

A textile label, a rickshaw, exquisite Mughal paintings and a precious Cartier brooch – telling the stories of Britain’s South Asian communities as the UK’s first ever permanent gallery opens in Manchester:

A unique collaboration between the British Museum and Manchester Museum.

Press images: <https://tinyurl.com/SAGpress>

- The British Museum and Manchester Museum, which is part of the University of Manchester, present a co-curated gallery
- Led by a Collective – from Manchester’s local South Asian communities
- Championing community co-curation at a scale and depth of partnership not seen before – providing valuable insight on what an approach to co-curation can mean for future museum practice
- The South Asia Gallery opens to the public on 18 February 2023.

As part of the British Museum’s commitment to share objects across the UK, a unique new permanent gallery space has been developed - Manchester Museum’s South Asia Gallery: a British Museum partnership.

The permanent gallery has been co-curated by the British Museum, Manchester Museum and the South Asia Gallery Collective, a group of 30 inspiring individuals including community leaders, educators, artists, historians, journalists and musicians.

The gallery showcases artefacts from the collections of the British Museum and Manchester Museum, alongside new contemporary commissions and personal objects provided by the Collective. It explores the connection between South Asia and Britain’s legacy of Empire, and presents fresh perspectives on British Asian and South Asian culture, innovation and creativity.

The gallery’s story-led design will reflect multiple voices and perspectives on South Asia through six overarching themes:

Past & Present explores the ancient Indus Civilisation through a contemporary lens, sharing perspectives beyond archaeologists’ perceptions of that time. It presents powerful female figures of the Mughal Empire and reveals the impact of Gandhi’s visit to the cotton mills of Darwen, Lancashire, through the connection of Manchester’s cotton industry to the Indian independence movement.

Lived Environments illustrates that natural materials and recycling are an important part of daily South Asian life, as well as highlighting the impact of the British Empire on the regions’ environments.

Innovation & Language looks at South Asian innovation through the contribution of three iconic individuals that have often been overlooked, including Satyendra Nath Bose, one of the seminal founders of modern quantum science.

Sound, Music & Dance features various forms of musical expression from ancient instruments such as a Sri-Lankan conch shell, to the secret South Asian Day-timers raves of the 80s and 90s.

British Asian explores identity through a range of expressions from music to art, celebrating stories not usually represented by mainstream British Asian culture.

Movement & Empire looks at South Asian identity in relation to voluntary and involuntary migration, including as a result of war and the trauma of Partition, which was one of the largest migrations in human history.

A dedicated performance space at the centre of the gallery will be shaped by ideas and contributions from the Collective, and programmed in collaboration with local and international artists and performers.

Highlights from the 45 British Museum objects:

[The Boddhisatva Statue](#) from Gandhara, an ancient region that spanned north east Pakistan and Afghanistan. Representing the Buddha of the Future holding his hand out in a gesture that says 'do not fear'. Gandhara was right on the crossroads at the centre of the Silk Roads and like Manchester today, was home to a multi-ethnic society with an eclectic cultural heritage.

[Pair of tabla](#) recently acquired by the British Museum, that belonged to Us. Alla Rakha, considered the finest Indian tabla player of the 20th century. The tabla have been removed from display in London where they were shown alongside Ravi Shankar's sitar, as the two musicians had frequently played together.

[Mughal painting](#) Chand Bibi c. 1700-1750 Delhi or Agra (India). Chand Bibi, the 17th century warrior queen from South India, was celebrated in Mughal painting and literature. She ruled over the kingdoms of Ahmednagar and Bijapur in the Deccan and was renowned for her bravery in battle.

[Cartier emerald brooch with diamonds and platinum](#) Columbian emerald carved in India, c. 1700, brooch set by Cartier in 1935. The French jeweller Jacques Cartier first visited India in 1911 for the Delhi Durbar, a ceremony which marked the coronation of King George V and Queen Mary as Emperor and Empress of India. The firm sought commissions from Indian clients who wanted to modernise their jewellery collections. Cartier reset Indian jewels in lighter platinum instead of gold.

[Textile label c. 1920](#) designed in India, printed in Britain. This textile label was used to advertise and sell British-made cloth in India. It names the Ralli Brothers who owned both a mill in Manchester and an associated outlet in India. The label has their name in multiple languages: Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and English. It shows the different communities and places that the cloth must have moved between.

Hartwig Fischer, Director of The British Museum says "The British Museum is delighted to be collaborating with Manchester Museum on the new permanent South Asia Gallery, a British Museum partnership. We have learnt, and will continue to learn, a great deal from the communities and colleagues in Manchester on this innovative project. Creating partnership gallery spaces like these is a vital part of our national programmes work to share our collections with audiences across the UK."

Emily Hannam, South Asia Project Curator at the British Museum says "It's been really exciting working with the South Asia Gallery Collective to identify historic objects in the British Museum's collection, which speak to the very contemporary stories told in the new gallery. We are looking forward to seeing how the gallery evolves and how this collaborative way of working will inform the British Museum's future partnership projects."

Esme Ward, Director of the Manchester Museum says “The new South Asia Gallery displays world-class material from the British Museum alongside the best of South Asian collections in Manchester. We’re incredibly grateful to The British Museum for opening up their collections and imaginations alongside us. Spectacular and historic objects bring fascinating stories to life and we can’t wait for people to see this stunning new gallery.”

Nusrat Ahmed, South Asia Gallery Curator at Manchester Museum, says “As a first-generation British-born South Asian person, it is really exciting to be part of such a ground-breaking project. The co-curated South Asia Gallery envisages a collaborative, iterative space that will generate new perspectives and connections. We hope to engage further diaspora communities on its opening and support its continual evolution. This personalised approach humanises the gallery, telling stories about real people and their objects.”

Notes to Editors

About The British Museum’s National Partnerships programme

The British Museum has a presence throughout the UK, engaging with partners nationally to lend hundreds of objects to partner organisations each year. Our initiatives give everyone the chance to engage with the British Museum’s collection and expertise.

With the lead support of the Dorset Foundation in memory of Harry M Weinrebe, in 2021/22 1,594 objects were lent to 95 venues, reaching 3 million people outside of London – 1 million more than visited the British Museum in the same period. Even with pandemic-related closures, in 2021/22 50% more visitors saw a British Museum object outside of London than in the museum in Bloomsbury.

The British Museum is committed to sharing its collection and knowledge as widely as possible and to create positive educational, social and economic impact for people and places across the UK. Facilitating new perspectives on our shared global history with others through Partnership Galleries, as well as through Touring Exhibitions which reflect diverse viewpoints, lived experiences and collective ideas. The Museum also manages the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) in England, recording and sharing archaeological discoveries to help shape our understanding of the past.

About Manchester Museum

Manchester Museum will reopen to the public on 18 February 2023 following its £15 million transformation supported by public funding from Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, The University of Manchester, and numerous philanthropic supporters. The South Asia Gallery joins a series of new galleries including the new Lee Kai Hung Chinese Culture Gallery and Belonging Gallery, heralding the museum’s commitment to building greater understanding between cultures, a more sustainable world and bringing to life the lived experience of diverse communities through the museum’s historic collections and new displays.

The South Asia Gallery

The Gallery was funded by an initial UK Government Funding commitment of £5 million, announced by the then Chancellor George Osborne in 2015 (and subsequently administered through Arts Council England), and has received significant additional funding through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and philanthropic support. It forms a centrepiece of Manchester Museum’s wider, £15 million capital transformation.



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