This dissertation focuses on the artistic culture of late Mughal Delhi spanning the last century of Mughal rule and the administration of the English East India Company in North India, from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. It brings a hitherto unrecognized period of artistic accomplishment to light and studies the transformations within painting culture in the multicultural Anglo-Mughal society of Delhi. Rather than being fixated on the continuum of Mughal painting over centuries, this dissertation suggests that the art of the late Mughal period should be studied on its own terms as a response to immense socio-political and cultural changes. At its core this study is concerned with dissolving the stylistic barriers between Mughal and Company painting in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I take up the question of what the term 'late Mughal painting' entails and discuss how the term privileges the notion of a court centric culture of painting in an era when the Mughal court was only one of many venues of artistic expression. On the other hand, I highlight the inadequacy of the term 'Company painting' to address the variegated nature of works produced under East India Company patronage in this period. Thus, this dissertation attempts to view seemingly disparate works within a common framework of visual analysis. Moreover, it seeks to highlight the agency of painters in creating this diffusion of artistic conventions at Delhi and charts transitions in their working methods. In a period where the story of the Mughal empire appears as an appendage to the dominant historiography of the East India Company's rise to power, this investigation of painting culture in Delhi (the spiritual and historical center of Mughal power) reveals how paintings were critical for either maintaining or upsetting the status quo between court and Company and how this critical balance of power between the two was negotiated in the visual sphere. The first chapter of this dissertation discusses the role of cartography as a means for projecting Mughal imperial identity in the face of a growing Company dominance. Using a body of previously unexplored maps and cartographic drawings I show how painters used topographic markers to illustrate Mughal presence using both European and local conventions of drawing. Such works, I argue, also initiated the creation of visual histories of later Mughal rule at Delhi, as they pictured events often discussed in private correspondence, such as the famous bazgasht or Return of Shah Alam II (r. 1759-1806) to Delhi that marked the re-establishment of the Mughal house Delhi in 1772. Paintings produced in the royal court of Shah Alam II reflected upon the historical legacy of Mughal ideas while referencing the emotive context of Indo-Persian and Braj bhasha poetics that constituted the wider expressive culture of this period. Composed by the Delhi painter Khairullah, court scenes played upon the metaphorical significance of the lost Peacock Throne of Shah Jahan re-imagining it within the space of the later Mughal court - thus creating a formidable visual imperial identity for the veteran blinded emperor Shah Alam II. Furthermore, Khairullah's younger colleague Ghulam Murtaza Khan took this legacy forward using the shared knowledge of Western perspective and Mughal painterly hieratic to create court scenes for Akbar II (r.1806-1836). His works can also be read for their clever subversion of the Company's attempts to conduct diplomatic meetings on an equal footing. The painter's innovative format for Mughal court scenes was modeled on the picture plane of a one-point perspective, which he used to draw attention to the centrally placed and physically higher figure of the emperor. This, in turn, relegated the figure of the British Resident to a mere courtier rather than the new arbitrator of power in Anglo-Mughal Delhi. Ghulam Murtaza Khan's paintings easily constitute the most substantial visual record of the Mughal court in the nineteenth century. As this dissertation reveals, a large majority of paintings produced in courtly and non-courtly settings were, in fact, executed by the same group of painters belonging to the family atelier of the painter Ghulam Ali Khan (active 1790-1855). This dissertation offers a first look into the network of painters active in Delhi during this period and also offers a plausible genealogy of their family. Later chapters of this dissertation highlight how Ghulam Ali Khan worked in different conventions - of Mughal manuscript painting, architectural, and landscape drawing, and miniatures - showcasing his ability to skilfully modify his technique to suit a particular patron. His working method also indicates that artistic knowledge available to the painter reached him through discrete channels such as the court atelier or through his training in European architectural craftsmanship. However, the melding of artistic conventions in the nineteenth century was subject to the will of the artist and the marketplace. I provide an overview of Ghulam Ali Khan's career spanning the breadth of his early work on architectural views of Delhi's buildings to his work on portrait studies of Delhi's residents for the newly powerful group of Company officers, William Fraser (1784-1835) and Colonel James Skinner (1778-1841). The dissertation also suggests a connection between Ghulam Ali Khan and the
British topographical painter Thomas Daniell (1749-1840) through a study of Daniell’s scraps (illustrated notes) from his private papers. Moreover, my research situates Ghulam Ali Khan as the driving force for painting at the Rajput court of Alwar and the Jat court of Jhajjar enabling us, for the first time, to create a near-complete picture of his career. This dissertation presents first time look into the pictorial archives at Alwar and uses new evidence to substantiate the painter’s pivotal role in shaping painting culture at Alwar in the nineteenth century. The penultimate section of this dissertation presents facets of European patronage that link closely with the cultural and political conditions at Delhi. In particular, I examine the circumstances surrounding the commission of portraits of Delhi's residents by the Company officer William Fraser that were part of the (now) world famous album compiled between the years 1810 and 1825. I draw attention to the pragmatic considerations surrounding land settlement that bore upon Fraser's interest in creating a visual record of the Delhi countryside. Focusing on his professional role as the surveyor, I show how he was able to create an enduring model for land settlement that incorporated his personal and familial links with village residents in the region. This analysis provides the all important context for thinking about rural portraits in the Fraser Album, and their personal as well as professional appeal for Fraser. This dissertation also lays out a near complete picture of Fraser's friend James Skinner's professional life and his interest in creating a pictorial biography through commissions of albums and monumental paintings. Situating the paintings within the socio-political context of Skinner's rise from an adjunct Company officer to a decorated Mughal and Company servant, I discuss how Skinner's search for permanent recognition shaped the content of Ghulam Ali Khan's compositions. Finally, this dissertation charts the later years of painting at Delhi and its dilution into souvenir copies painted on ivory that I call, "Mughalerie". William Fraser's own interest in commissioning copies of popular paintings on ivory is noteworthy here, indicative of rise in the popular taste for European-styled miniatures based on Mughal ideas that fed into the emotional economy of Anglo-Indian residents of Delhi. Overall, this study of painting culture in Delhi aims at enriching the mainstream historiography of the modern period of Indian painting and offers a compelling reassessment of this transition period in Indian art history.

**Geographic Areas**

- South Asia

**Subjects**

- Art
- South Asians

**Files**

- Sharma_columbia_0054D_11397.pdf (application/pdf, 1.56 MB)

**More About This Work**

**Academic Units**
- Art History and Archaeology

**Thesis Advisors**
- Dehejia, Vidya J.

**Degree**
- Ph.D., Columbia University

**Published Here**
- June 7, 2013
Yet initial contact between these two empires was surprisingly positive: the first Company “Residents,” or ambassadors to the Mughal court, immersed themselves in its court culture, wore Mughal dress, took Mughal wives, and became important patrons of Mughal painting, transforming the art of the capital in the process. The best works produced under Company patronage are unparalleled in Indian art and show a sympathy with the Mughal world quite at odds with stereotypes of colonial philistinism and insensitivity. As British power and arrogance increased in the early 19th century, this brief dial Between the years 1707 and 1857, the cultural center of Delhi in North India was the locus of a dramatic shift of power with the decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of the British Raj. This critical transitional period altered Indian culture, politics, and art, and brought unprecedented artistic innovation and experimentation. The artistic flowering of this time is evident in jewel-like portraits, miniature paintings, striking panoramas, and exquisite decorative arts crafted for Mughal emperors and European residents alike. Sumptuous color illustrations of such works illuminate the pages.