

Friends of Global South Asia

Fall 2025



Figure 1: Artist Vishwa Patel at Gallery 1065 for FGSA tour © Piali Roy.

Message from the Chair

Friends of Global South Asia (FGSA) have been active since the summer, hosting tours at Gallery 1065 and Atelier Next Door, and raising over \$6000 for our ROM internship. We are now planning our next donors-only vault tour, so please update your membership to be included.

In this issue, we recap our November AGM, where ROM curators highlighted features of the upcoming suite of South Asian galleries, currently in design, with plans to open in 2028. We also introduce Farrukh Rafiq, ROM's Coordinator of South Asian Engagement, and spotlight one of our most popular Instagram posts on paduka footwear. Finally, we share a video of Amardeep Singh's talk on his Guru Nanak video project. – Piali Roy

FGSA's AGM Looks Forward to the New Suite of South Asian Galleries



Figure 2: Curator Dr. Deepali Dewan showing the floors plans of iterations of South Asian galleries. © Samia Naqvi.

The Friends of Global South Asia (FGSA) held its Annual General Meeting on November 6, 2025, with over 30 members and ROM representatives joining both in person and online. The focus was on ROM's future suite of South Asian galleries, which are planned to open in 2028.

The meeting began with brief remarks from Martha Haldenby, Chief Development Officer of ROM Governors, who touched on institutional priorities and the \$15 million fundraising goal connected to the new gallery plans.

The meeting then turned to upcoming developments at ROM. Dr. Deepali Dewan, Dan Mishra Curator of Global South Asia, offered a preview of the new Global South Asia Gallery now in progress. She shared early floor plans, showing how the gallery's size has grown from 1,000 square feet in 2000, to 5,000 square feet in 2008 and now to 9,000 for 2028! She also showcased potential collection highlights, explaining that this new

iteration will move toward a thematic curatorial approach rather than the past chronological structure, to open up fresh ways of connecting ideas, global histories, and material traditions. Dr. Dewan noted that ROM was working with the renowned firm, OMA, which is considering South Asian architectural traditions to inform the re-imagining of the South Asia Gallery. The team is conducting both community and expert consultations to ensure the upcoming gallery also reflects the stories and representations of the global South Asian diaspora.

Where we are going.

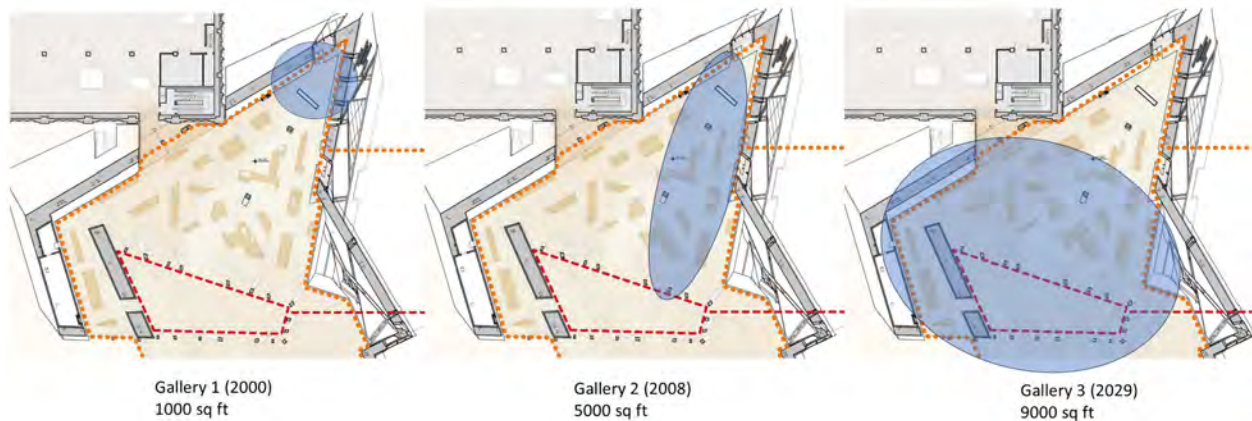


Figure 3: Floor plans of South Asia galleries in 2000, 2008 and 2028 © ROM.

Santbir Singh, Associate Curator of Sikh Art & Culture, then spoke about the forthcoming Gallery of Sikh Art and Culture, which will adjoin the South Asia Gallery. He highlighted how rare it is, globally, to have a dedicated and expansive space for Sikh arts and heritage, and what this means for broader public engagement and scholarship.

Dr. Farrukh Rafiq, Coordinator of South Asia Community Engagement, also reflected on a busy year of outreach and engagement with community groups and arts organizations across the GTA, with hands-on workshops that leverage ROM's collections and widen engagement beyond the museum.

Chair Piali Roy closed the evening by walking us through the past year's milestones. She highlighted budget developments and fundraising efforts, including the successful FGSA-supported student internship, an opportunity that enabled the 2024 intern to later secure a research assistant position at ROM.

FGSA looks forward to building on this momentum and continuing to support meaningful South Asia–focused programming at ROM. – Samia Naqvi and Nitin Deckha

Introducing Dr. Farrukh Rafiq, ROM Coordinator for South Asian Engagement



Figure 4: Coordinator for South Asia Community Engagement Farrukh Rafiq. © ROM.

As ROM Coordinator for South Asia Community Engagement, I help bring the museum's South Asia collection to life for diverse audiences across the Greater Toronto Area. In close collaboration with Global South Asia Curator, Deepali Dewan, I design and deliver dynamic, accessible programming tailored to cultural community groups and local libraries. My work includes curating interactive talks and workshops that both build excitement around ROM's South Asia collection and critically examine the historical role of colonialism and its ongoing impacts today.

My programming is designed to foster curiosity, increase visitation to the museum, and create meaningful engagement with South Asian history and heritage. I regularly deliver public workshops both off-site and on-site at ROM, covering topics such as ornamentation in South Asian objects and colonial-era photography. I also plan culturally relevant events like talks and workshops that connect historical content with contemporary identities and issues.

Feedback from ROM's South Asia Arts & Culture Workshops has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants shared that they gained a deeper understanding of stereographs, colonial media bias, and the representation of South Asia through Western lenses. Many praised the workshops for providing new insights and successfully linking historical themes to broader cultural contexts—and expressed eagerness to take part in similar programming in the future. – Farrukh Rafiq

Footprints Through Time: Reflecting on the Paduka and Cultural Lineage



Figure 5: Paduka (sandals), Carved teak wood, Rajasthan, India, 20th century CE, 24.5 x 9 x 7 cm © ROM.

In light of a recent controversy surrounding a high-end designer brand copying the Kolhapuri chappal (without acknowledgment of its origins or artisans), it feels timely to look back at another iconic South Asian shoe: the paduka. While today's headlines speak of appropriation, these ancient sandals speak of legacy.

The paduka is one of the oldest known forms of footwear in South Asia. This particular pair, held in ROM's collection, dates to the 19th century and was likely made in India. Crafted from wood with delicately turned knobs to anchor the toes, these sandals were not made for comfort, but for significance.

In Hindu traditions, the paduka carries deep religious and cultural meaning. Worn by ascetics, sages, or those engaged in sacred practices, the wearer's bare heel and ball of the foot touching the earth was thought to maintain a spiritual connection. Even today, padukas are offered in temples as symbols of devotion, representing the feet of deities or revered figures.

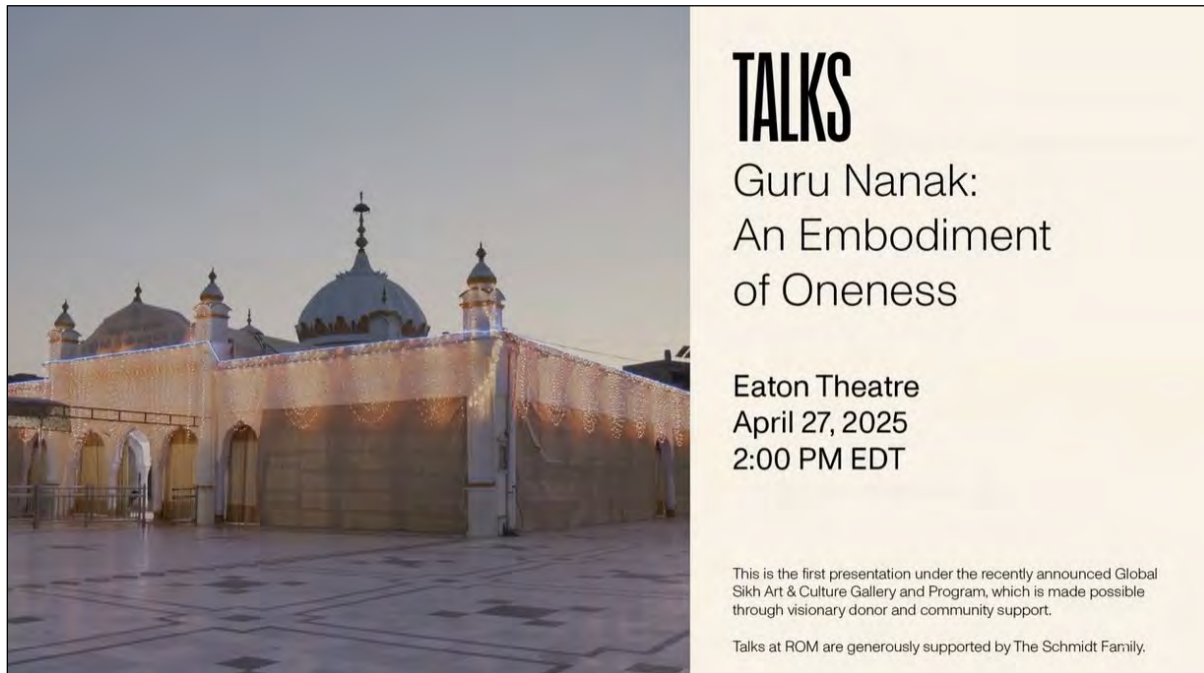
Even beyond religious contexts, the paduka reminds us of the evolution of design rooted in purpose and symbolism: created with minimal material but rich in intention.

As we reflect on the paduka's simplicity and strength, it's worth asking: What do we lose when contemporary design borrows without recognition? And what might we gain by honoring the craftsmanship beneath our feet? – Huma Rana



Figure 6: Paduka (sandals), Carved teak wood, Rajasthan, India, 20th century CE, 24.5 x 9 x 7 cm © ROM.

Video: Guru Nanak: An Embodiment of Oneness



TALKS

Guru Nanak:
An Embodiment
of Oneness

Eaton Theatre
April 27, 2025
2:00 PM EDT

This is the first presentation under the recently announced Global Sikh Art & Culture Gallery and Program, which is made possible through visionary donor and community support.

Talks at ROM are generously supported by The Schmidt Family.

Figure 7: ROM promotion for Guru Nanak talk.

[Watch the video](#) from a ROM talk featuring award-winning director, writer, and producer Amardeep Singh as he discusses the creation of the 24-episode documentary series “Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak’s Travels” and the Oneness in Diversity project he is currently leading. Singh and his team preserve and highlight the legacy of Sikhism’s founder through an extensive journey filmed at over 150 multifaith locations spanning nine countries. The series offers a comprehensive look into Guru Nanak’s endeavors to inspire Oneness and a universal spiritual understanding.

This is the first presentation under the recently announced Global Sikh Art & Culture Gallery and Program, made possible by visionary donors and community support.

Visit [ROM's YouTube channel](#) for past talks and presentations by ROM speakers and curators.

FGSA Membership

Membership in a Friends group at ROM is a wonderful way to support the museum's Global South Asian collection. Thanks to a long history of generous benefactors, we now have a dedicated gallery, an endowed curatorship, innovative programming, and ongoing education about South Asian art, culture, and history.

Friends of Global South Asia

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[Join FGSA](#); Follow us on [Instagram](#)

Friends of Global South Asia is organized by ROM's Department of Museum Volunteers to provide support for the Museum. ROM is an agency of the Government of Ontario.

Alternate accessible formats are available upon request.

The logo for the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), consisting of the letters "ROM" in a bold, black, sans-serif font.