How Secular Is Art?

As an invitation to interrogate the secular modality of art, the book unsettles both the categories of ‘art’ and ‘secular’ in their theoretical and historical implications. It questions the temporal, spatial, and cultural binaries between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ that have shaped art historical scholarship as well as artistic practice. All the essays here are anchored in a conception of a region, whether we call it South Asia or the Indian subcontinent—one fissured by histories of partition, state formations, and religious nationalisms but still offering a collective site from which to speak to the disciplines of art and the knowledge worlds in which they are embedded. The book asks: How do we complicate the religious designations of pre-modern art and architecture and the new forms of their resurgence in contemporary iconographies and monuments? How do we re-conceptualize the public and the political, as fiery contestations and new curatorial practices reconfigure the meaning of art in the proliferating spaces of museums, galleries, biennales, and festivals? How do we understand South Asian art’s deep entanglements with the politics of the present?

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How Secular Is Art?

On the Politics of Art, History, and Religion in South Asia

Edited by
Tapati Guha-Thakurta
Vazira Zamindar
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