

<http://www.openartsarchive.org/open-arts-objects>

Teaching Support Sheet

Presenter: Renate Dohmen

Object: Unknown Indian and French craftsmen, Tipu's Tiger, ca. 1793, painted wood with metal fixtures, Victoria & Albert Museum

This film presents a unique object: a hybrid work created by French and Indian craftsmen in India, that combines the latest European mechanical knowledge with Indian folk art skills. Dr Dohmen explores the technical marvel of Tipu's Tiger, a cutting edge late eighteenth-century musical automaton, made of carved and painted Indian jack wood, which makes grunting and wailing sounds. It reached England as a war trophy after the defeat and death of Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, in 1799, who commissioned it. Its inner mechanism was most likely created by French craftsmen at Tipu's court. It is now on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Before watching the film

Before watching the film, locate the work online and download an image of the work here that you can use to show to your class: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O61949/tippoos-tiger-mechanical-organ-unknown/>

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/tipus-tiger>

Questions to ask your students before watching the film (students to complete on the attached form)

1. Have you ever heard of Tipu Sultan? If not, who do you think he might be?
2. What do you know about the British Empire and about British India? (see helpful fact sheet at the foot of this document)
3. Have you ever seen the object before, and if so where and in what context?
4. Can you imagine what function it might have served?
5. How might the relationship between man and nature be played out in the work?

After watching the film

Questions to ask your students after watching the film.

1. Why do you think Tipu commissioned the object?

It was for Tipu's entertainment and amusement but it also showed him as a modern, up-to-date ruler of the world who had access to the latest technological innovations. Of course it also expressed his desire to vanquish the British threat to his rule by depicting a symbolic victory over his enemy, the British.

2. Why do you think it was so popular when it was displayed at the India Museum in London in the nineteenth century?

Tipu became a symbolic marker within world politics as Britain and France fought both in Europe and in their global dominions. Tipu was presented as the barbarous foe who was in alliance with France, the archenemy of Britain. He and his father had caused real problems for the British militarily and Tipu's final defeat and demise was seen as not just as a regional victory of a war that happened in a distant India but one that had consequences for world politics. France posed a powerful threat at the time because of the French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon and his attempt to conquer the rest of Europe. Tipu's tiger became a symbol that could be read numerous ways by presenting a symbolic defeat over an enemy that was still at large. For Britain, it demonstrated how Tipu could be vanquished, just as the British public hoped that France would soon be vanquished too.

3. What do the formal aspects of Tipu's Tiger tell us?

India was not shut off from the world or indeed as backward as European propaganda often had it but rather Tipu was in touch with the French and was well aware of British-French power relations. Tipu was interested in exploiting the newest technology for his own benefit, which tells us that India was not a barbarous and backward place but that Tipu (and many other rulers like him, such as the Mughal emperors) were well informed, open to the world, and welcomed innovation. Indeed, when the British first encountered Emperor Jahangir (the Mughal emperor) in the seventeenth century, their gifts seemed dismal in comparison to the lavish gifts he was accustomed to. It is also likely that the idea for the automaton was Tipu's, so he had a good imagination.

4. How has the film helped you understand how the 'Tiger' functioned?

The object had three functions for Tipu: it symbolized the wished for victory over the British; it underscored his legitimacy as king through the focus on the tiger, an animal that was traditionally associated with divine kingship in India (his father had been an usurper, so the claims to righteous rulership sought to obfuscate this history); and it also was his emblem – the tiger stripes were on the uniforms of his soldiers for example, and the tiger as emblem was found on all of the objects Tipu owned and that were associated with him. Nature here then was used as a symbol of power.

5. What have you learned about the role of France in Tipu's demise?

Tipu was in alliance with France because he was fighting the British in India who wanted his territory. The French also had a presence in India and both France and Britain carried over their hostilities in Europe to their encounter in India as they fought for world dominance. This is the period of colonisation and empire and thus it was only natural for Indian rulers to form requisite alliances with France or Britain who were only too willing to fight to support any military effort against the other side. The rivalry over world domination between France and Britain was a key factor in why the British became involved in the Indian power struggles and transformed their position as traders into territorial rulers.

6. What is its relevance for today?

The work reminds us of Britain's imperial history and the importance of Anglo-French hostilities for the colonisation of South Asia. It gives us a way into colonial history as a battle between European powers over global dominance. It also points to how Britain's colonial history has shaped British culture today—the ubiquitousness of curry for example.

You might want to show students a satirical print by Gillray of the power struggles at play in the early nineteenth century:

<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-plumb-pudding-in-danger---or---state-epicures-taking-un-petit-souper-by-gillray>

This political cartoon by James Gillray shows William Pitt and Napoleon carving up the world between them and establishing spheres of influence in 1805.

7. How did the meaning of the object change as it travelled to London?

In Tipu's context it signified the symbolic defeat over the British, in London it became the ultimate war trophy.

Comparative analysis

Students might compare Tipu's Tiger with *The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes by Marquis Cornwallis 26 February 1792*. Oil on canvas by Robert Home (1752-1834), 1793 (c), Film National Army Museum <http://blogs.nam.ac.uk/collection/collection-highlights/hostages-from-mysore>

and read the corresponding text:

Willcock, S. (2013) 'A Neutered Beast? Representations of the Sons of Tipu Sultan –'The Tiger of Mysore'– as Hostages in the 1790s', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 121-147.

Please see comparative table at the end of this document

Online Activity

1. Students can read more about the tiger on the V&A's website and watch a film where the tiger is 'played':

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/tipus-tiger>

(Strangely the conservator plays 'Rule Britannia' on it, which throws up some interesting questions about the legacy of colonial rule and 'nostalgia' of imperial power, something the open arts objects film tries to avoid)

Alternatively, you can watch on youtube this video, which perhaps is a little more neutral:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qna3ZYBvI_U

2. Students might also like to research a similar work with a similar subject, *The Death of Hugh Munro*:

<http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/708701>

This figurine refers to a real life event that most likely inspired Tipu's Tiger: Hugh Munro, a British man was out hunting and was killed by a tiger in India in 1791. He was also the son of General Hector Munro (1726 – 1805) had had defeated Tipu's father in 1781 during the Second Anglo-Mysore War, with a huge loss of life on Tipu's side.

3. Search the image/collection of museum and gallery databases to find comparable images:

<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O61949/tippoos-tiger-mechanical-organ-unknown/>

<http://metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/708701>

You could ask students: What contemporary imagery and iconography might have a similar effect and impact on audiences today and how museums/galleries can and should adapt to the present day? The Victoria & Albert Museum now has a Rapid Response Collecting Gallery, regularly updated to be responsive to the changing world, what objects do you think should be included in the Gallery? For more information visit: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/r/rapid-response-collecting/>

Bibliography and further info:

Book: Susan Stronge, 2009, *Tipu's Tigers*, V & A Publishing,

Scholarly articles that are accessible online:

Brittlebank, K. (1995) 'Sakti and Barakat: The Power of Tipu's Tiger. An Examination of the Tiger Emblem of Tipu Sultan of Mysore', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 257-269.

Masani, Zareer, 'The Tiger of Mysore', *History Today*, 2016, Vol.66(12), p.11(6)

Resources online

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/tipus-tiger>

<http://www.tigerandthistle.net/tiger11.htm>

about the conservation of the object:

<https://vimeo.com/6099083>

Comparative Analysis Table

At the top of the middle column, write down the information related to 'Tipu's Tiger' and on the other column, information related to the 'The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes by Marquis Cornwallis' by Robert Home (1752-84) National Army Museum <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1976-11-86-1> You might want to watch this film on the painting: <http://blogs.nam.ac.uk/collection/collection-highlights/hostages-from-mysore>

Works of art	Tipu's tiger	'The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes by Marquis Cornwallis' by Robert Home
date		1793 (c).
What is it?	Object – Indian folk art, created by artisans	Painting, created by an artist
material	Painted wood with metal fixtures	Oil painting on canvas
Size/scale	L 178cm, H 71cm, W 61cm	58 3/4 x 39 1/2 in. (149.2 x 100.3

		cm.)
Subject matter	Indian anti-British sentiment because of British military zeal in India and active land grab	After the third Anglo-Mysorean war Tipu had to hand over his sons as hostages to ensure that he would stick to the rather humiliating conditions the British had imposed on him after his defeat – he had to ceded half of his territory and pay huge war preparations. The painting however presents this humiliation in terms of an act of paternalistic benevolence that sugar coats the fact of Britain’s military intervention in terms of friendship and well meaning, and is thus propagandistic
Original location	Commissioned in the 1790s by Tipu Sultan of Mysore, who kept the spectacular wooden semi-automaton in the music room of his palace, the tiger was shipped to London after Tipu was killed in 1799.	
Composition		Landscape format, it is in the genre of a history painting, the highest academic genre – typical features are a morally elevating and important topic, (the generosity of the victor of kindly receiving the hostages and treating them well is the high-minded aspect here), the painting combines the dynamism of diagonal lines (visual line drawn by the elephants for example, which is counter balances with a diagonal created by the people standing in the right corner of the painting and connecting through to the people on the left distant corner of the painting) with the more usual emphasis on order, symmetry and stasis which emphasizes the horizontal – here represented by the people in the foreground.
Condition		
Function		Propaganda

Helpful Fact Sheet:

British traders arrive in the early 17th c

Haidar Ali (born 1722 - 1782) (ruler of Mysore)

Tipu died 1799

Anglo-Mysore War

30 decades of war in the second half of the 18th century

1 -(1767–69)

2 -(1780–84) – treaty established conditions before start of the wars, it was a draw

3 -(1790–92) (Tipu lost and had to concede half his kingdom to the British)

4- (1799) Tipu was seen as ally of the French and was attacked by the British, the Nizam of Hyderabad from the North, and the Marathas (another powerful Indian dynasty that sought to replace the Mughal emperors and, after Tipu's defeat, were to be the next thorn in the British side).

Mughal empire

A powerful empire in South Asia that flourished from the early sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, and continued on until 1858 when the last Mughal emperor (he had no real power any more) was exiled to Burma (now Myanmar) by Britain. The name refers to the Central Asian origin of the founder of the empire Babur, who was a descendant of the Mongol conqueror Gengis Khan, and the Turkic conqueror Timur (Tamerlane). They ruled from 1526 to 1857 BCE over a predominantly non-Muslim society that was multi-ethnic and multi-faith on all levels of society.