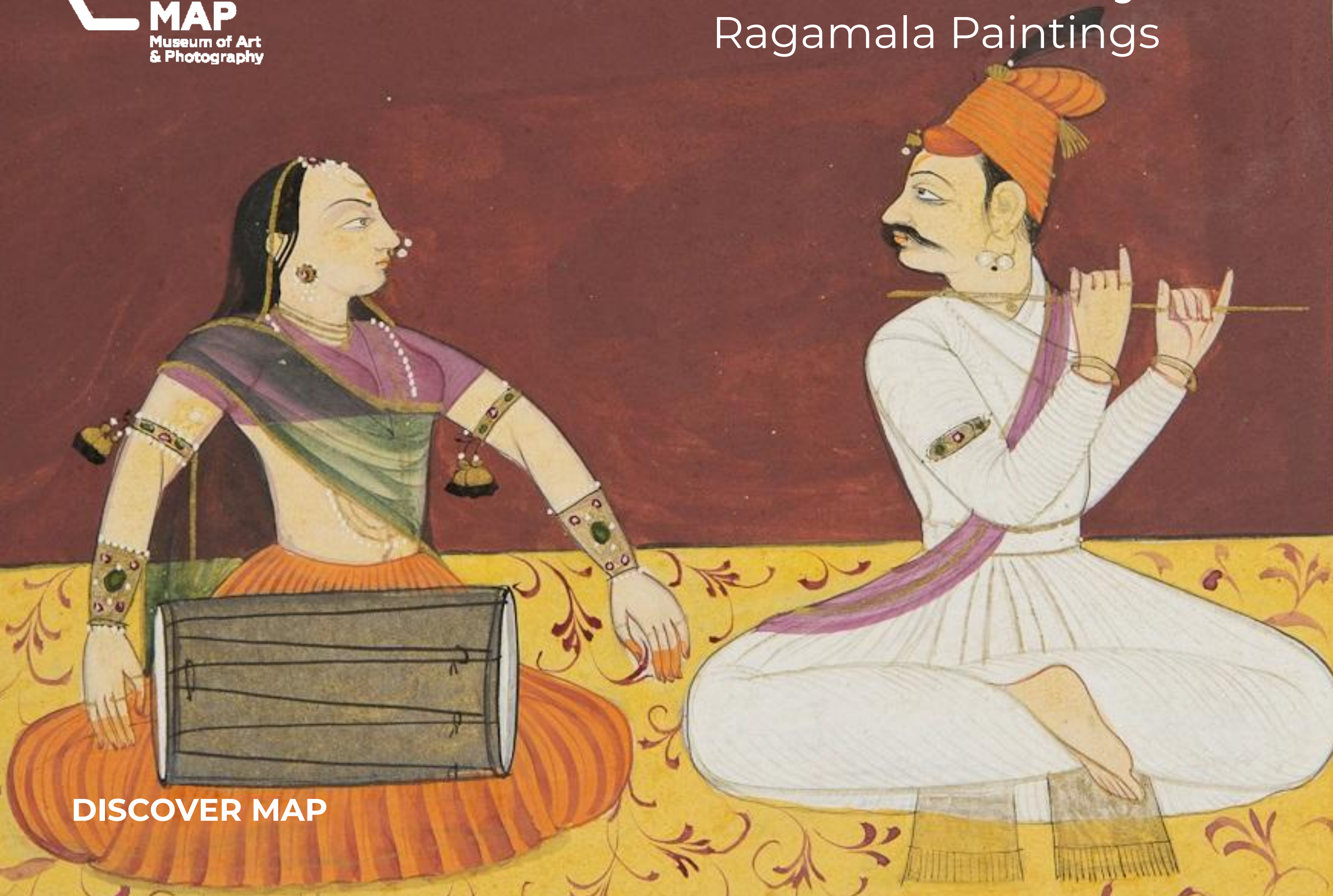


Music To The Eyes

Ragamala Paintings



DISCOVER MAP



ENGAGE.

Do you have a personal playlist on a streaming platform? Think about the songs you have in there and try to pick one for each of the situations below:

A song to pump you up in the morning.

A go-to song for when you are feeling low.

A crowd favourite party song.

We may not be very aware of it, but we are always connecting songs to specific moods, feelings or even times of the day! Centuries ago, a type of Indian paintings known as **Ragamala Paintings** used this idea to connect music and moods.

The word Ragamala translates to a “garland of ragas”, and the term raga refers to the arrangement of musical notes in Indian classical music.

What plant or tree species can you spot here?





LEARN MORE.

The heart and soul of Indian classical music, the raga is the melodic framework of any composition. Using the framework and improvising within it, a musician can make an endless number of tunes. There are over 300 ragas! Listen to Canadian musician Abby V sing 73 of them in this [video](#).

The root word raga in Sanskrit also means colour. Why do you think they used the same word for music and colour?

One interpretation is that the ragas are meant to create different feelings in the listener, and therefore “colour the mind”.

Building on the idea that the music and ragas create a mood, ragamala paintings depict this mood through colours and stories.

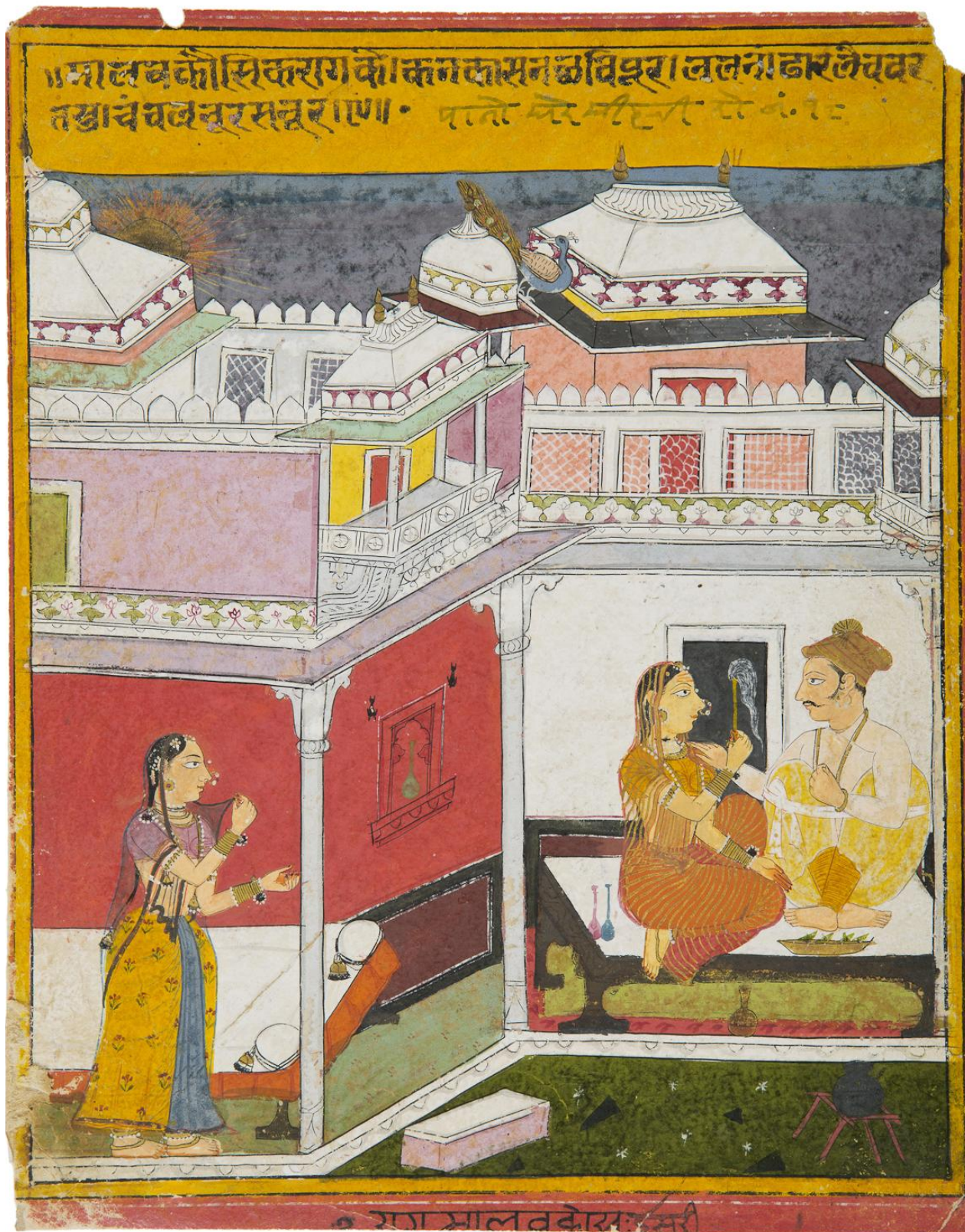
Here is a ragamala painting.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- What are all the colours you spot?
- What do you think is happening here?
- How do you think the people in the painting feel and why?
- How do you think the painting is supposed to make the viewer feel? What do you see that makes you think so?

Collection: The Metropolitan Museum, New York





In addition to that, some Ragamala paintings also include short poems describing the mood.

Here is an example where the lines on top describe what you see in the image below. ADD RAGA NAME Can you guess what script this text is in*?

*This is a four-lined poem in Nagari script - an ancestor of the now prevalent Devanagari.

Do you know languages that use Devanagari? Ask a grown up or look up on the internet.

If the girl in the yellow skirt could speak, what would she say?

Now let's look to the image below the text.

LOOK CLOSELY.

- Can you guess the time of day? What makes you say that?
- Do you notice anything odd/unique about the building? What is it?
- Do you see anything interesting about the way the clothes are painted?
- Can you spot a bird? Which one and where is it?

Isn't this fun? Let's look at a few more ragamalas in the following pages and see what else they hold!



As you've learnt, the ragas also have names. Depicted here is the Bhaskar Raga.

Each raga is also meant to be sung at a particular time of the day.

THINK.

Can you guess the time of day Bhaskar is meant to be sung at? Look closely at the colours!

If this were the cover of a book, what might the book be about?



Collection: Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

Answer: Raga Bhaskar is to be sung at dawn. Have you ever seen a sunrise in real life? Next time you do, think of the colours you see in this painting - see if they match in any way. Is there anything else in this painting that makes you think of a super-duper early morning?

According to legend, singing a raga at the wrong time would make the gods very angry and could even lead to the musician being cursed by them!

Ragas are associated not only with the time of the day, but also with seasons. There are ragas for the summer, for the monsoon, and so on.

LOOK CLOSELY.

What time of day do you think this painting is hinting at? Why?

What season do you think it might be depicting?



CREATE.

Colours and forms are very important in Ragamala paintings to express a specific mood. How about trying a quick exercise that uses colours and lines to describe YOUR moods and feelings at the moment?



First, relax and think about how you are feeling right now. You can close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and think about it for a couple of seconds.

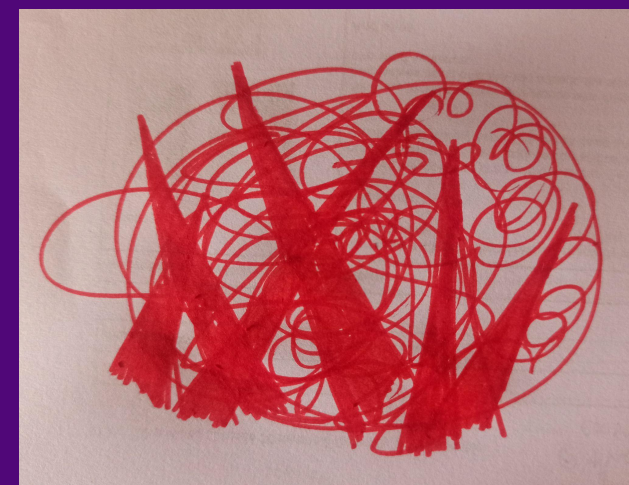
Next, pick three elements – a colour, a line and a shape – that you think represent this feeling the best.



Finally, it's time to draw! You can use any art supplies and do it in any style. Just do what comes naturally, let the process unfold gradually and most importantly, have fun!

WHAT WE MADE!

For anger, we picked the colour red, a mass of scribble-y lines and a bunch of spikes for the shape. So here's what our art piece looks like!



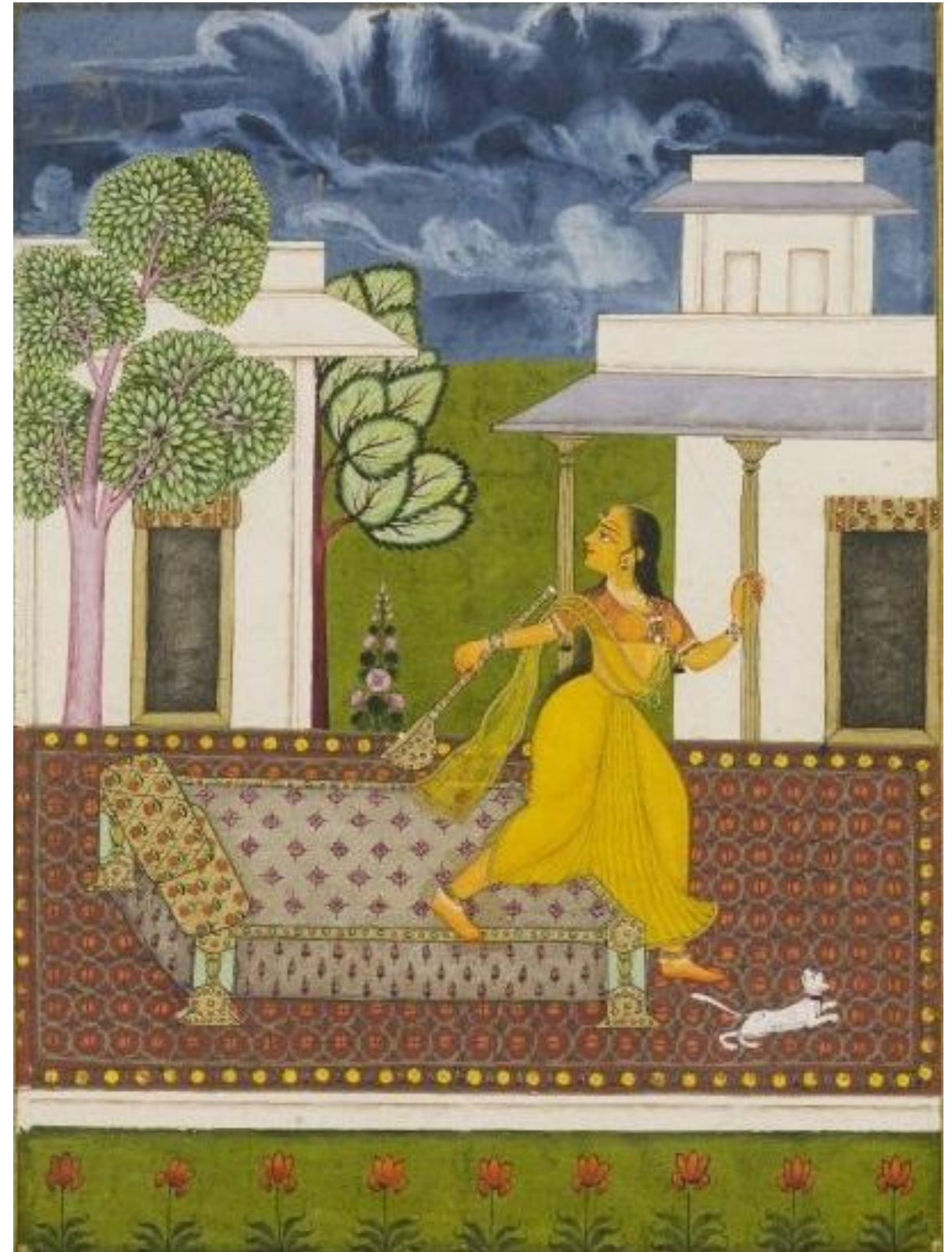
Over time, it became really hard to remember the names and styles of all the ragas! So to make things easier, the painters bunched them up into families.

There are raga husbands and wives, and even raga sons and daughters! This one, for example, is Patmanjari Ragini, the wife of a Raga called Deepak. How does this painting of Mrs.D make you feel? Why?

ENGAGE.

Can you pick a song that would go really well as soundtrack for this scene? Why did you choose this one?

Collection: Centre For Research
University of Edinburgh, Scotland



And here is Mrs.D's husband, Raga Deepak. Deepak literally means lamp in Sanskrit.

OBSERVE

We know that this painting is of the raga because we see a man in it wearing a flame in his head! Do you see it? What else do you see that makes a connection to lamps and fire?

There are rules about the representation of each raga that artists carefully followed. The other big word for such rules in art is **iconography**.



If you could change one thing about this building, what would it be?



LEARN MORE.

Simply put, **iconography** is the type (and study) of imagery commonly used by an artist or artists to convey something specific. This often includes the use of symbols to make meanings about a piece of art.

The 'flame-on-head' symbol, for example, lets us know that the male figure in the last painting is Deepak Raga. If we replace that to 'peacock-feather-on-head', the figure in the painting would change to Krishna!

Sometimes, iconography (the things you draw and how you draw them) can also help to show the overall mood of the image.

Can you look closely at this painting and guess the mood or vibe for it? Look closely at what these people are doing – that is your hint!

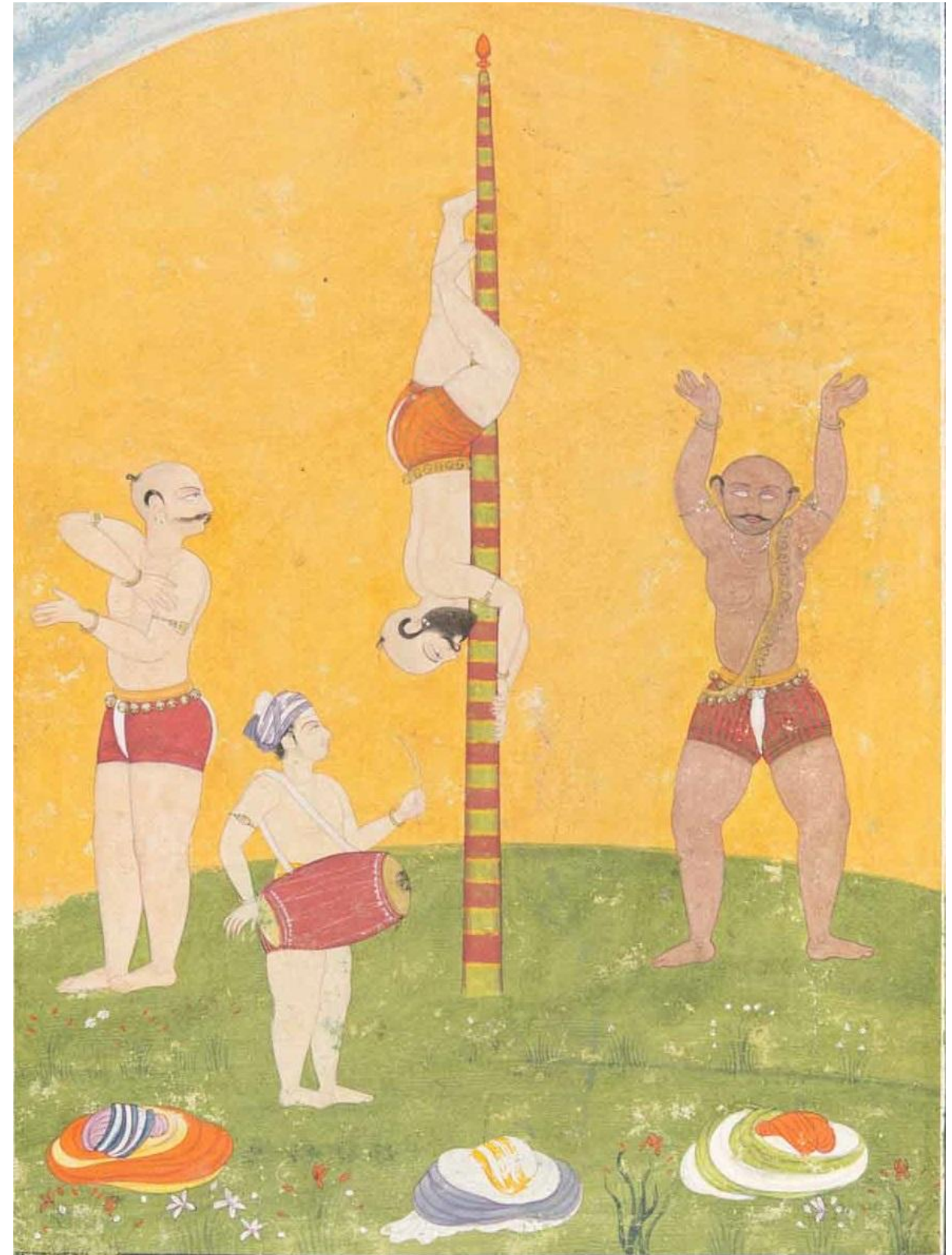
What's the mood?

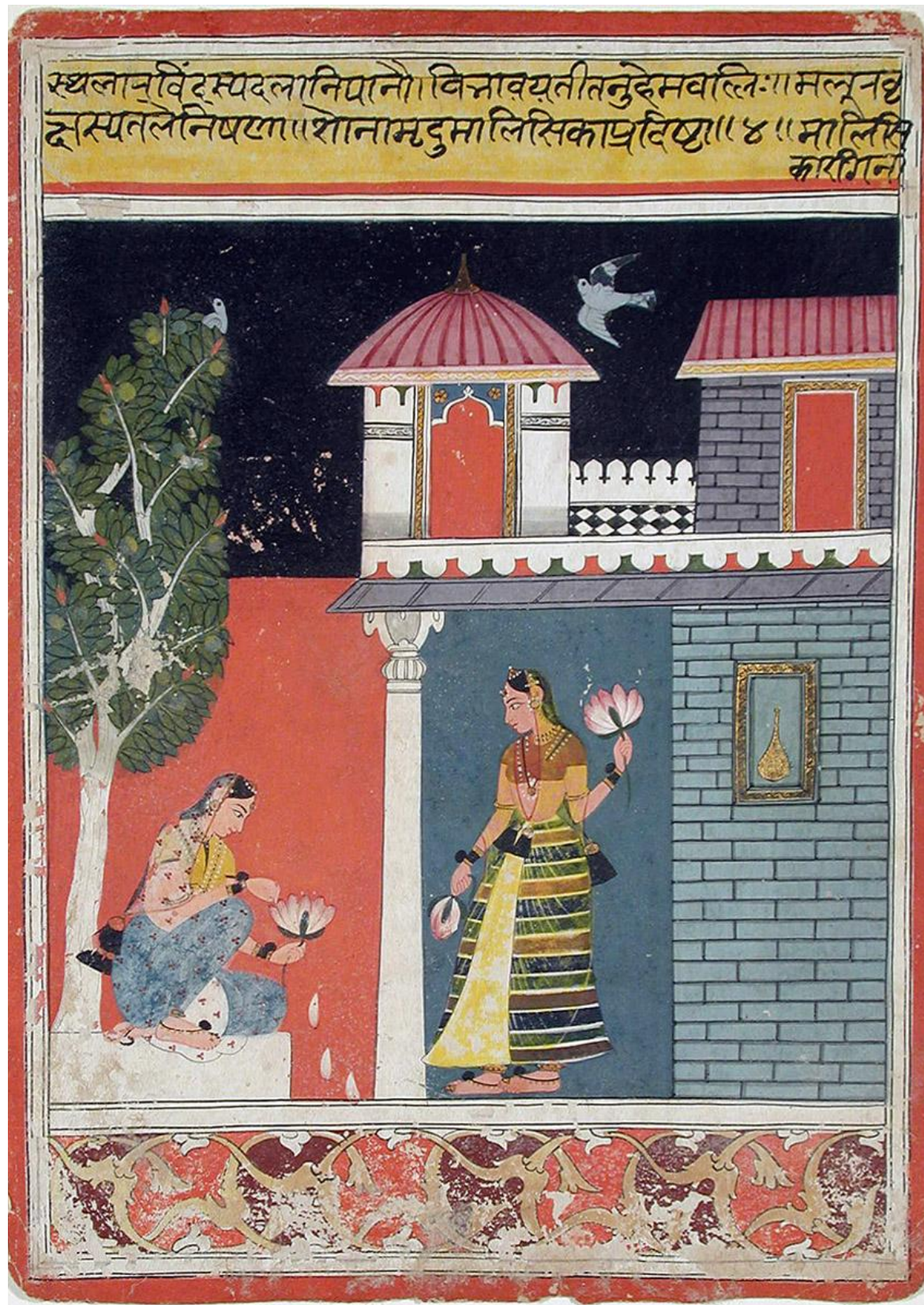
◁▷ Lazy and relaxed

Energetic and fierce ✖

▽ Lonely and sad

Head to our **Activity Sheet** extra to create a mood painting with your favourite song inspired by the ragamalas!





You must have guessed by now that stories and scenes play an important role in Ragamala paintings. Love was a common theme for these stories.

LOOK CLOSELY.

Here is Ragini Malashri and her friend holding two huge lotuses.

- What is Malashri is doing with her lotus? Have you ever seen anybody do something like this in real life or a movie?*
- What mood is this painting trying to hint at?

*As per the rules, Malashri is shown in an indecisive mood, plucking the petals of a flower. Does this game ring any bells? If you cannot figure out the answer, look up “loves me-loves me not” on the internet or ask a grown up!

Collection: The Metropolitan Museum, New York



While some Ragamala stories were inspired by everyday things, others were taken from myths involving gods and goddesses. Here is one inspired by the Hindu god, Krishna.

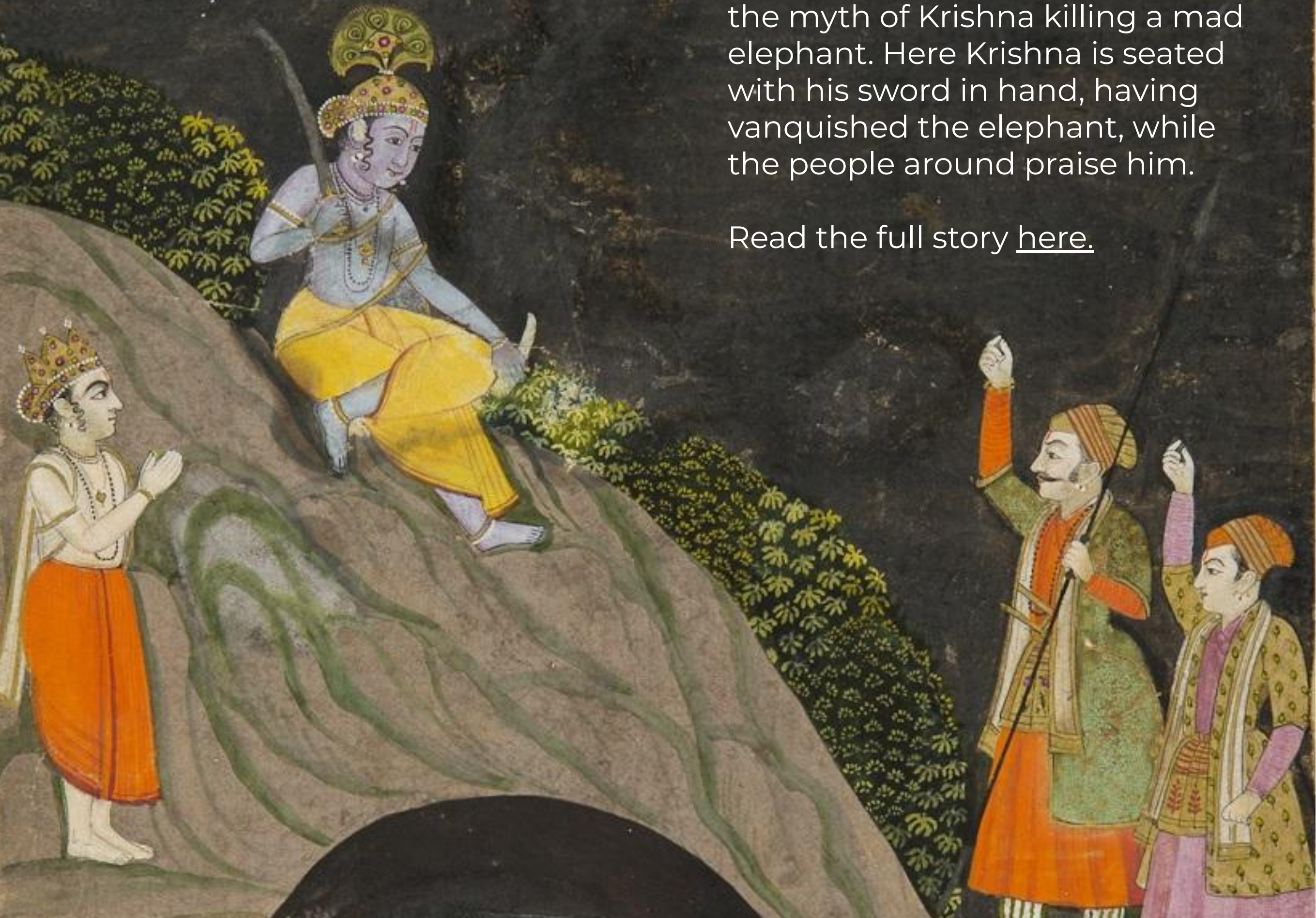
LOOK CLOSELY.

- Do you know which figure Krishna is? (Remember the iconography slide?)
- What do you think Krishna has just done? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What are the other men doing? Why do you think so?
- What animals do you see?
- Do you know this story?*

Head to our **Stories With Art** extra for a fun activity involving ragas, paintings and storytelling!

*This is Kanhara Ragini inspired by the myth of Krishna killing a mad elephant. Here Krishna is seated with his sword in hand, having vanquished the elephant, while the people around praise him.

Read the full story [here](#).



We do not make Ragamalas any more, but we continue to make connections between visual art and music through moods and feelings.



EXPLORE.

What's your favourite song to play on a rainy day?
How does listening to this song make you feel?
Now look at this photograph – do you feel something similar when looking at it, as you do when listening to the song?

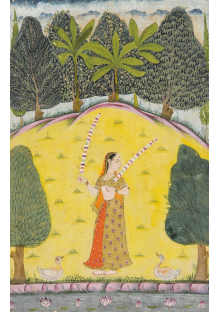


END.

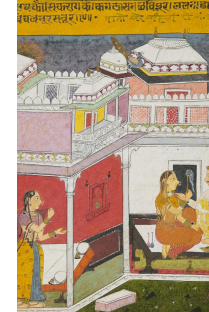
This is a different way.
Look at this photograph.
Think of how it makes you
feel. Now, think of a song
that makes you feel the
same way. Could it be a
soundtrack for this image?
It's fun trying this for
different images!



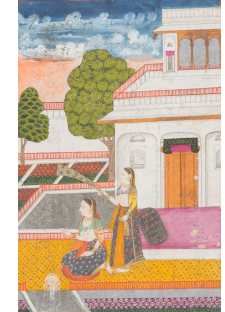
Lahula Ragaputra, Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
H. 17 cm, W. 14 cm
PTG.01167



Gauri Ragini, 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 28.5 cm, W. 21.2 cm
PTG.01054



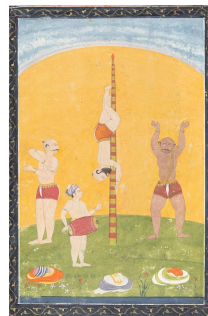
Raga Malkosa, Late 17th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
H. 24.2 cm, W. 19.2 cm
PTG.01171



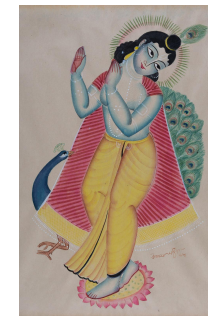
Raga Kalyana, Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 21 cm, W. 13.5 cm
PTG.01342



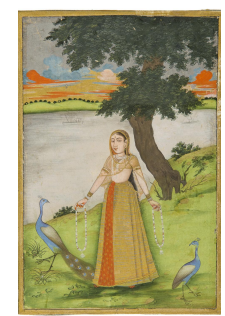
Kanhada Ragaputra, Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolor and gold on paper
H. 22 cm, W. 13.5 cm
PTG.01332



Desakha Ragini, Late 18th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
H. 22 cm, W. 14.5 cm
PTG.01336



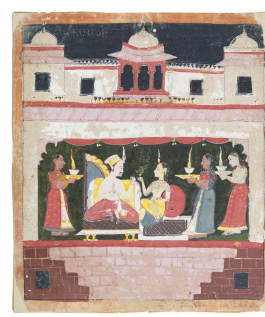
Krishna, 2012
Kalam Patua
Watercolour on paper
H. 41.2 cm, W. 33 cm
PTG.00221



Kakubha Ragini, Late 17th century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour on paper
H. 19.8 cm, W. 13.8 cm
PTG.01249



Monsoons in Mumbai, c.1990
Namas Bhojani
C-type print
H. 25.5 cm, W. 38 cm
PHY.02283



Deepak Raga, Late 18th Century
Unknown Maker(s)
Opaque watercolour and gold on paper
H. 20 cm, W. 17 cm
PTG.01248



Mumbai, India
T.S. Satyan
Archival pigment print
H. 61 cm, W. 86.5 cm
PHY.01773



MAP

Museum of Art
& Photography

MAP

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Bangalore 560 001, India

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