

The University of British Columbia
Department of Art History, Visual Art, Theory
ARTH 555: Graduate seminar in S Asian art
appointment
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**THEORIZING THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER:
EIGHTEENTH- TO EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY INDIA**

Colonialism, as Edward Said has pointed out, “is impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (1994). Yet as Lata Mani reminds us in her important work on *sati*, the complexity and heterogeneity of both colonial and indigenous discourses underscore the serious limitations of theorizing the colonial encounter solely in terms of a self/other binary. While acknowledging an intellectual debt to the seminal work of Said, subsequent scholarship has worked to significantly complicate sets of binaries and relationships embedded and naturalized in the very ways we approach this material. An important revisionist position is staked out by the Subaltern Studies Collective, a remarkable project of ‘writing history from below,’ and edited by Ranajit Guha, the brilliant historian and founding member of the Collective. Clearly indebted to the Subaltern Studies endeavor, more recent scholarship complicates the binary model of dominance and subordination, calling attention to the entanglements between power and difference. Our seminar will be located in the complex period of the East India Company expansion and Imperial consolidation of the Indian subcontinent. We will analyze some of the strategies such as the cartographic control of land, the picturesque technique of rule, and the classification of archeological monuments which, according to Nick Dirks, set in motion transformations every bit as powerful as the better known consequences of military and economic imperialism. Our focus will be trained on Calcutta, the first capital of British India, and on Bengal as the site of the ‘Bengal Renaissance’ and a practice of indigenous resistance to the colonial enterprise. We will be reading important voices in the fields of history and art history, including Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakravarty, Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Geeta Kapur, among others. The weekly readings bring into dialogue theoretical texts with specific case studies from a range of visual art production. For us as historians of the visual, this means attending to the textures and details of the past and present not only in theoretical but in interpretative and invested ways.