

Life & Arts

FT Weekend



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Critics' choice

Life & Arts

Visual arts Jackie Wullschlager

Splendours of the Subcontinent: Four Centuries of South Asian Paintings and Manuscripts

The Queen's Gallery, London

"During the reign, lion and goat drink together at the same well: the subjects are intertwined in contentment, and the vestige of distance has altogether disappeared" eulogised the post-graduate of the Maharaja of Jodhpur to Queen Victoria on her becoming Empress of India. The Hindi verses are inscribed in elegant calligraphic hand, in pages embellished with flowers and peacocks: the queen, who learnt Hindi in school, could read them.

The first show of its kind brings South Asian paintings and manuscripts across over centuries by British monarchs. It vividly interweaves politics with the glories of Indian art. In the 17th century, when the Thirty Years war ravaged Europe and the Stuart monarchy was embattled, the Mughal dynasty enjoyed stability and prosperity across a vast empire of 150 million subjects, a golden age celebrated in lavish, intricate works both secular and sacred, from Shah Jahan's inlaid, water-coloured of houses within images "An Elephant Hunt" to magnificent Koran scrolls. Majestic decline, the ascendancy of the East India Company and the



British establishment of an empire made possible the British Crown's acquisition of such wonderful works whose provenances demonstrate both warm relationships between British monarchs and India, but also symbolic teaching of cultural and economic power from the subcontinent. The play-off of Ayaal presented

George III with the spirit of illuminated *Padshahnama* (Book of Emperors), chronicling Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's reign. The exquisite "Gita Govinda" paintings featuring Vishnu and Lakshmi were given to Edward VII in Bombay. The hand-coloured gold and marbled lithographs "The Ardnamh" bringing south

Asian aesthetics of manuscript production into the age of print, was presented to Queen Victoria, and among proto-modern pieces, Abanindranath Tagore's art nouveau orientalist fantasy "Queen Gita Govind" was acquired by Queen Mary on her 1912 tour of "most beautiful India". www.artsandculture.gov/uk, 10 October 18

His nayskhipro performs personae, from a series of Bahari paintings depicting the story of pyramids from the Bhagavata Purana (c1775) www.artsandculture.gov/uk

Ed Ruscha: Course of Empire and Thomas Cole: Eden to Empire
National Gallery, London
Ed Ruscha's deadpan, flat, cinematic, boxlike depictions of lonely petrol stations, cupboards of highways and abandoned factories may be the most more than a decade after they were the standout presentation of the 2005 Venice Biennale. **Course of Empire**, Ruscha's title, alludes to the grandiose 19th-century painting tracing the rise and fall of an imaginary civilisation by American romantic landscape artist Thomas Cole, subject of the National Gallery's main summer show, www.nationalgallery.org.uk, June 11-October 7

Summer Exhibition and The Green Spectacle
Royal Academy, London
Graison Perry curates the Summer Exhibition for the Royal Academy's 250th anniversary. Meanwhile *The Green Spectacle* chronicles the world's longest running exhibition of contemporary art, held annually since 1963, with a display of 190 works.

These include Angelica Kaufmann's "Director Taking Leave of Andromache" — shown this year — works by Richard Reynolds, Joseph Wright of Derby, John Singer Sargent from subsequent summer shows, William Powell Frith's 1831 "A Private View at the Royal Academy", and recent contributions by Tracey Emin, Michael Craig Martin, Wolfgang Tillmans. royalacademy.org.uk, June 12-August 29

Life in Motion: Egon Schiele and Francesca Woodman
Tate, London
An engaging double bill of two precocious, minimalist, agency in lists who were obsessed with self-depiction and bodies and their in-built twitches. The 20th-century expressive, angular, explicit portraits, psychologically acute and still disconcerting, and Woodman's feeble 1970s photographs staged as a series of her formance, concealing and revealing herself in strange interiors, curled like an ac, soaring like an angel. tate.org.uk, 10 September 27

Howard Hodgkin: Last Paintings
Gagosian Gallery, London
An exhibition of final works — including six never before seen — from the great artist who died last year. It shows Hodgkin experimental and dazzling to the end: his virtuosic sweeping strokes of a brush, washed with diluted, coloured paint simplified but still vigorous, generous, refined, and a daring near-sculptural use of bare wood offset by fluid, wistful motifs, evocative of time passing yet arrested by memory and art. gagosian.com, 10 July 28

Flowers
Ordo Vas, London
Flowers familiar and unfamiliar in postwar art: Andy Warhol's large Day-Glo blossoms, Alexander Calder's "Little Black Flower" mobile, Gerhard Richter's "Blumen", and Lucian Freud's "Cyclamen", a species attractive to the artist for the way they collapse: "they crash down; their stems turn to jelly and their veins harden". ordovasart.com, 10 July 28