

Silk Roads and The Centre of the World

Date/Time	Tuesdays 7 March-4 April 2023 2-4pm	Price	£90
Venue	The Art Workers' Guild, 6 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AT	Lecturer	Anita Chowdry

Like a spider sitting in the centre of her web, the urban centres of Central Asia once comprised a hub linking over four thousand miles of trade routes that connected ancient Empires and Kingdoms across the breadth of Asia. Known collectively as The Silk Roads, the trade routes and their cities were the arteries of early globalism, connecting and shaping diverse cultures across three continents.

In this course we shall focus on the period stretching from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Tracing the history and impact of the Silk Roads through paintings, stories, architecture, books, technology, and a range of decorative arts, we shall examine:

- How the Silk Roads emerged in the first millennium BC.
- The Empires and Kingdoms that maintained the trade routes.
- How material and technological advancements disseminated along the Silk Roads.
- How trade and eclecticism influenced the arts and architecture.
- The spread of intellectual ideas and faiths.

Lectures

- 1a. Early Roots: Trade and Tribute in Ancient Persia. *Darius I and annual tributes.*
- b. Gold, Silver, and the Mountain of Gems. *Mining and folklore in Central Asia.*
- 2a. Early Roots: China and the Western Han. *Silk as currency, imperial trade routes.*
- b. Sogdians, Bactrians, and Nomads. *Tribes playing a pivotal role in culture and trade.*
- 3a. Apollo and the Buddha: Graeco-Buddhist Empire. *Alexander and the rise of Buddhism.*
- b. Dunhuang and the Mogao Caves. *The Buddhist diaspora, its impact on art and culture.*
- 4a. Asian Decadence in Rome and Byzantium. *Luxury trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.*
- b. Kings and Heroes: The Last Persian Empire. *Artistic and cultural heritage.*
- 5a. A New Ideology: Cultural Synergies and the Spread of Islam. *A novel visual language.*
- b. Gathering Knowledge, the Arts of the Book. *Museion of Alexandra to House of Wisdom.*

Lecturer

Anita Chowdry is a visual artist and educator based in London. Her research focuses on the codicology of Persian manuscripts. Having undertaken workshops and courses at major institutions in Britain and abroad, she currently lectures on Art History in the Eastern and Islamic world at the CityLit Institute.