

Another India exhibition gives voice to India's most marginalised communities

Never-before-seen objects, including newly-commissioned sculptures and a head-hunter's trophy skull, highlight India's Indigenous and Adivasi people – both past and present



Left: monkey skull headhunter's trophy collected by J.H. Hutton (Copyright MAA, University of Cambridge). Right: Hangsha Salim, a 78-year-old Konyak Naga man with facial tattoo (Copyright Peter Bos/Subexposure 2016)

[A full press gallery of images from the exhibition is available here](#)

Hundreds of objects which tell the story of 100 million of India's most marginalised citizens – its Indigenous and Adivasi people – are to go on display for the first time in a ground-breaking exhibition at Cambridge University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) from March 8.

Putting on display never-before-seen objects from the Museum's historic collections, as well as stunning, newly-commissioned works from contemporary Adivasi sculptors, *Another India* tells the stories behind a remarkable collection of artefacts while confronting head-on the role played by Empire and colonialism in the gathering together of this material. The exhibition also features 23 works acquired by its curator Mark Elliott, using a New Collecting Award from Art Fund.

"This is an exhibition about the India – or the many Indias – that most people in the UK don't know," said Mark Elliott. "It's about 100 million people of Indigenous or Adivasi backgrounds who are marginalised by majority populations and the state. It's an exhibition about identity, diversity and belonging; and the role that objects play in creating a sense of who we are."

"These are issues that affect all of us, particularly now when Identity – who we are, where we come from and where we belong – is being fought over here in

Britain. Another important story is how these things came to Cambridge in the first place. Many of the artefacts were acquired through colonialism: sometimes fair exchanges, sometimes gifts, sometimes not. This is about legacies of empire for people in the UK and India.”

Among the objects going on display are a head-hunters skull, pieces of the Taj Mahal and a snake-charmer’s flute. Ten new sculptures, specially commissioned by Elliott after working closely with Adivasi and indigenous artists at workshops across India, will also take pride of place in *Another India*, thanks to the prestigious New Collecting Award from Art Fund. The workshops took place from Gujarat in the west to Nagaland, right on the border with Myanmar (Burma) in the North east.

The sculptures, the largest of which is 13 feet (3.9m) high and the heaviest of which is almost a tonne, have been shipped from the sub-continent and will sit alongside stunning photographic portraits of Indigenous Indians – from the late 19th century to the 21st. The most recent works include photos of Naga men in their 80s and 90s proudly displaying their tattooed faces and bodies.

“We are trying to make this less of a show about dead white guys by living white guys,” added Elliott. “We showed artists across India some of our collections and said ‘here’s the stuff we have from your place, what do you think? What would you make now if we asked you?’ The whole brief was to produce new works in response to the collections we have.”

Ruby Hembrom, an Adivasi writer and activist, who has worked closely with Elliott and MAA on the planning of the exhibition, said: “*Another India* is the only India we Adivasis know. Identity is belonging and we belong to this India. We belong to the objects of this India and belong to the feelings they trigger and emotions they evoke. The India that ‘others’ use is the one where we are confronting hatred, racism, sexism, exploitation, brutality, dehumanisation and stereotyping in our everyday lives.

“No matter how much we’ve talked of or engaged in social and political change, very little has changed for us. This is not the India our ancestors sacrificed for, or hoped for us, and this is not the one we want for our descendants.”

Among the historic objects going on display at MAA is a coin necklace from the ‘Criminal Tribes’ settlement in Maharashtra which was collected by Maguerite Milward in 1936. Milward went on expedition to make portrait sculptures of Indigenous and Adivasi men and women. The necklaces show how Adivasis whose lives were transformed by colonialism, reappropriated and repurposed coins issued by the British Raj as jewellery, signs of wealth and status.

The head-taker’s skull meanwhile comes from Nagaland and was worn on the chest by a Konyak warrior who had captured an enemy head. The monkey

skull, with red, white and black hair woven into the crown, was collected by JH Hutton, Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills and later a Professor of Anthropology at Cambridge, who put it in a glass jar and kept it in his office until he retired.

Headhunting was a popular but ambivalent topic of anthropology in the first half of the 20th century. It was an aspect of Naga culture that the British sought to eradicate but found fascinating, and which despite the coming of Christianity, remains a hugely important part of Naga identity today.

“Another India is talking about a very different India to most people’s expectations in Britain and possibly India too,” said Elliott. “We didn’t want to do a show about Bollywood, saris and curry, but instead highlight a massive body of marginalised people – numbering nearly twice the population of the UK – who to a great extent aren’t seen as having culture, heritage and history of their own.”

Many of the objects going on display – whittled down from the 10,000 plus Indian objects in MAA’s collections – are the product of an extraordinary industry of exploration, survey and classification whose advance started with the East India Company and continued under the Crown until independence in 1947.

By the mid-19th century, scholars and administrators were working through masses of linguistic, economic, ethnographic and criminological data to decode the demography of India, defining groups of people as distinctive on the basis of shared language, customs, religious belief and ‘racial’ characteristics.

By the end of that century, such groupings had been consolidated into a fundamental distinction between ‘castes’ and ‘tribes’. Tribes were identified as groups of people who were separated geographically, socially or both from ‘mainstream’ caste society. Often living in more isolated territories away from large population centres such as hill and forest regions. These groups were defined first as being outside the caste system but furthermore as ethnically or culturally distinct, often being described as ‘primitive’.

While the constitution of India identifies these groups as Scheduled Tribes or ‘Tribal’, this term is widely seen as derogatory with connotations of primitivism, backwardness and even savagery. In truth, all the categories are remarkably slippery. Indigenous, Adivasi and Tribal identities are still fiercely contested.

“The objects on display resist pigeonholing, just as people do,” added Elliott. “The identities presented here are ambiguous and contested. But this is not just an historical exhibition, the artefacts and the stories they tell are the stories of communities who are living, struggling and thriving today.

“Putting together this exhibition has brought me and the museum into contact with extraordinary people: scholars, activists and artists and more – from the

tribes, groups and communities that we are incredibly proud to represent here in Cambridge.”

Another India is the centrepiece of the University’s wider celebrations entitled *India Unboxed*. To mark the UK-India Year of Culture 2017, the University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Garden, are hosting a shared season on the theme of India with a programme of exhibitions, events, digital encounters, discussions, installations and more within the museums and the city of Cambridge. Rooted in the Cambridge collections, the programme will explore themes of identity and connectivity for audiences in both the UK and India.

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Notes to editors:

About the University of Cambridge

The mission of the University of Cambridge is to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence. To date, 96 affiliates of the University have won the Nobel Prize.

Founded in 1209, the University comprises 31 autonomous Colleges, which admit undergraduates and provide small-group tuition, and 150 departments, faculties and institutions.

Cambridge is a global university. Its 19,000 student body includes 3,700 international students from 120 countries. Cambridge researchers collaborate with colleagues worldwide, and the University has established larger-scale partnerships in Asia, Africa and America.

The University sits at the heart of one of the world’s largest technology clusters. The ‘Cambridge Phenomenon’ has created 1,500 hi-tech companies, 14 of them valued at over US\$1 billion and two at over US\$10 billion. Cambridge promotes the interface between academia and business, and has a global reputation for innovation. www.cam.ac.uk

About the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA)

The MAA has one of the most important collections of its kind in the UK. Originally founded in 1884, it has been in its present location on Downing Street since 1913. MAA’s collections span nearly two million years of human history, on all six inhabited continents. Our oldest object is a 1.8 million year old stone tool from Olduvai Gorge, whilst the newest are made by contemporary artists. The anthropology and photographic collections are

enhanced by collaboration with indigenous communities. For more information, visit: www.maa.cam.ac.uk

About the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM)

The UCM is a consortium of the eight University Museums, which works in partnership with the Cambridge University Botanic Garden and other Cambridge University collections. They include: Fitzwilliam Museum, Kettle's Yard, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Museum of Zoology, Museum of Classical Archaeology, Whipple Museum of the History of Science, The Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences and The Polar Museum. The University's collections are a world-class resource for researchers, students and members of the public representing the country's highest concentration of internationally important collections, all within walking distance of the City Centre. The work of the UCM is made possible through support from Arts Council England's Major Partner Museum programme. www.museums.cam.ac.uk

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 123,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by the V&A, London, in 2016) and a range of digital platforms.

Find out more about Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org
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