



“The great site of the meeting rivers in North India is the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna at Prayaga, where the city now called Allahabad stands...

Its many bathing places and 'tirthas' drive away all sins...merely entering the boundary of Prayaga, or seeing the Ganga at Prayaga, or even thinking of Prayaga at a distance, melts away one's sins.”

~ Diana Eck, India, A Sacred Geography



2001 Kumbh Mela

Photograph, courtesy Lisa Kristine

Kumbh Mela represents the world's largest gathering of humanity at a religious festival that occurs every twelve years, lasts 55 days, and draws millions of visitors to a temporary, purpose built tent city on the banks of the Ganges and Yamuna.

Over fifty Harvard professors, students, administrative staff, and medical practitioners made the pilgrimage to Allahabad, India, to the Kumbh Mela site in 2013, inspired by its scale and complexity, to document and analyze the processes involved in the successful functioning of the Kumbh. An interdisciplinary team included faculty from Harvard's Business School, Divinity School, Graduate School of Design, and School of Public Health.

With innovative inter-faculty collaboration, the South Asia Institute's Kumbh research project at Harvard touched upon issues across a number of related disciplines – urban studies and design, religious and cultural studies, environmental science and public health, technology and communications.

Join two Harvard faculty leaders of the Kumbh Mela research project as they share viewpoints from the 2013 Kumbh:

Society for Art & Cultural Heritage of India and Asian Art Museum, San Francisco

in collaboration with

South Asia Institute, Harvard University

proudly present

Mapping the Kumbh Mela

The World's Largest Gathering of Humanity

Saturday, November 5, 2016, 2 PM

Samsung Hall, Asian Art Museum, 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco

RSVP: info@sachi.org; Tel. 650-918-6335

The Event is Free after Museum admission, and Open to the Public

The SACHI Annual Meeting, scheduled at 1.15 PM will precede the Annual Event



Understanding the Kumbh Mela

Diana Eck

Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies, FAS; Member of the Faculty of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School

One of the major outcomes of this group's research was observing the concern many people at the Kumbh had about the pollution produced throughout the course of this festival. One small group of researchers examined the use of trees and plants at the Mela – be they for decoration or worship purposes. Another small group gathered data on how flowers are used in worship. They found that the flowers for the most part ended up in the river itself. This team interviewed members of the Ganga Action Parivar who undertook the work of raking flowers out of the river to clean it up and to raise awareness about the state of the river's pollution. This research reflects the burgeoning concern at the Kumbh Mela but also in India more generally, about the effects of religious practices on the environment.



The Ephemeral Megacity

Rahul Mehrotra

Professor of Urban Planning and Design and Chair of the Department of Urban Planning and Design, Harvard Graduate School of Design

The Kumbh Mela can be viewed as a case study, or prototype, for the pop-up mega-city, a sophisticated manifestation of “flexible urbanism,” the temporary structures that respond directly to a changing urban environment. The team from the Graduate School of Design engaged in photographing and documenting in detail some of the most important sectors of the Kumbh. They produced maps and images that helped understand just how this massive feat of constructing a city in the matter of a few months was completed. The systematic documentation of processes at the festival has revealed a rich and sophisticated urban typology, the various components of which can be useful in the future for other, more precarious contexts relating to disaster response, public health and sustainability.

Prof. Robert Goldman and international humanitarian photographer Lisa Kristine will be the hosts leading the panel discussion and Q & A following Harvard faculty presentations by Prof. Diana Eck and Prof. Rahul Mehrotra.



Robert Goldman is the William and Catherine Magistretti Distinguished Professor of Sanskrit at the University of California at Berkeley. He is the General Editor and a principal translator of the Valmiki Ramayana Translation Project. Professor Goldman's areas of interest are the Sanskrit language and Indian epic and literary studies.



Lisa Kristine is a distinguished San Francisco based international humanitarian photographer. For more than thirty years Lisa has explored the globe, looking for the peoples, cultures, and the places that time forgot, creating indelible and unforgettable images. Lisa documents indigenous cultures in more than 100 countries bringing the distant, the ancient, and the rare into clearer focus. Among her numerous projects, Lisa has photographed the 2001 *Kumbh Mela*.



Asian Art Museum

Reception and book sale to follow.

Please join us for a reception following the event in the Loggia adjoining the auditorium. *The Kumbh Mela: Mapping the Ephemeral MEGACITY*, a book publication, will be available for purchase in the Asian Art Museum bookstore.

This event coincides with the Asian Art Museum's 50th Anniversary Special Exhibition, The Rama Epic: Hero, Heroine, Ally, Foe on view through January 15, 2017.

