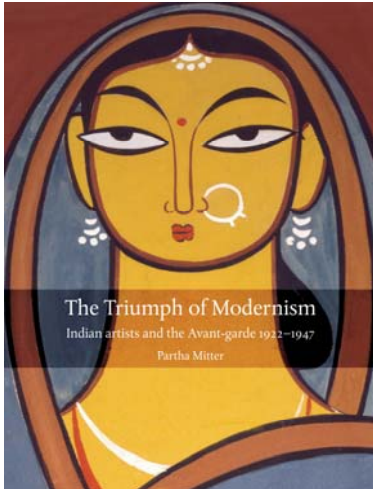


The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde 1922-1947 / Partha Mitter.--
 London, England: Reaktion Books, dist. by The University of Chicago Press, November 2007.--256 p. ill.--
 ISBN-13: 978-1-86189-318-5: \$45.00 (pa.).



This is Partha Mitter's third book in a series dealing with representations of Indian art, begun with *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and followed by *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). *The Triumph of Modernism* discusses the rise of modernist art in India and artists' contributions to the construction of national identity in late colonial India. Mitter sets out to introduce Indian artists to a wider international audience, in particular to scholars of modernism. He challenges an 'overtly Eurocentric view of modernity' and defines the originality of modernism in the Indian subcontinent. He analyzes the interplay between Western modernism, Indian nationalism, and the struggle against colonial oppression.

Mitter traces the beginnings of avant-garde art in India to the response to a 1922 exhibition of Bauhaus artists in Calcutta. He discusses the formalist prelude to modernism, Indian discourses of primitivism and naturalism, complex issues related to Imperial patronage and nationalism, as well as individual artists' responses to modernity and global aesthetic values, while professing allegiance to local and regional expressions. Mitter includes references to the critical Indian and British press, detailing the response to modernist Indian art and the development of competing regional schools. Contacts between Indian and European intelligentsia and art schools (particularly between Santiniketan and the Bauhaus) are revealed, as is the role of art in India's anti-colonial resistance.

The cover illustration of a striking Jamini Roy painting, the high quality illustrations sprinkled throughout the text, and the catching title will surely attract many readers to this volume. Unfortunately, the authors' complex phraseology, his frequent use of academic jargon, and his use of specialized Indian art vocabulary without an accompanying glossary will make this work out of reach for a general audience. In addition, a seemingly small deficiency makes this book difficult to consult: the illustrations are not numbered and the author does not refer readers to pages where illustrations are found. This requires readers to either flip through the book to locate an illustration, or, to use the index to find the page where the illustration is located. Furthermore, many individual works of art discussed by the author are not illustrated and many works that are illustrated are not discussed. On the other hand, the references and bibliography are invaluable to those wishing to probe deeper into this topic. This book is recommended for academic, museum, or public libraries supporting research on modern art, Indian art and culture, colonialism, and British studies.

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