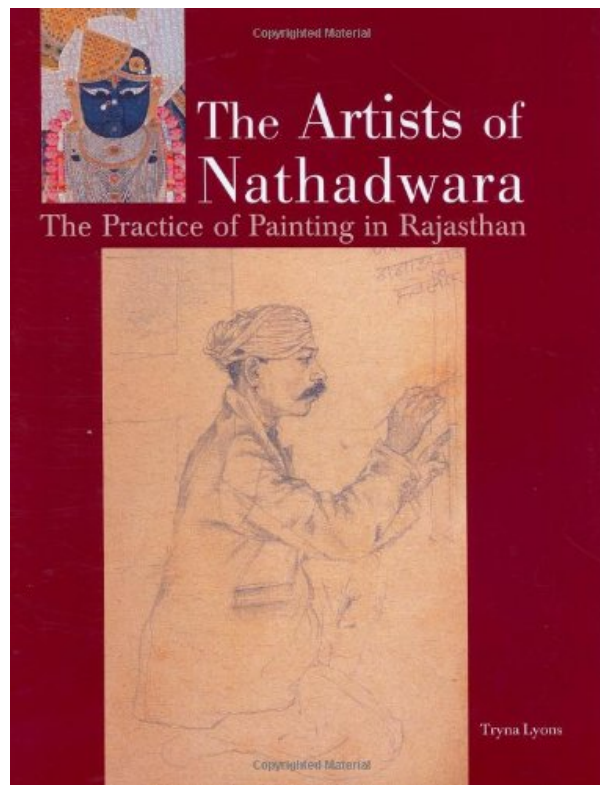
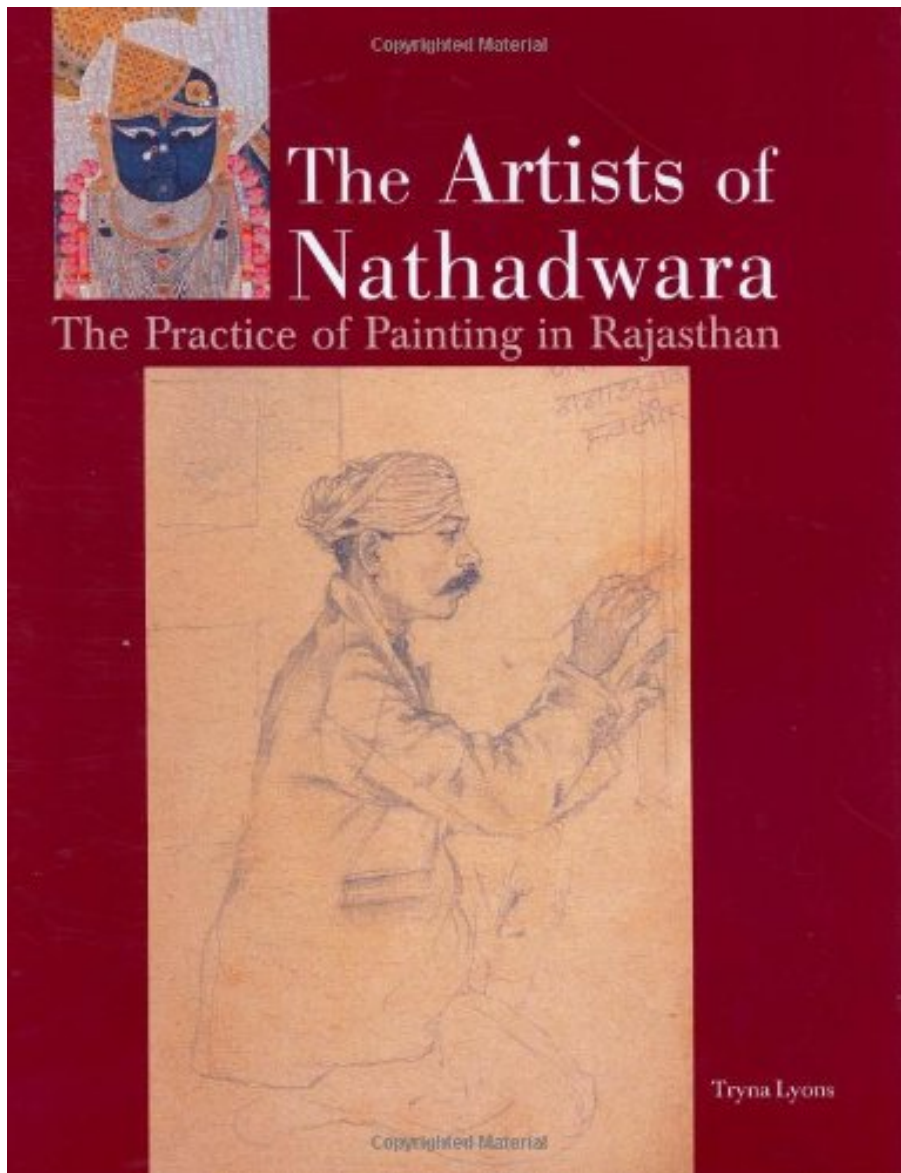


# THE ARTISTS OF NATHADWARA: THE PRACTICE OF PAINTING IN RAJASTHAN BY TRYNA LYONS



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(American Anthropologist 2008-01-00)

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In this beautifully illustrated study, Tryna Lyons combines ethnographic and art historical methods to examine the work and careers of artists in Nathadwara, Rajasthan, India. The religious pilgrimage center of Nathadwara is home to a large community of traditional artists, who retain sketchbooks and other materials handed down in their families for generations. The old sketchbooks, still used to teach younger generations and to provide established artists with ideas, reveal the connection between contemporary practice and the historical antecedents of the Nathadwara school of painting. Lyons's innovative approach focuses on analysis of the sketchbooks of five artists active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reproduced here in detail alongside full-color reproductions of their work and related images. The sketchbooks reveal personal style and innovation, demonstrating the array of choices open to artists in a time of cultural ferment and excitement. A section on women artists documents the careers of successful female exponents of the Nathadwara style. Appendixes include a glossary and a collection of artists' genealogies, some stretching back 17 generations, recording significant information on artistic activities, commissions, and patronage. The Artists of Nathadwara should make us question Orientalist assumptions about tradition and the anonymity of South Asian artisans.

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Exquisite study of a little-known sacred art

By Aimee Brant

This book is a thoroughgoing, well-rounded study of the artists of Nathadwara town in Rajasthan, India, and of their various art productions and practices: a rigorous and innovative ethnography of living and deceased painters and painting in the Pushtimarg tradition of Vaisnavism. The book design is a delight, with its miniature drawings from Nathadwara art motifs placed on the pages and also at the end of each chapter, plus the beautifully printed color (and B&W) illustrations—a true feast for the eyes.

In her Introduction the author situates the art in relation to previous scholarship, then briefly surveys the history of Pushtimarg and how it became settled in Rajasthan, the role of the picchavai in this tradition, the question of whether it is art or folk art, and the scope of the study.

The next nine chapters intensively discuss the following topics: Mural paintings by Nathadwara artists; artists' workshops at turn-of-the-century; a glimpse of the temple in old Bombay based on an artist's sketchbook; artist families as frameworks for the evolution of style; an artist's eye to the future as exemplified in a sketchbook; the influence of British stylistics on an England-returned master artist; the women artists of Nathadwara; artists' histories and myths of caste and kin and location, and the genealogists who maintain and also invent them to please their patrons; and a conclusion that surveys issues of religion in relation to art and life in Nathadwara, artist views on aesthetic excellence, and younger artists' experimentation with other kinds of painting.

Throughout her in-depth examination of art and art making based on interviews, photographing art on location, studying rare artist sketchbooks, and extensive travels to important sites in and away from Nathadwara, the author reveals the many ways in which the artists of Nathadwara experience and fulfill their religious devotion in their works.

I highly recommend this beautiful as well as impressive book as a resource for Vaisnava studies as well as for historians of traditional arts on the Indian sub-continent.

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