Kirin Narayan

2020 Distinguished Lecture in Cultural Anthropology

Professor of Anthropology
The Australian National University

March 12, 2020
Paleontology Hall
Museum of Natural History
4pm

Shaping a Mystery:
Artisans and Ancestors in India’s Ellora Caves

Ellora, Western India, is a World Heritage Site with thirty-four magnificent Hindu, Buddhist and Jain temple-caves excavated and sculpted from the mountain’s rock. Ellora Cave 10, a 7th-century Buddhist chaitya hall, or shrine, features a towering seated Buddha sculpted with hands in the dharmachakra mudra (or “teaching pose”). This cave has also long been known to locals, pilgrims and art historians as the “Vishwakarma Cave” or the “Carpenters’ Hut.” Why is this so? The deity Vishwakarma, “Maker of the Universe,” is usually depicted with tools, and is considered the divine ancestor of artisan communities and protective patron of industrial workers in many regions of India. I build on contemporary ethnographic research on Vishwakarma worship, historical accounts of Ellora, and an elaborate mythology featuring Vishwakarma’s presence on the sacred Ellora mountain, using the prism of Cave 10 to recuperate artisans’ perspectives on making and the provocations of mystery.

Open to the public. Sponsored by the Department of Anthropology, the Center for the Humanities and Arts, and the Center for Asian Studies. For more information, contact carla.jones@colorado.edu