

FACE VALUE

Early Portraits in Indian Art

MAP DISCOVER



A portrait is basically a representation of a person in any form – drawings, paintings, photographs and even sculptures.

In the beginning, portraits referred mainly to the representation of people's faces, head and shoulders.

There is a special term for this in sculpture – do you know what that is?*

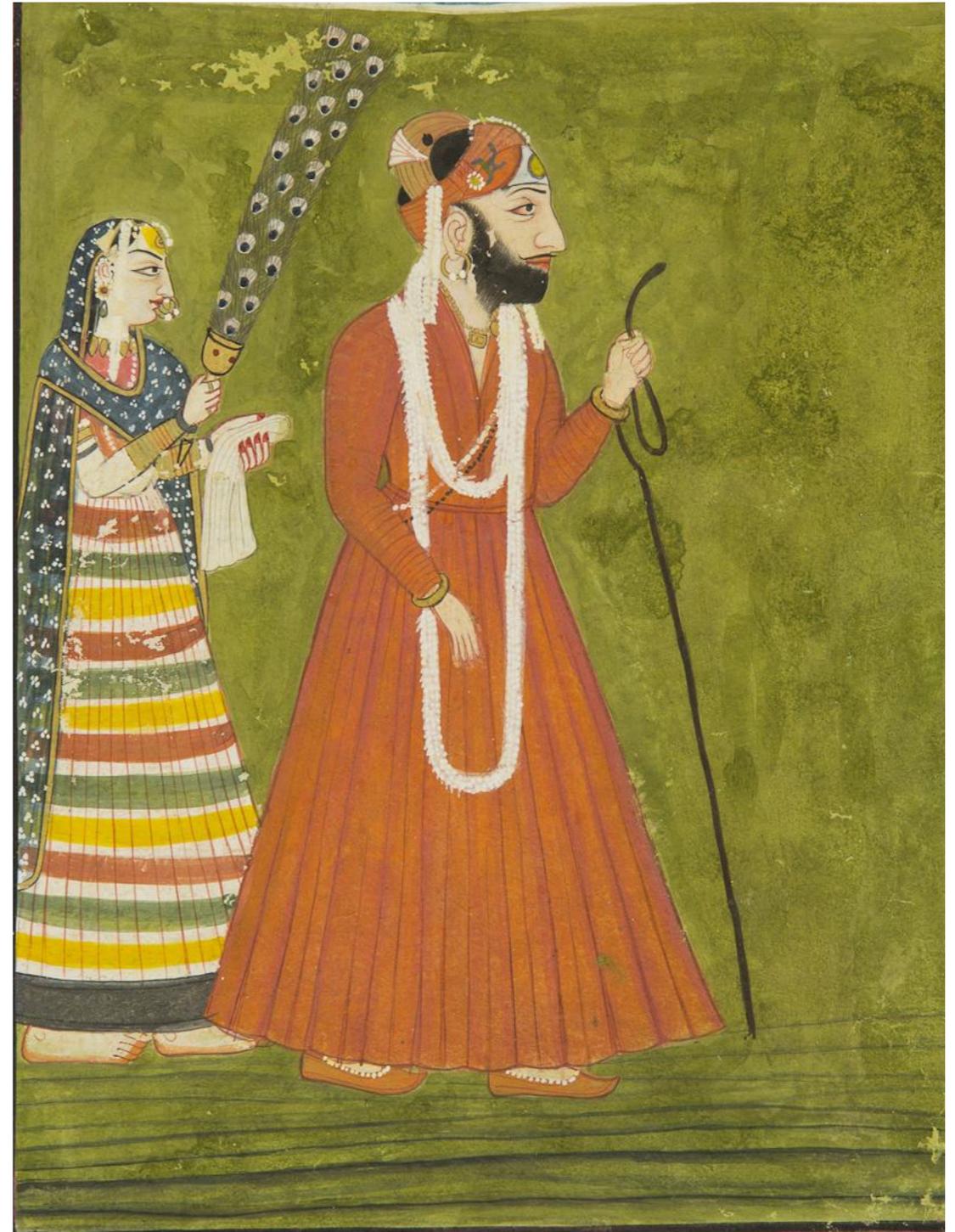
*



*Hint: It starts with a 'B' and rhymes with 'dust'.
Did you get it?

Later on, the term 'full length portrait' came to be used for depictions of people that showed the entire body.

There are two figures in this painting. Whose portrait do you think it is meant to be? How might we be able to tell?



A portrait might show us how a person looks. Additionally, it can also reveal other things such as the sitter's hobbies, interests, values, beliefs and more. This is often done through clues hidden in the portrait itself.

LOOK CLOSELY.

Observe what this sitter is wearing, the things kept around her and the room where she is sitting. Also observe her posture and facial features.

What can you tell about this woman by looking at her portrait?



Early portraits in India were made to look perfect, not real. They were called **Idealised Portraits**.

There were rule-books about how to make portraits of all types and one had to follow them very strictly.

Vocabulary-Alert!

The word ideal means something that is perfect. It is also used to describe something that exists in our imagination as perfect, but unlikely to become real.

How would you describe the woman in this painting? Do you think it this is a realistic depiction?



LOOK CLOSELY.

Now, observe this painting.

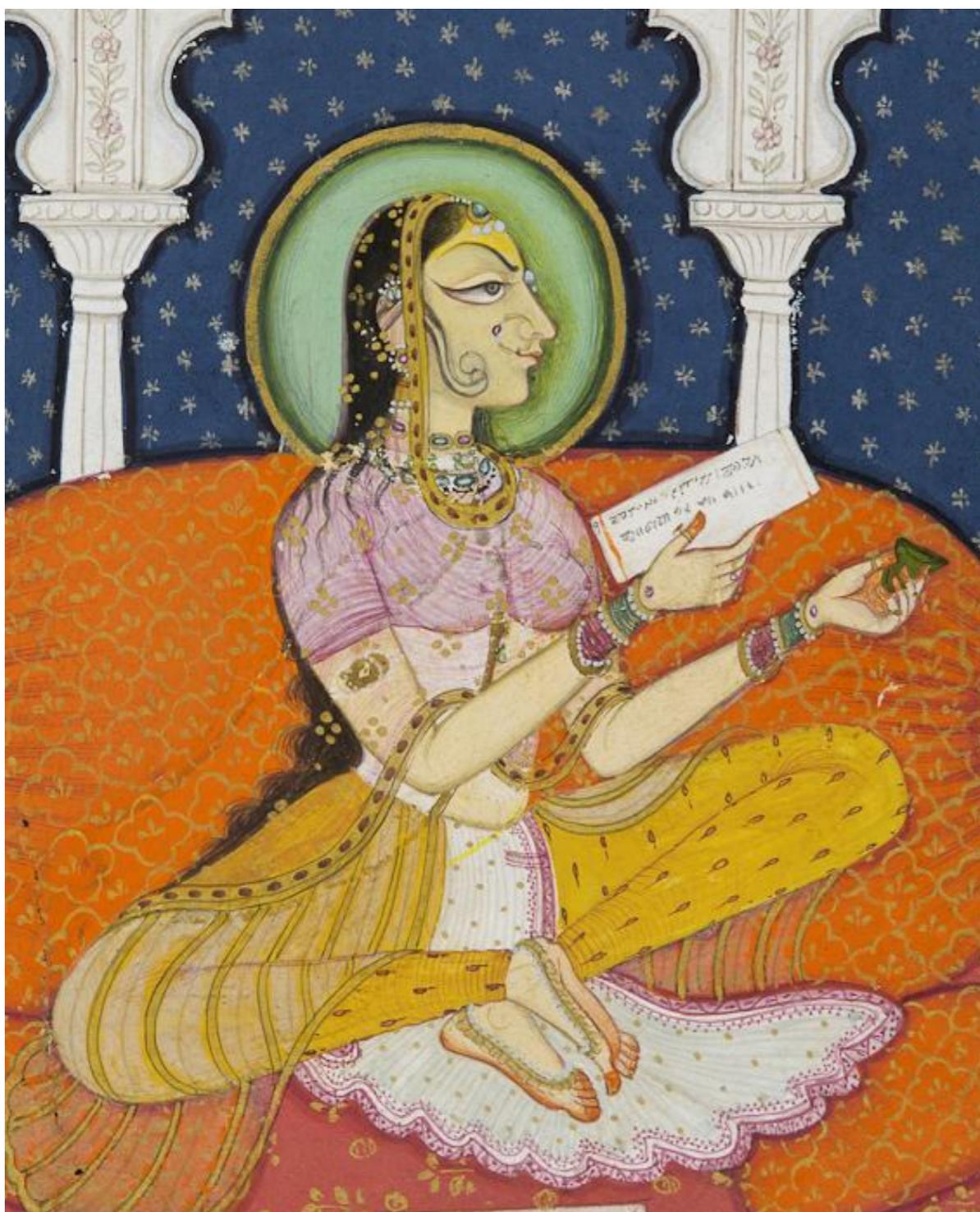
Do you think this is a real woman?
Why / Why not?

Now pay closer attention to the
style of the painting.

Observe her facial features, her pose
and the way her body is drawn.

What about her looks realistic and
what doesn't?





This painting is of a real person – a poet and singer who lived in 17th century Rajasthan. We do not know her real name, but she is widely known today as **Bani-Thani**.

It is clearly an idealised portrait of her. She is given an elongated eye, a high arched eyebrow and a very small waist.

Learn more about ancient rulebooks and create your own version with our **MAP Activity Worksheet**.

How many kinds of patterns can you observe in this detail?

REFLECT.

Do you think people manipulate or alter their faces and bodies in portraits to look a certain way today?

Why would they do that?
What are they trying to achieve?

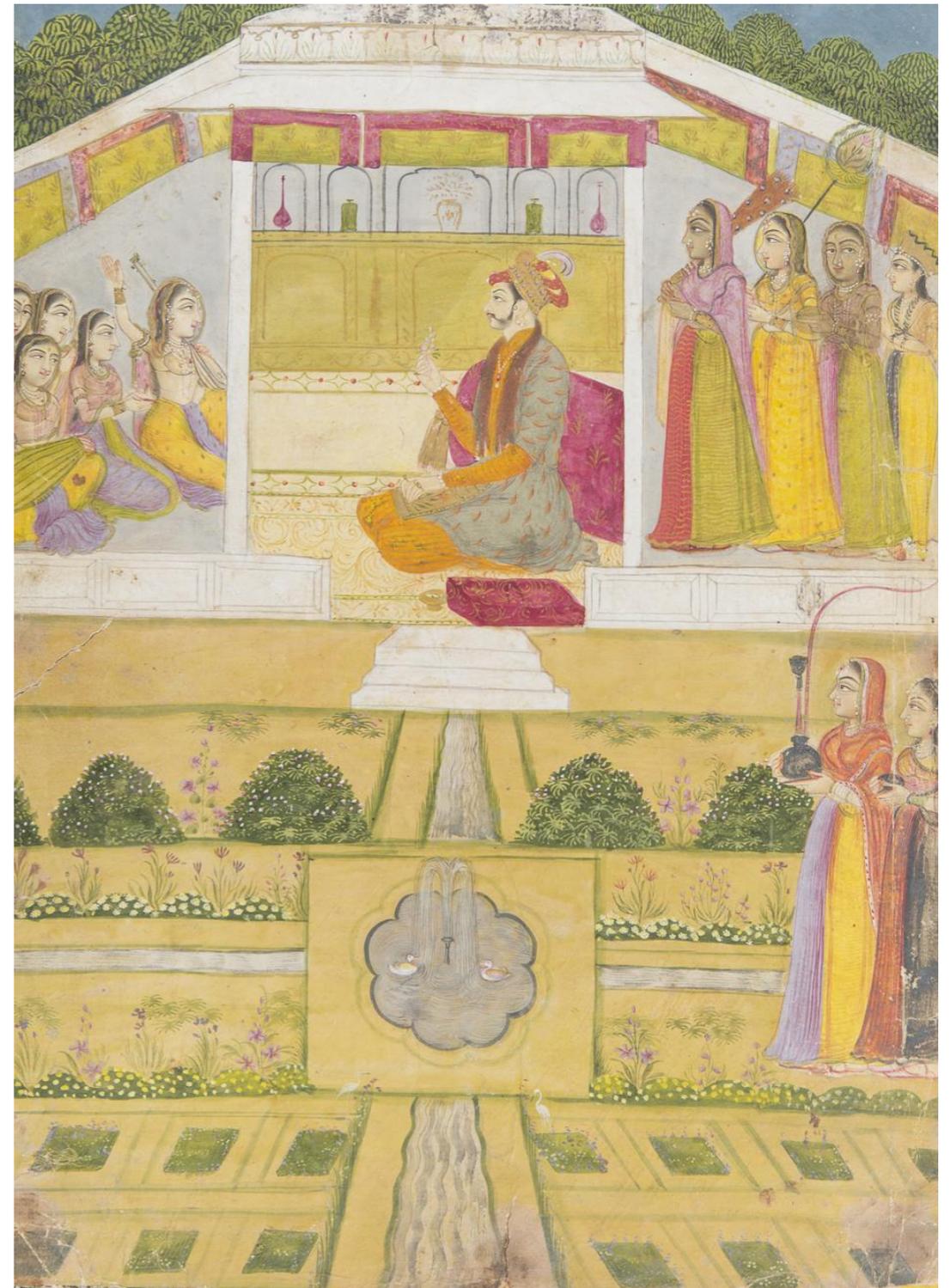
Think about advertisements you may have seen around. Think about face filters on phones and social media pages.



Idealised portraits were very common among the royals of India, who were big patrons of portraiture.

Often, portraits of kings and nobles showed them engaged in activities like holding court, fighting in battle or going about their day in the palace.

What do you think this portrait is trying to tell us about the kingly figure?



Vocabulary-alert!

A patron is someone who gives financial or other support to a person, organisation or a cause.

In the case of art, a patron is often the one who pays for the work to be made.

How about trying out a patron-painter collaborative portrait making through our **MAP DIY Guide** extra?

What story does this painting reveal to you?



Kings got portraits made for many different reasons such as:

- Marking important events in their lives.
- As gifts for visiting dignitaries.
- As gifts and tokens of favour for friends and family.

This is a portrait of Bahadur Shah Zafar II – the last Mughal Emperor.

What do you think might have been the reason behind getting this portrait made?



Image: Uploaded on Wikimedia Commons, distributed under a CC-BY 2.0 license.



In addition to kings, many nobles also got their portraits made. Here is one such of Hasan Reza Khan, who was the minister of the Awadh kingdom (present day Lucknow).

LOOK CLOSELY.

- How would you describe this man's physical features?
- How would you describe his garments? How would they feel: soft, rough, something else?
- Is he wearing any jewellery or carrying other props?
- What do you notice about the background?

Royal portraits were also carved on coins, medals or badges – something small enough to keep in your pockets, wear as a pendant or even on your turban!

LOOK CLOSELY.

Can you identify the figures seen in these medals?

Hint: look at the writing on the side, it tells you who they are!

Do you think portraits are still used in this manner today?



THE PORTRAIT HUNT!

Go on a scavenger hunt in your house to find different kinds of notes and coins. These can be from any country. If you find a few from different countries, even better!

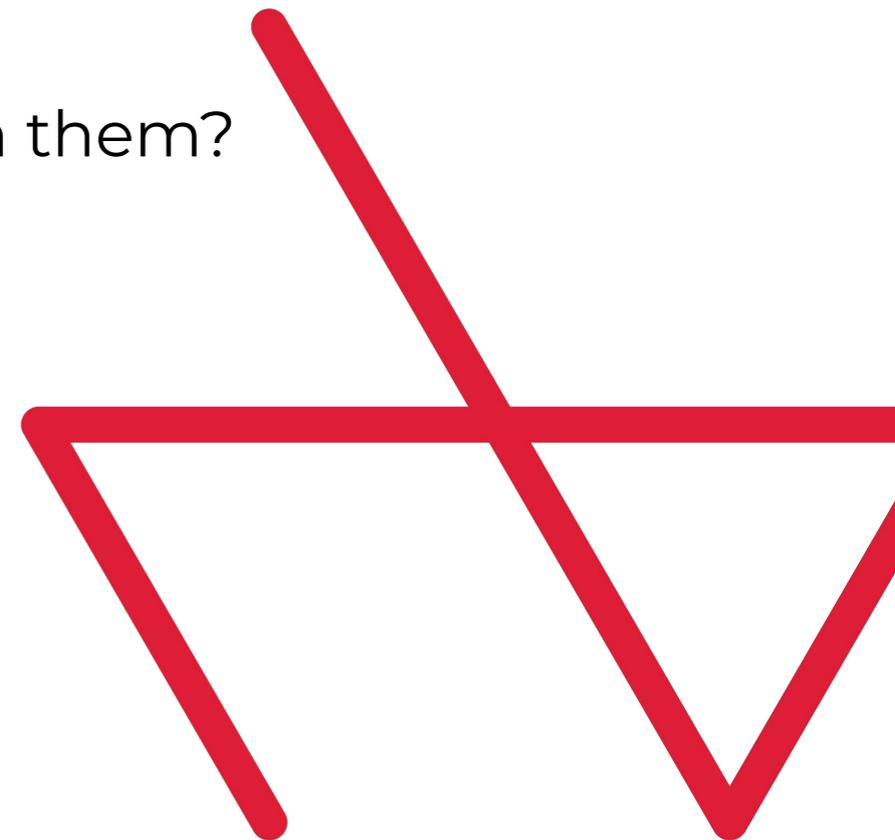
Are there any portraits on them? Try and find out who these people are and why they were chosen to be on this country's currency.

Are there other items around your house with portraits of political leaders or other people on them?

Here are some categories to look for:

Medals | Badges | Textiles | Souvenirs

How many did you find?





Sometime in the mid-19th century, a remarkable new invention changed portrait-making to a great degree and forever.

Can you take a guess at what that invention might be?

Hint: We all carry this invention with us all the time now, with our phones!

Head to the other portrait pack in the Discover MAP series to find the answer!

Do you think the artist painted this portrait on the spot or looked at a reference? Why do you think so?



Portrait of a princess, c.1800
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
H. 15 cm, W. 10 cm
PTG.01178



Portrait of a man, c.1900
Unknown Maker(s)
Ink on paper
H. 11 cm, W. 15.5 cm
PTG.01098



Portrait of a woman, c.1900
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 39 cm, W. 29.4 cm
PTG.01251



Portrait of a royal woman, c.1884
Attributed to Raj Rupan
Opaque watercolour
and gold leaf on paper
H. 25.5 cm, W. 17.6 cm
PTG.01161



A nobleman watching a
musical performance, 20th Century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 38 cm, W. 29 cm
PTG.01347



Portrait of a king, 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
H. 32 cm, W. 21 cm
PTG.01148



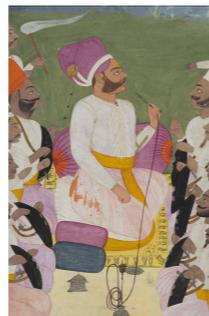
Military medal with portrait
of King George V
Unknown Maker(s)
Various Metal Alloys
SCU.00607-7



Military medal with portrait
of Queen Victoria
Unknown Maker(s)
Various Metal Alloys
SCU.00607-10



Portrait of Hasan Reza Khan,
Minister of Awadh, Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 17.5 cm, W. 12.8 cm
PTG.01183



Portrait of a king with his courtiers,
Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 25 cm, W. 12 cm
PTG.0641



Portrait of a princess, Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 18 cm, W. 10 cm
PTG.01145



Portrait of an aristocratic male, c.1900
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 39 cm, W. 29.4 cm
PTG.01252



MAP

**Museum of Art
& Photography**

MAP

Sua House
26/1 Kasturba Cross Road
Bangalore 560 001, India

map-india.org

 [museumofartandphotography](https://www.instagram.com/museumofartandphotography)

