Lucknow: Art, Patronage and History
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Lucknow emerged to cultural prominence at an important historical junction in South Asian history, as the Mughal Empire fragmented and the English East India Company advanced its political and territorial ambitions. The city—ruled by Shia Muslims of Persian descent, and host to a diverse population of South Asian, Persian, British, and continental European residents and travelers —was a center for various cross-cultural interactions that impacted local artistic production through the mid-19th century. As a result of the events of 1857-58, which were calamitous for the city, and India’s independence in 1947, Lucknow’s representation differs in South Asian and British art and memory. The lecture will examine patronage of Lucknow’s arts against the broad narrative of India’s late-Mughal and colonial history and art history.

Key Dates and Patrons:
Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-48)
1739: Sack of Delhi by Iranian King Nadir Shah
Saadat Khan Burhan al-Mulk—first Nawab of Awadh (r. 1722-1739), rules from capital at Faizabad.
Nawab Safdar Jang—(r. 1739-54), rules primarily from Faizabad, also from Lucknow.
Nawab Shuja al-Daula—(r. 1754-75), shifts capital to Faizabad c. 1765, first significant nawabi patron. During his reign, Lucknow’s distinctive style emerges.
Mughal Emperor Shah Alam (r. 1759-1806)
Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil—employed by Shuja al-Daula c.1763-75.
Colonel Antoine-Louis Polier—patron at Faizabad and Lucknow, 1773-76 and 1780-88.
Nawab Asaf al-Daula—(r. 1775-97), establishes capital permanently at Lucknow.
Major General Claude Martin, patron at Lucknow, 1775-1800.
Nawab Wazir Ali Khan—(r. 1797-98)
Nawab Saadat Ali Khan—r. 1798-1814)
Nawab Ghazi al-Din Haidar—(r. 1814-27), crowned King of Awadh in 1819, a title then assumed by all subsequent rulers.
King Muhammad Ali Shah—(r. 1827-37)
King Wajid Ali Shah—(r. 1847-56)
1857-58: Great Uprising (also known as the Sepoy Mutiny/Rebellion, or the First Indian War of Independence).
1858: Direct control of India passes to British Crown. Queen Victoria assumes title of Empress of India.
Suggested reading:
Stephen Markel and Tushara Bindu Gude, eds., India’s Fabled City: The Art of Courtly Lucknow, (Los Angeles: LACMA; Munich: Delmonico and Prestel, 2010).


For fun: