



Industrial Design Centre
Indian Institute of technology

Intrusive Art at Ajanta Caves

Design Research Seminar

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own word and where other's ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and reference the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/ fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can evoke penal action from the source which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.


Sreelekha S

Approval

The Design Research Seminar project titled "Intrusive Art at Ajanta Caves" by Sreelekha.S is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirement for M.Des degree programme in animation film design.

Guide :

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sreelekha.S', with a horizontal line underneath.

Acknowledgment

I sincerely extend my deepest gratitude to my respected guide Prof. Sumant Rao for his immense guidance and support throughout the process. I would also like to express my gratitude to Rajesh Kumar Singh for his guidance and support in sharing his immense knowledge on Ajanta Caves. I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. Walter M Spink for sharing his immense knowledge on Ajanta Caves.

Sreelekha S

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Introduction

For my DRS project I visited Ajanta caves under the guidance of well renowned Art Historian Rajesh Kumar Singh who shared his immense knowledge on Ajanta caves. I had also got a great opportunity to interact with prof . Walter M. Spink who has dedicated his life on researching Ajanta Caves

During the course of the visit I was enquiring about the presence of Buddha sculpture in oldest caves built during the Hinayana period where buddha was not worshiped. This lead me to my DRS topic on the Intrusive Art on Ajanta Caves.

The term “ Intrusive Art” was coined by Prof. Walter M. Spink, for all the unauthorized and unplanned sculptures and paintings seen throughout ajanta caves.

My research orientation was toward figuring out Intrusive Art throughout the caves.



About Ajanta Caves

The Ajanta caves were named after Ajintha, a nearby village in Aurangabad district of the western state of Maharashtra in India. The caves are located about 62 km from the nearest railway station at Jalgaon. They are roughly 100 km from the district headquarters at Aurangabad.

Ancient Buddhist texts relate that the Buddha had directed the monks to dwell neither too far nor too near the city. That is why such recessed spots, often near a waterfall, were chosen near trade routes or human settlements. This allowed the monks to maintain a distance from worldly life as well as be close enough for their daily rounds of begging for alms. The caves were primarily meant for use in annual rainy season. Ajanta consists of thirty caves, each dedicated to the life of the Buddha. Each cave is filled with sculpture, wall murals, and ceiling paintings. Though much of this site has collapsed, what remains at Ajanta has allowed a glimpse into the artistic traditions of ancient India.

History of the Construction

There were two phases of activities that took place in Ajanta cave, the Hinayana phase and the Mahayana phase. In the Hinayana phase Buddha as God was not worshiped, instead stupas were worshipped. In the Mahayana phase Buddha was worshiped. Cave no. 9, 10, 12, 13, 15A are the oldest which were built during the Satavahana period and belong to the Hinayana phase of construction. The other caves were built during the Vakataka period (ca. 462 to 480 CE) and belong to the Mahayana phase.

Many rulers from different regions donated money to construct their own shrines (caves) in this site. Harishena, the Vakataka ruler, donated money for most of the caves, especially cave no. 1. In 477 BCE there was supposedly a war between the Vakatakas and the Ashmakas. The Vakatakas fell and the Ashmakas came to power.



Period of Destruction and About Intrusive Art

Work going on the Ajanta caves was supposedly stopped and people who had been working on the site had to evacuate because of the war. Many sculptors and painters were left without jobs, some of them remain in the site for safety along with the monks who live there. This is where the "Period of Disruption" (ca. 479 to 480 CE) started. There came lots of unauthorized sculptures and paintings "The Intrusive Art" done by the sculptors and painters who remain in the site for small amounts of money given by the monks and the laymen who visited Ajanta wanting their own personal votive figures for worship. The original plan was completely disrupted and intrusive images started to cover most of the blank spaces in almost all the caves which are considered to be "alive", that is, worshipable caves.

Intrusive votive sculptures of Buddha are commonly seen throughout the site except cave no. 1 which is considered to be a dead cave, where not a single intrusive is seen. Intrusive sculptures and paintings can be seen in cave no. 2, 4, 6 upper, 9, 10, 11, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26 respectively.

Extensive amounts of intrusives are seen in cave no. 6 upper, 19, 26. Cave 6 upper is completely covered with intrusive sculptures.

Characteristic of Intrusive Art

- Placement of the sculpture has no symmetry.
- Original plane of construction of left mirroring the right is not followed.
- Votive sculptures meant for personalized worshipping so some has iron hooks for hanging garland and also had door hinges to cover the intrusive sculptures (eg. cave 9A 9B left outside).

Photo Documentation

After selection of the topic I went about taking photos of Intrusive Art seen in almost all of the caves. In this report I have showcase photo documentation done for this research.

Cave 9 and 10

Cave no 9 and 10 which were the oldest caves to be caved belonging to the hinayana phase were image of buddha was not worshiped, is where we can see the extent of intrusion art now contains different arrays of Buddha sculptures throughout the shrine entrance and Buddha paintings inside the caves.



Cave 4

In the pouch area of the cave there are intrusive sculptures. Avalokitesvara sculpture in the left side of pouch area is an intrusive sculpture showing Buddha in the form of Avalokitesvara invoked in eight cases of danger and distress like the fear of wild animals like the lion, elephant and cobra and of fire, assassins, incarceration and shipwreck, the caravan leader might suffer in his journey by land and sea. The alignment of the sculpture to the window is disaligned which proves that the sculpture is an intrusive art.



Cave 6 upper floor

This cave is fully covered with intrusive art having various depiction votive of Buddha.



Cave17

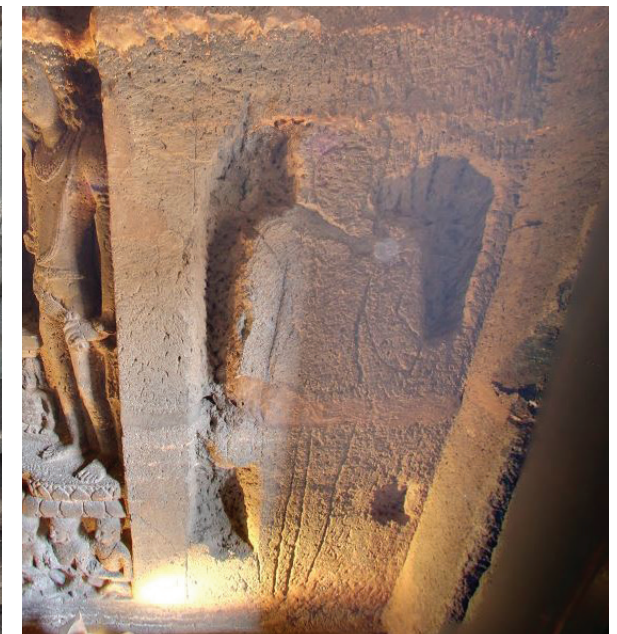
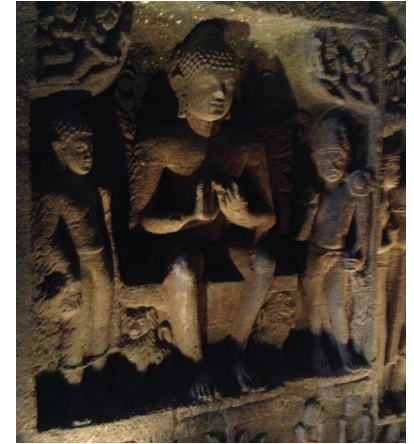


Cave 19



Cave 26

Most of inside and outside of the cave can be intrusive sculptures based on the characteristics of the intrusive sculpture.



Intusive Art in other caves



cave 2



cave 11



cave 20



cave 21



cave 23

Conclusion

The whole process of this project was a great learning experience for me. I learned a lot about the cave from my interaction with Mr Rajesh Singh and prof Walter M Spink, who helped me in the understanding about intrusive art until then I was unaware about them. If I get an opportunity I would like to furthermore study about Ajanta and intrusive art wherein I have just touched the tip of the iceberg.

There is a need to bring awareness amongst the visitors of the Ajanta caves about the existence of Intrusive Art for better understanding of the original architecture plan, paintings and sculptures.

Reference

- An Introduction to the Ajanta Caves: With Examples of Six Caves - Rajesh Singh
- Ajanta: History And Development 1. The End of the Golden Age (Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 2; India)- Walter M. Spink
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