



**TREASURES OF THE
ALBERT HALL MUSEUM
JAIPUR**

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FOREWORD

The transformation of Albert Hall from a home for dioramas to a resurrection of Colonel Thomas Holbein Hendley's vision of creating an industrial arts museum, took several years of multiple efforts. The renovation of Albert Hall—one of the finest 19th-century museums, curated by Hendley in the latter half of that century—was completed in July 2008. The modernized museum retains the spirit of the original, yet takes advantage of the precepts of modern museology with the help of technological advances in conservation, repair and restoration.

The Albert Hall now boasts of a metal room, an arms-and-armour gallery, a sculpture gallery, displays of international art, pottery, stone art, wood work, ivory, jewellery, clay models, musical instruments, coins and seals, carpets, and galleries for miniature paintings. Many of the original wall-built showcases were built by Wimbridges in Bombay, which were modelled on the lines of showcases at the South Kensington Museum, now known as V&A Museum, in London, have been retained to house the display. The collection is complemented with a well-documented index, compiled with the help of catalogues and the abundant literature available on crafts of Jaipur. The museum has also introduced enhanced security; better signage, and lighting and audio systems.

Authorities on museology at the prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York advised us to develop a theme for the museum. The renovations have thus focused on highlighting the industrial arts theme developed by Hendley in the 19th century.

At that time, Jaipur was experiencing a progression from the feudal to the modern age, under the rule of the reformist king, Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II (r 1835–80), and his successor, Sawai Madho Singh II (r 1880–1922). It was the former's vision which led to setting up of Jaipur School of Art in 1866 for developing the industrial arts of the time. Sawai Madho Singh II carried forward this vision, and all other modernization plans of his predecessor.

It was in this atmosphere of change and reform that Thomas Hendley came to Jaipur as the residency surgeon, as did Samuel Swinton Jacob, a young military engineer, who came to head the new public works department (PWD) which was set up in 1860. They



Detail of an ornately carved pillar in Albert Hall.

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Side door of the main hall. The arch and upper part of the door have glass painted in white, and lower part is intricately carved.



Khanda, ornate sword, with embossed figure of goddess Kali and inscription in Devnagari. Rajasthan. 18th century. L 101.60 cm. Acc No N/1148

in the catalogues indicate that the art of stone sculpting was well-developed and had undoubtedly provided images for temples and homes throughout India. Stone carvings were also on display at the Jaipur Exhibition of 1883.

The other important name in the history of Albert Hall is that of Sir Samuel Swinton Jacob, who designed and built the museum. He had come to Jaipur in 1867 to head the PWD, but made his mark in designing and building several important buildings including Naya Mahal. Jacob was asked to design and construct the memorial building in honour of the visiting Prince of Wales, Edward VII, who had laid the foundation stone for it in 1876. With support of his chief overseer Tujumul Hoosein, artist Ram Baksh, draughtsmen Shanker Lal and Chote Lal, and principal masons Chander and Tara, Jacob set about building Albert Hall in 1881. He sent his staff to study Mughal monuments located in Delhi, Agra, and Fatehpur Sikri to gain inspiration in producing the best designs—both Mughal and Rajput. The magnificent structure, which was completed in 1886, was done in the best of Indo-Saracenic traditions.

The royal durbar decided that Albert Hall would become a permanent home for Hendley's collection of industrial arts and so the museum moved out of its temporary accommodation at Naya Mahal to the Albert Hall in Ram Niwas Bagh. By February 1887, the new museum was ready for its inauguration and was itself an intrinsic part of the display as it represented architectural designs, both local and Mughal. The structure—pillars, brackets, arches and ornamentation—was representative of the art of stone carving, serving as examples of the art without requiring a gallery display. The School of Art went on to publish 12 portfolios, replete with designs of plinths, columns, doors, brackets, arches, balustrades, *chhatris*, cenotaphs, and *jharokas*, decorated parapets, and incorporating almost every facet of Mughal and Rajput buildings. These became valuable reference material for architects and designers.

Yet another unique element of Albert Hall is the murals representing the different civilizations of the world. The Indian themes in these murals include illustrations of the *Ramayana* from *Razmnama*, and the frescos of the Ajanta caves. European, Greco-Roman, Babylonian, Far Eastern and Pharaonic civilizations are also represented. The courtyards and corridors are replete with aphorisms and quotations of poets, sages and philosophers.

In the light of this historical backdrop, the museum is indeed an inheritance from the past. These arts, as they have developed today, owe much to the noble efforts of Maharaja Sawai Ram Singh II and Maharaja Sawai Madho Singh II, and to Hendley and Jacob.

Among those visiting the renovated museum, the tourist would have a glimpse of the entire range of industrial arts of the 19th century; the artisan would have a unique opportunity to study rare examples of the finest workmanship, possibly even be inspired to experiment and reintroduce what may now be antiquated; the historian could register

inspirations of an earlier age; the student of art and crafts could research specific areas of interest; and the artist and aesthete could simply sit back and enjoy art and culture at its best.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the leadership and guidance provided to the project by successive secretaries of art and culture of the Government of Rajasthan. In the initial phase, Ashok Shekhar successfully grappled with the seemingly endless issues and problems, which appeared insurmountable at the time. The succeeding Secretary of Art and Culture, Salauddin Ahmad, carried the project forward with visionary zeal and determination, overcoming all obstacles to its successful culmination. In this he was ably assisted by the remarkable energy of B L Gupta, Director, Department of Archaeology and Museums, coordinating the worthy efforts of a diverse team of experts, engineers and artisans, and attending to administrative minutiae. We also relied on the invaluable support and expertise of the eminent art historian and museologist, Dr Chandramani Singh, Director at Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, for historical detail and accuracy, and Kristine Michael for her encyclopedic knowledge of Indian pottery. We are indebted to all the eminent members of Rajasthan State Museums and Monuments Management and Development Society, particularly Apurv Kumar, R K Poddar, Pramod Kasliwal and B G Sharma for their individual expertise and enthusiastic participation in the project. We are also fortunate in having a young, dynamic and dedicated curator in Rakesh Chholak, who showed amazing skill in translating ideas for design, decor and display of objects, from the drawing board into faithful actuality, almost instantly, as if with a magic wand.

Indrajit Singh Masuda