

Political cartoons in India in the 1930s and 1940s

Reference: 2018-1-ROY

Supervisor	Dr Malini Roy (Curator, Visual Arts Collections)
Department, Location	Asian and African Collections, St Pancras
Start date/timeframe	The placement can take place any time between May 2018 and April 2019
Duration	3 months (or part-time equivalent – see below) <i>For a part-time placement, the student would be required to spend a minimum of 2 days/week on site at the Library</i>
Remote-working	If required, the placement could be undertaken working from home for 3 days/week (or part-time equivalent)

Context for placement

The Visual Arts section is responsible for developing, curating and promoting the Library’s collection of prints, drawings, photographs and associated ephemera from the South Asian subcontinent. This rich and diverse collection documents the interests of the East India Company and the British Government of India during the 16th-20th centuries.

This collection includes more than 200 political cartoons and artist proofs by Rudolf von Leyden (1908-83) that were presented by the artist to the Library in 1968. Von Leyden studied geology at the University of Göttingen where he was awarded his doctorate in 1932. In the following year, due to his interest in leftist politics, he relocated to Bombay to join his elder brother, the businessman Albrecht von Leyden. In India, he established the ‘Leyden Commercial Art Studio’ and as a skilled artist he avidly prepared drawings to document his observations of WWII in both the *Times of India* and the *Illustrated Weekly of India*. These were all submitted under the pseudonym ‘Denley’. Both newspapers can be consulted either in their original format or on microfilm at the British Library.

The von Leyden collection requires additional research, including cross-referencing with printed periodicals, to check whether the cartoons were actually published and if so in which publication. At present, there is only a skeletal catalogue entry for the entire set of drawings. We are keen to catalogue each drawing individually, adding the descriptive metadata to the Library’s Archives and Manuscript cataloguing system (IAMS). We would also like to be able to link the collection to other works by von Leyden in national and international collections. Detailed descriptions of the cartoons and artist proofs will support and stimulate research, and make the collection accessible to those wishing to understand international observations of the period and war.

This placement would allow a PhD student to research the von Leyden collection in relation to the printed publications as well as to document the socio-political impact these works may have had on the readership based in Bombay in relation to their understanding and perception of political developments in war-torn Europe.

Expected tasks and outcomes

The placement will be based in the Visual Arts section of the Library’s Asian and African Collections department and will be supervised by Dr Malini Roy, whose research and interests lie in South Asian art history. However, during the placement, the student will have the opportunity to meet with curators and reference specialists from across the Library’s collections to identify related objects and research tools.

The focus of the project will be to produce detailed catalogue records and descriptive metadata for the objects in the collection. There is scope for this task to be shaped by the student in line with their own research interests. This would be discussed and agreed with the BL supervisor at the start of the placement, following a preliminary review of the collection. For example, it might be agreed to focus on cartoons dealing with particular themes or subjects or political events.

There will be the opportunity for the student to deliver a staff talk on the outcomes of their research as well as to write posts on this collection for the Library’s [Asian and African Studies](#) blog. The research could also be used as the basis for a submission to the *Electronic British Library Journal (eBLJ)* or another academic journal.

Another option would be to convene a workshop to discuss research use of the collection with other academics and relevant BL curators and reference specialists.

Training and experience expected to be gained by student through the placement

At the onset of the placement, the student would have practical training on cataloguing standards and will use specially-designed spreadsheets to enrich the cataloguing data. Additional sessions on handling of collection items will be arranged through the Preservation team. Over the course of the placement, it would also be possible for the BL supervisor to arrange job shadowing opportunities with colleagues in the Library's Asian and African Studies and Newspapers Reference Services teams.

The placement would be an excellent introduction for any PhD student with an interest in pursuing a curatorial career or further academic research into international history or politics. It is an excellent opportunity to put knowledge of the period to practical application and to learn how collections are archived, catalogued and curated.

Posts on the Asian and African Studies blog command an international and predominantly non-academic readership. Contributing to this will enable the student to publicise their work to thousands of readers and will hone their skills in writing for non-specialist audiences.

This is an opportunity to work at first hand with a little-known and under-used primary source and, in so doing, to contribute directly to making it more visible and accessible to other researchers and Library users.

Required knowledge and skills

- High degree of accuracy and attention to detail in inputting data using MS Word and Excel.
- Postgraduate research interest in World History, World War II, empire or History of Art would be beneficial.
- An understanding or experience of research using archival materials and sources.

This is a training and development opportunity open to current PhD students only. It is not intended to lead to a permanent post at the Library. Please note that the Library is unable to provide a stipend for PhD research placements. Applicants must obtain the support of their PhD supervisor and Graduate Tutor (or someone in an equivalent senior academic management role) in advance and, as part of their process, consult their HEI to ascertain what funding is available to support them.