

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

Student Handout

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

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

1. Why do you think Tipu commissioned the object?
2. Why do you think it was so popular when it was displayed at the India Museum in London in the nineteenth century?
3. What do the formal aspects of Tipu's Tiger tell us?
4. How has the film helped you understand how the 'Tiger' functioned?
5. What have you learned about the role of France in Tipu's demise?
6. What is its relevance for today?
7. How did the meaning of the object change as it travelled to London?

Comparative analysis

Fill out the table below, considering the following elements: date, subject matter, material, location, function, formal qualities. Use the empty boxes to comment on any other formal qualities or aspects of the works you would like to note.

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		
date		
What is it?		
material		
Size/scale		
Subject matter		
Original location		
Composition		
Condition		
Function		

Online Activity

1. You 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>

2. 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>

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/>