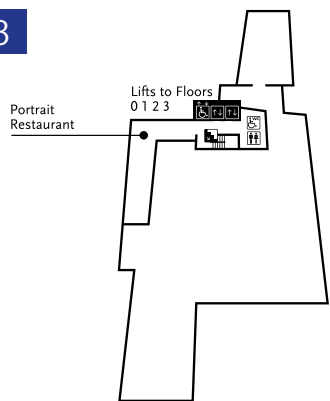


CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS **THE SINGH TWINS**

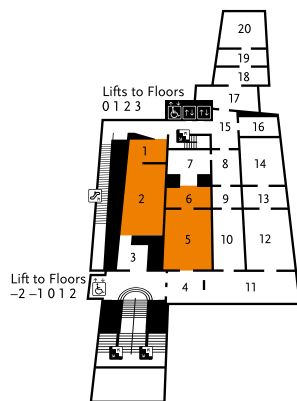
As artists whose personal style is rooted in traditional Indian miniature painting but also inspired by other global artistic conventions, we have always been fascinated by the universal nature of art as a language that transcends cultures and times, and have championed the ongoing contribution of traditional art forms within modern art practice. Contemporary Connections highlights some of the personal connections we have made and explores commonalities in terms of symbolism, structure and themes.

Amrit and Rabindra Singh. 2010

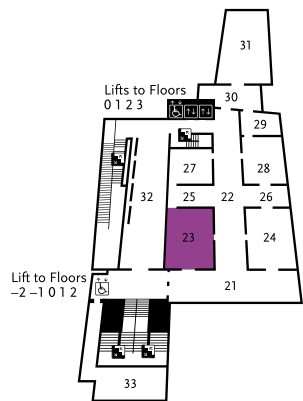
3



2

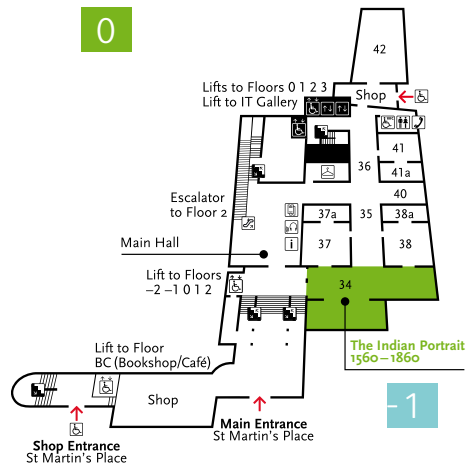


1

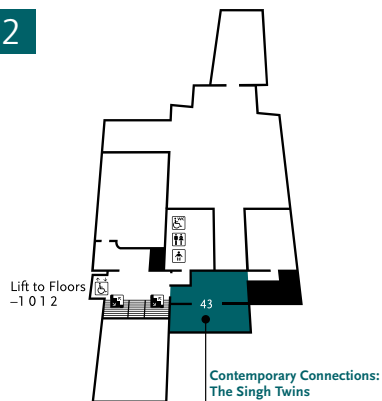


L

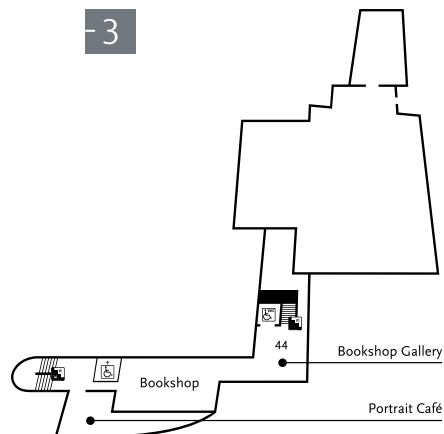
0



-2



-3



CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS THE SINGH TWINS

Contemporary Connections is an initiative which invites contemporary artists to respond to the collection at the National Portrait Gallery. Creating a dialogue in time and space, it offers a personal perspective, reflecting the times we live in, current understandings and changing interpretations of the cultural landscape.

Contemporary Connections: The Singh Twins explores work by twin sisters Amrit and Rabindra Singh in relation to work in *The Indian Portrait 1560 – 1860* exhibition and portraits in the Gallery's Collection. Use this trail in the Gallery and create your own explorations and reflections.

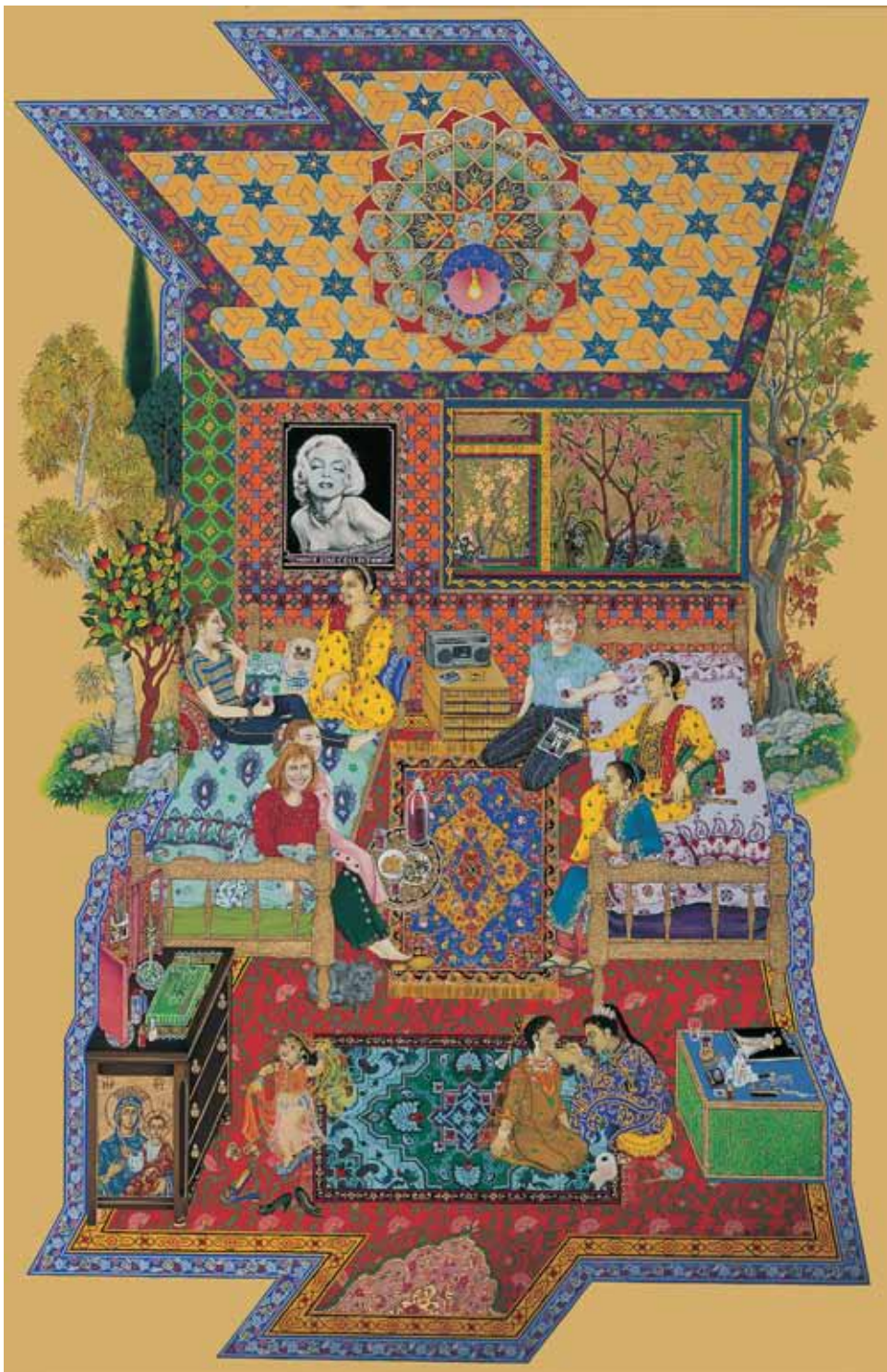
- 3
- 2
- 1
- L
- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3

Rooms 1,2, 5 and 6

Room 23

The Indian Portrait
1560–1860

Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins



1. A SHARED TECHNIQUE

Similar to the Tudor artist's 'face pattern' and the Indian miniaturist's study sketch, we rely on a stock of photographs for reference when painting individuals in group portraits. This often dictates the particular face angle that can be used, and explains why, to a certain degree, there is no visual interaction between the various figures within these three works. Each person seems to be in their own world – looking in a different direction – rather than being engaged with each other, or the viewer.

Floor -2 Room 43
Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins
Les Girls, 1993/94



Floor 0 Room 34
The Indian Portrait
1560-1860
Tilly Kettle Painting
Nawab Shuja' al Daula
and His Sons. Lucknow,
 c. 1820. © V&A Images/
 Victoria and Albert
 Museum, London.



Floor 2 Room 1
Sir Thomas More, his
father, his household
and his descendants
 by Rowland Lockey, after
 Hans Holbein
 the Younger, 1593

2. THE NARRATIVE PORTRAIT

Our painting, *All That I Am*, draws upon common devices used by Tudor artists and Indian miniaturists in their narrative paintings. The 'main player' of the story is larger in scale than the rest of the figures in the composition and is centrally placed. Each of the scenes that make up the narrative, which are depicted in the remaining space surrounding the sitter, are cleverly separated using architectural and landscape detail. In this way it is possible to depict a whole life story on one canvas.



Floor -2 Room 43
Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins
All That I Am (Pitha Ji),
 1993/94



Floor 0 Room 34
The Indian Portrait
 1560-1860
Raja Raj Singh of Chamba with his children and attendants.
 Chamba, possibly by Nikka of Guler, c. 1785-90.
 Frits Lugt Collection, Institut Néerlandais, Paris



Floor 2 Room 2
Sir Henry Unton by
 unknown artist, c. 1596

3. THE ALLEGORICAL PORTRAIT

Allegorical portraits enable artists to go beyond merely depicting the physical likeness of a person to say something about their status, personality and achievements. A particular device used by Tudor artists and Indian miniaturists was to depict the sitter standing on a globe, representing the power or status they commanded. We adopt this same device in several of our paintings, including *The Greatest* which was directly inspired by *Jahangir triumphing over poverty*.



Floor -2 Room 43
Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins
The Greatest, 2002



Floor 0 Room 34
The Indian Portrait
 1560-1860
Jahangir triumphing over poverty. Mughal, attributed to Abu'l-Hasan, c. 1625. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase. Photograph © 2009 Museum Associates/LACMA



Floor 2 Room 2
Queen Elizabeth I
 ('The Ditchley portrait')
 by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, c. 1592

4. THE GARDEN

These works reveal the importance and hidden meaning of landscape in portraiture. Like *The Capel Family* and the *Princes of the House of Timur*, the tended garden in our painting *Indian Summer at Dhigpal Nivas* represents status and wealth which, within the context of this particular celebration of multicultural experience, denotes the relative success and financial security of British Asians. *Indian Summer at Dhigpal Nivas* also relates to a popular convention of double symbolism applied by Indian miniaturists for whom the garden also represented paradise. Here we re-interpret the concept of paradise as an ideal world in which traditional values and cultures coexist and blossom within a modern global society.



Floor -2 Room 43
Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins
Indian Summer at Dhigpal Nivas, 1994/95



Floor 0 Room 34
The Indian Portrait
1560-1860
Princes of the House of Timur.
 Mughal, possibly by Mir Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd us-Samad. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum



Floor 2 Room 5
The Capel Family
 by Cornelius Johnson, c. 1640

5. PORTRAITS AS PROPAGANDA

In these three works, well-known figures of their day are given god-like status through association with imagery and characters pertaining to established myths and legends, with the adoption of symbolic gestures and use of hierarchic composition. From royalty to aristocracy to celebrity, figures from the real world are presented as icons of veneration. Representing the public image, or, official face of the sitter, these portraits reveal how, across cultures and ages, art has been used as visual propaganda – both reflecting and shaping popular perceptions of the personal image.



Floor -2 Room 43
Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins
From Zero to Hero, 2002



Floor 0 Room 34
The Indian Portrait
1560-1860
Jahangir receiving Prince Khurram at Ajmer. Mughal, attributed to 'Abid, c. 1635. The Royal Collection. © 2009 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Floor 2 Room 6
Venetia, Lady Digby
 by Sir Anthony Van Dyck, c. 1633-1634

6. IMAGES OF CONFLICT AND POWER

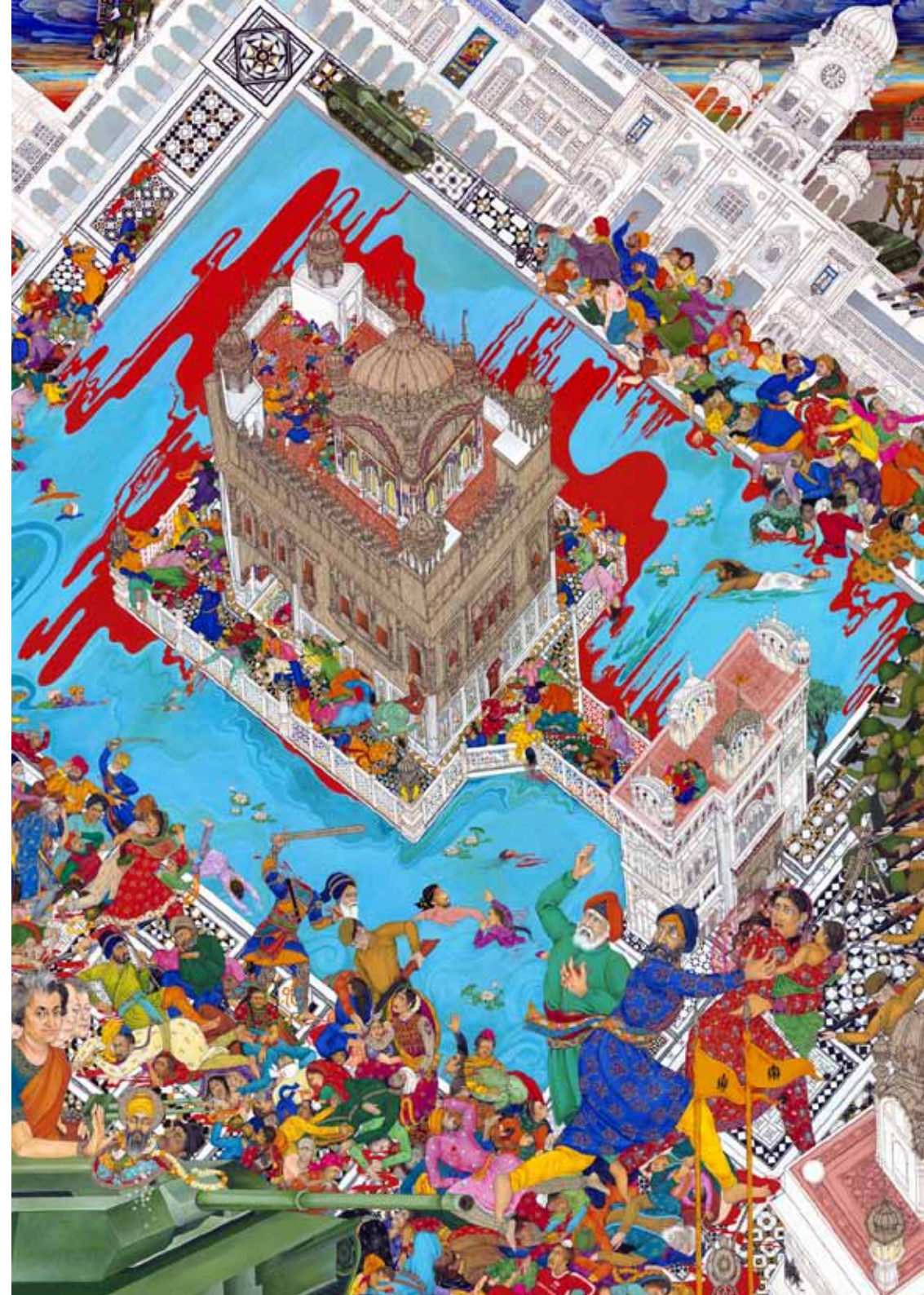
Our painting depicting the Indian army's attack on the Golden Temple at Amritsar in 1984 borrows imagery from the *Padshahnama* – *The Book of the Emperor* which depicts events from the life of Shah Jahan – to create a symbolic association between an event which many regarded as an affront to the Sikh faith in modern times, and the historical persecution of Sikhs during the period of Mughal rule in India. These three works relate to the politics of power struggles in India and demonstrate the universal tradition of using art to document war, military conflict and their consequences. Our painting does this from the perspective of human tragedy, highlighting the innocent victims of political abuse and conflict.



Floor 0 Room 34
The Indian Portrait
1560 - 1860
The death of Khan Jahan Lodi. Mughal, by 'Abid, c. 1633. The Royal Collection. © 2009 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



Floor 1 Room 23
The Relief of Lucknow,
1857 by Thomas Jones
Barker, 1859



Floor -2 Room 43
Contemporary Connections:
The Singh Twins
Nineteen Eighty-Four, 1998

National Portrait Gallery

St Martin's Place

London WC2H 0HE

Open 10.00 – 18.00

Thursdays and Fridays until 21.00

www.npg.org.uk

Contemporary Connections: The Singh Twins

11 March – 20 June 2010

Admission Free

The Indian Portrait 1560 – 1860

11 March – 20 June 2010

Admission Free

Indian Spring

A rich and engaging season of events offers a contemporary perspective on one of the world's most vibrant, diverse and enigmatic countries. Highlights include a contemporary South Asian literary festival, Singh Twins master-class, India Noir LATE night as well as workshops for families and young people.

www.npg.org.uk/indianportrait

All Singh Twins images

© The Singh Twins www.singhtwins.co.uk

All National Portrait Gallery images

© National Portrait Gallery, London

National Portrait Gallery, 2010



Recycling box in main hall