.

On May 2, 2026, FGSA members had the chance to attend *Island of Strangers*, an exhibit bringing together works by Zinnia Naqvi and Shahana Rajani at the Susan Hobbs Gallery.

The tour began with Naqvi walking the group through her work, deeply rooted in personal archives: family photographs, found images, and collected materials. One piece, featuring a school poster she made as a child to represent Pakistan, stirred rich conversation among attendees. Questions of representation surfaced alongside reflections on an inherited idea of home, one not directly inhabited yet deeply felt. The tension between these notions, and the need to problematize belonging within a multicultural fabric, unfolded in exchanges between the group and the artist. The exhibit also includes Naqvi's cyanotypes, through which she creates traces, prints, and maps.

Naqvi explained the cyanotype process to the group; the sun-printing process, the emergence of that distinct blue after drying, and how she uses it to preserve and present

layered “blueprints.” These works bring together text and image across time, juxtaposing portrayals and performances of home, identity, belonging, and acts of looking back.

The group then followed the artists to the upper floor, where Rajani’s work is on display. She offered a beautifully articulated snapshot of her practice with coastal communities in Pakistan, of the time she spent living among them, moving through their landscapes, and learning from what they shared. Her work reflects a careful, conscientious effort to represent this knowledge in ways that remain as close and ethical as possible to its original holders. Rajani’s probing of the sacred and the secular within local traditions invites viewers to remain attentive to the magic, the elusiveness, and the unsaid, elements that often risk slipping through modern interpretations and reinterpretations.

Also, part of the exhibit is a video Rajani filmed during her time with Indigenous communities in Pakistan. It features local voices and stories of returning to the beloved (here, the sea), of *zikr* (remembrance) practices, of the intimate making of *taweez* (amulet/talisman), and of how the sacred is woven into the everyday fabric of life.

Both Naqvi and Rajani shared their thoughts, motivations, inspirations, and artistic processes with the group. Their voices, interweaving the personal, the public, and the collective, resonate throughout the work on display. I, for one, carried those echoes with me as I walked out. – Samia Naqvi

Behind the Scenes Tour with our Curator



Figure 3: Dr. Deepali Dewan leading an FGSA behind-the-scenes donors tour at ROM, featuring objects from the Global South Asia collection.

I had the pleasure of joining a special behind-the-scenes tour last week, featuring beautiful antiquities from across South Asia. The tour was led by Deepali Dewan, the Dan Mishra Curator of the South Asian Gallery. She had a remarkable way of bringing these objects to life, tracing their stories from ancient times to the present day.

She shared insights into how ROM's Global South Asian gallery will lean into storytelling and present objects through multiple perspectives. The gallery is also unique in the Western world for bringing historical artifacts and contemporary art together in a shared space. This ranges from sacred Shaligram fossils discovered on mountaintops in Nepal, which reveal both geological history and their role as objects of worship, to contemporary interpretations of the Shiva Lingam by Toronto-based painter and sculptor Youngo Verma, whose work explores the interplay of light, dark, and duality.

We also encountered exquisite Mughal paintings, known for their finely measured compositions, delicate detail, and luminous jewel-toned colours. Deepali's colleague Navjot Dhanoa, who first joined the department as an intern through FGSA's fundraising program and is now a full-time member of the team, guided us through the works, sharing the story of two generations of painters and his research into the layered symbolism within each scene. The tour also highlighted stunning jewelry worn by women from regional communities, each piece reflecting the artistry, culture, and traditions of those who created and wore them.

On a personal note, it was especially meaningful for me to see a traditional lamp from my home state of Kerala on display, a beautiful reminder of how these collections connect to memory, identity, and heritage. We were also joined by one of our donor families, whose generous donation of treasured family heirlooms ensures these stories can continue to be shared and preserved for future generations.

If this experience was any indication of what is to come, I am excited for the reopening of the Global South Asian Galleries at ROM. For those looking to connect more deeply with South Asian culture and history, membership offers unique opportunities to take part in exclusive behind-the-scenes tours and events like this one. – Devi Ekanand

Sketches from an Artist's Notebook



Figure 4: Sketches from an artist's notebook, ink and watercolour on paper, Jodhpur (Marwar), Rajasthan, India, 19th century, 2009.10.39.

How often do we get a glimpse of sketches from Marwar paintings?

These notebook pages, held in ROM's collection, capture quick studies of figures: a noble on a horse, and profiles of men and women. These could have been sketches in preparation of another painting, sketches just to experiment, or studies of figures from an already existing painting.

Sketchbooks allowed artists a freedom not often seen in finished works. Yet the bold outlines typical of the Jodhpur court are clearly visible here, along with the skilled rendering of facial hair associated with its artists. – Vishwa Patel

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FGSA Gallery Hop at DesignTO Festival 2026



Figure 5: Installation view from *Assembly: A holding space for culture* at It's OK Studios during FGSA's DesignTO Festival gallery hop.

On January 31, 2026, FGSA's DesignTO Festival gallery hop brought together community members for an afternoon of conversations around design, memory, and cultural identity within the South Asian diaspora in Toronto.

The group first gathered at It's OK Studios to visit *Assembly: A holding space for culture*, an exhibition that combined installation work, interactive elements, archival material, and sculptural pieces to reflect on how cultural practices are preserved and shared across communities.

Artists Alycia Shanika and Erica Whyte joined the group to speak about their work, offering insight into the personal and collective narratives informing their practices. Through installations, sculptures, and participatory elements, the exhibition encouraged attendees to think about cultural holding spaces not only as physical sites, but also as ongoing acts of care and gathering.

Following the visit, the group walked together to Red Head Gallery to see *Nice to meet you!*, a group exhibition curated by design collective Table. Centered on the idea of “the act of a greeting,” the exhibition explored how design can create moments of welcome, belonging, and connection through both physical and digital works.

The co-curators guided attendees through the space and answered questions about the featured projects and broader curatorial themes. Several audiovisual works drew particular attention, especially after attendees learned that some of the sound recordings used in the pieces had been captured directly from the locations and environments represented in the artworks themselves.

The exhibit sparked discussions around how sound, visual design, and spatial elements can evoke memory and foster a sense of connection to particular places and experiences. – Samia Naqvi

FGSA x Art Manzil

Panel Discussion: South Asian Art Collecting in the Diaspora



Figure 6: Panel discussion on South Asian art collecting in the diaspora featuring Meenakshi Alimchandani, Vandana Taxali, and Anjali Patel, moderated by Niyash Mistry, at Atelier Next Door.

Last summer, FGSA and Art Manzil came together to co-host a compelling panel discussion on the evolving landscape of South Asian art collecting in diasporic

communities, particularly in Canada. The conversation brought together three dynamic voices in the field: Meenakshi Alimchandani, Vandana Taxali, and Anjali Patel, with Niyash Mistry (Art Manzil's founder and curator of the *Ways of Being* exhibit) serving as moderator.

Mistry opened the discussion by inviting each speaker to reflect on their connection to the exhibit *Ways of Being*, which surrounded the attendees in the beautiful space at Atelier Next Door. From this grounding point, the conversation transitioned organically into broader reflections on the role of art within diasporic communities – as a medium, an expression, and a vital tool for representation.

Taxali and Patel delved into the layered challenges South Asian art faces, even amidst increased visibility. They spoke to the complex dynamics of appropriation, where hard-won representation is sometimes co-opted by non-South Asian creators, diluting or misdirecting the intended narrative. This sparked a rich exchange with the audience. Attendee Asma Mahmood noted how fears of appropriation can sometimes lead to unintended exclusion, shutting out voices that may offer different, yet equally passionate, perspectives. Another participant highlighted that viewing this issue through the lens of allyship might be more productive than framing it as a binary between appropriation and authenticity. Instead, we must interrogate the nature of allyship being offered: its intentions, impacts, and limitations, they added.

Alimchandani emphasized the importance of diaspora members actively contributing to their own communities' representation. Without such efforts, she cautioned, the richness of these stories risks being overlooked entirely. Meanwhile, Taxali spoke to how cultural attitudes have historically discouraged artistic aspirations within South Asian families, particularly among children, citing her own experience. While the landscape is gradually shifting, the panelists agreed that continued effort and support are crucial to fostering sustained change.

Mistry offered a poignant reflection on the oft-repeated phrase that "South Asian art is having its moment." While this increased visibility is certainly worth celebrating, he warned that such a narrative can become too sweeping, glossing over the deeper, ongoing struggles. This "moment," he urged, must be met with as much critical engagement and innovation as celebration.

The panel closed with a vibrant reception, where attendees continued the conversation informally, sharing reflections, building connections, and discussing the many themes sparked by the discussion. The event was made possible through the active collaboration of Niyash Mistry (Art Manzil) and Nitin Deckha (FGSA), with generous support from Atelier Next Door.

Speakers Meenakshi Alimchandani, Vandana Taxali, and Anjali Patel brought nuanced perspectives to the conversation, and their continued engagement with attendees underscored the event's spirit of dialogue and community. The thoughtful participation of FGSA members and guests helped make this a truly memorable evening. – Samia Naqvi

FGSA Membership

Membership in a Friends group at ROM is a wonderful way to support the museum and the Global South Asian collection. Thanks to a long history of generous benefactors, we now have a dedicated gallery, an endowed curatorship, innovative programming, and ongoing education about South Asian art, culture, and history.

Friends of Global South Asia

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Contact FGSA: fgsa@rom.on.ca

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Friends of Global South Asia is organized by ROM's Department of Museum Volunteers to provide support for the Museum. ROM is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

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