

Faculty Development Grants and Awards

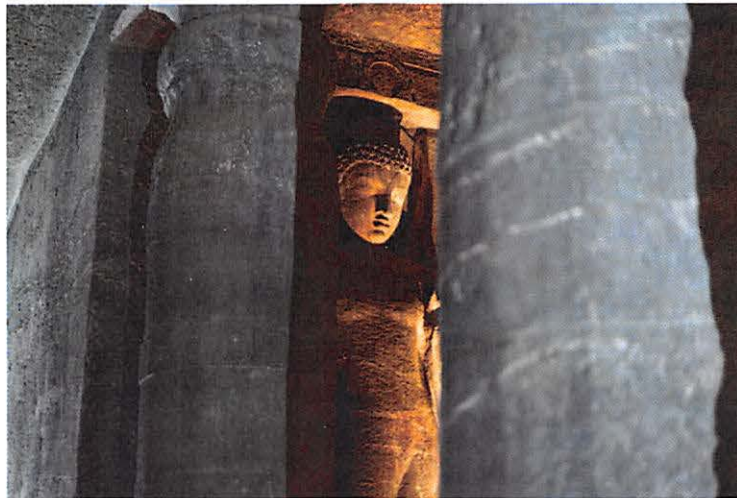
Report – Submitted February 2nd, 2018

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Still, Moving: Research in North Western India

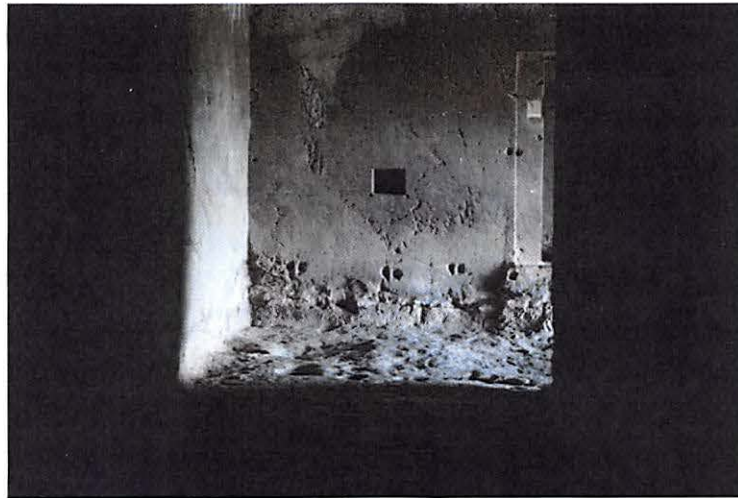
December 30th 2017 – January 22nd 2018

During the three and half weeks that I travelled in India this winter I was able to visit architectural and sculptural monuments that are central to my study of Indian art. Many of these structures and works are rock cut caves, dark, and difficult to see and even more difficult to photograph. With newly developed light sensitive sensors I could work with a SONY Alpha a7rII camera (without flash or tripod neither of which are permitted in these sites) to compose and develop images that enhance my ability to record, study, and interpret the intricate details of rock surface and spatial relationships. This specific kind of photographic work in turn adds a specific experiential quality to both my understanding and representation of these ancient monuments. For instance, here in the image below of a standing Buddha carved into the mountainside rock of Ajanta we see the quiet image of a Buddha between dark grey pillars. The figure looms within the stone monastic environment as if still breathing, conscious, and generous as he stands, a constant companion to the monks that lived in these 7th century caves for years or even decades.



Ajanta Buddhist Cave, India January 2018

At the Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu caves of Ellora I was able to observe and photograph for future study the inner sanctum of caves where generations of monks have lived since the 5th century. There, for the first time I observed many carved holes along the walls of these cave sanctum. These paired drilled wholes were made to anchor cloth that provided warmth and subdivisions to these lived in environments. And though there are no remains of these cloth adornments, the trace of their use and importance is evident here.



Ellora Cave , India, January 2018

While visiting the massive Buddhist Stupa at Sanchi, in a very remote part of Central India, I was staying out in rolling wheat fields when I noticed in the distance a small colorful Hindu shrine in the landscape. Visiting this shrine and talking with the farmers in the region revealed how vibrant and alive Hindu belief is throughout the country. Shrines like these are made by individuals to connect themselves and members of their family, alive and dead, to their many gods, especially Hanuman the Monkey-Man God. The many images I was able to take of these kinds of shrines and the discussions I had with the people who made them adds an ethnographic component to my studies that transforms my understand not only of the present but of the past as well. I can record and represent an image of this shrine. But what I learned from actually being there was how actively important the trees, nearby river, and other elements of the landscape were to what is and remains an intimate temple complex.

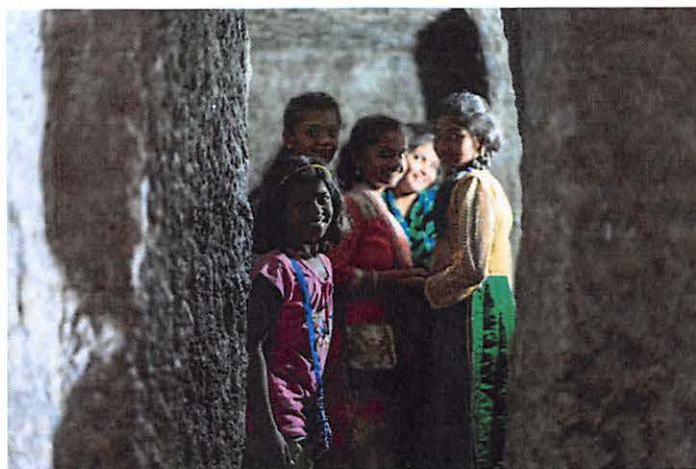


Rural Shrine, Sanchi, India, January, 2018

At the 16th century shrine of the Sufi Saint Salim Chisti, in front of the Mosque of the Fatehpour Sikri Mughal fort I could study the spatial relations of the shrine in the context of the mountainside massive fort and mosque. Seeing the central placement of this Shrine within the architectural setting made it very clear how important this Sufi teacher was to the Emperor Akbar. Thousands of Muslim pilgrims from within and outside India travel to this site to tie small strands of red and marigold thread to the marble jail carving to pay homage to this still revered Sufi teacher.



At ancient archeological and monument sites throughout India one constant phenomena that impressed me was the presence of school children brought by their teachers. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Islamic sites were all carefully cared for by the central Indian government and thousands of school children daily are brought to these sites to wonder and learn about the diverse, rich history of their country. As a noticeable foreigner in their midst, I was consistently welcomed and embraced with curiosity and kindness. There was a lesson to be learned in these experiences, especially within this current historical moment that we are living through, with increased nationalistic tendencies fermenting on a global scale. The importance of and renewed experience of the vast diversity of the past can be the antidote to xenophobia or narrowly defined nationalist interests. India, like the United States, is a country of sequential and simultaneous beliefs, languages, and peoples. Its beauty and strength in the past and in the present resides in the rhythms of that diversity.



Children at the Caves of Ajanta, India January 2018

Since my appointment to the History of Art Department at FIT I have taught 50 sections of our HA 225 *Art and Civilization of India* – that would be over 2,500 FIT students about the art and culture of this vast subcontinent. As is most obvious to all of us, ways of seeing, knowing, and representing art and culture have radically changed over the past forty years. The images that I have been able to take will therefore not only greatly impact and benefit my research, but also greatly impact my teaching. Since my return just a week ago I have already begun the long process of editing and preparing these images so that they may be added to FITDIL (for the FIT community) and through ARTSTOR made available to the SUNY community of scholars and students. I look forward to completing this project in collaboration with Molly Schoen our Visual Resources Curator and Nanja Andrianan Jason our Visual Technologist. Below is the itinerary of my travels and attached are the receipts and boarding passes for my international and national flights that I took.

From December 30th, 2017 to January 22nd, 2018 I travelled from Mumbai to Delhi to see and photograph the surroundings of a significant number of the monuments that are central to my research and that I teach in *Art and Civilization of India*. My

12/30 - 1/3	Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist Temples and Architecture in Mumbai
12/4-12/7	Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist Caves at Ajanta and Ellora
1/8 - 1/13	Great Stupa at Sanchi and Smaller Surrounding Buddhist and Hindu Temple
1/14 - 1/16	Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Fatehpur Shikiri
1/17 - 1/22	Hindu and Islamic Art and Architecture of Delhi

In addition to these major monuments, I was able to visit and gather images from museum and manuscript collections especially in Mumbai and Delhi.

I thank the FDGA committee and the Office of Academic Affairs for their generous support to offset the costs of this project: *Still, Moving: Research in North Western India*.

Respectfully yours,



Anna Blume