
Mathur uses the colonial history of the Indian subcontinent, especially as it relates to its British colonizers, to discuss design; both as the result of a conscious effort to control the visual display of culture and as a set of aesthetic traditions. Through a case study approach, she addresses the production and dissemination of visual media ranging from crafts to postcards to oil painting. Beginning with a discussing of the “cult of the craftsman,” Mathur depicts the British department store as a meeting ground for industrial society and the Indian craft tradition. Other key topics include the British Colonial and Indian Exhibition in 1886; the oil paintings of Rudolf Swoboda; an examination of the production, collection and circulation of colonial postcards; and a look into the process of repatriation, investigating issues of ownership, acquisition, and the manner in which European institutions collect and display the non-European world. Mathur brings her argument to a close with an epilogue detailing the contemporary status of the “design” of India on the international stage. [Lauren M. Freese]

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