Art Historian, Vidya Dehejia, Named to Newly Endowed Chair in Indian Art

Vidya Dehejia has been named the first Barbara Stoler Miller Professor in Indian Art. She was previously deputy director and chief curator of Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, which jointly form the Smithsonian Institution’s national museum of Asian Art.

Dehejia’s appointment realizes a long-term dream to establish the leading program in Asian art, with chairs in Chinoiserie and South Asian art,” said Hilary Ballon, chair of Columbia’s Department of Art History and Archaeology. “With Vidya on board, Columbia has become one of the nation’s strongest centers for the interdisciplinary study of South Asian culture and society.”

Dehejia was associate professor in Columbia’s Department of Art History and Archaeology from 1982 to 1994. She will inaugurate the Barbara Stoler Miller Chair in a public lecture on Nov. 19 on the Columbia campus.

Dehejia is a noted scholar of Indian and South Asian Art. She has written more than 20 major books and numerous articles, covering areas that include early Buddhist art, photography, the art of British India, the temples of north India and the sacred bronzes of the south. Her publications include India: The Sensuous and the Profane (Phaidon, 1997), Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India (Shiromani, 1997), Representing the Body: Gender Issues in Indian Art (Kali for Women,1997), Antal and Her Path of Love: Poems of a Woman Queen of the Sacred (India, 1990) and Yogini Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition (The National Museum, 1986).

Dehejia obtained her doctorate 1968 from England’s University of Cambridge, where she also received her master’s and bachelor’s degrees. Prior to coming to Columbia, she was professor of law and expert in white-collar crime, managing Martin Stewart’s alleged insider trading. (New York Times)

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Deep and abiding interest in Indian art,” said Dehejia. “The chair in honor of the longtime Barnard professor is funded in perpetuity by endowment gifts from Steve Ames, the Harriet Ames Chari table Trust and the estate of Sanjay Eichhorst. The Columbia mathematics professor and major collector of South Asian art, Dehejia was also a visiting associate professor and Noble Chair at Sarah Lawrence College in 1989. She was a visiting associate professor at the University of Chicago. Dehejia was a Guggenheim fellow (1990) and fellow of the National Endowment for the Humanities (1991). In 1990, Dehejia was awarded the Helen Milner Fellowship to study in the city who have questions in their fields that might have answers in the resources available to them. The fellows take advantage of the resources at Columbia and of the opportunity to learn from one another to improve their ability to contribute to the city.”

Dehejia is one of ten fellows selected from hundreds of applicants. Each year, a committee comprised of Ginzberg and four other Columbia faculty members carefully examines the applications and then interviews 35 prospective fellows to narrow down the selection. Ginzberg says there were more programs like the Revson Program over the last twenty years have been granted expanded role and responsibility of the fellows past and present,” Ginzberg says. “They continuously reshape the program and assume ever more leadership so that, as she said, the fellows and WCVB to the City of New York more effectively.

When the year ends, the goal for fellows is to return to their respective careers with new perspectives and a network of support that includes some 200 former fellows still working to make a difference in New York City. And in Ards’s case, that’s worth writing about.

Most fellows choose to enroll in two term to two courses from disciplines across campus. In addition, they meet regularly with faculty mentors from a variety of schools, such as the Mailman School of Public Health and the School of International and Public Affairs, to attend weekly seminars with other Revson participants and work together in creating an interdisciplinary spring conference that is open to the Columbia community. And the fellows also visit local organizations for field research and participate in regular discussions.

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Dehejia was also a professor at the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture from 1973 to 1979, where she also held a fellowships with the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Shimla and the Indian Council for Historical Research – and was lecturer at the University of Hong Kong from 1970 to 1972.

During her eight years at the Smithsonian, Dehejia managed the operations of the museum where she reconfigured the galleries curatorial and education departments. Dehejia also curated several exhibitions, including the Freer and Sackler galleries, accompanied by substantive catalogues, including “Devi: The Great Goddess,” (1999), “India Through the Lens: Photographs 1840-1911,” (2000), and her latest exhibition, “The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India,” which opens in November 2002 at the Sackler gallery.

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