The conference on ‘The traditional arts of South Asia: past practice, living traditions’ aimed to address these questions and assess the role of the traditional arts of South Asia, both as a way to understand the past and its current practice. These various questions are central to the activities of De Montfort University’s research centre PRASADA (Practice, Research and Advancement in South Asian Design and Architecture). The speakers came from a variety of disciplines, and included both academics and practising artists and architects.

The eleven presentations focused on a variety of media and contexts – including architecture, sculpture, painting, and textiles – from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India.

Abigail McGowan (University of Pennsylvania) and Robin Jones (Southampton Institute) addressed the colonial foundations of our understanding of the market and consumption in South Asian traditional arts. ‘In Indian crafts in colonial display and policy the marketplace, these transforma- tions are now shaping prevalent artistic trends.

Southern India remained the focus of both Anna Dallapiccola (PRASADA) and Samuel K. Parker (University of Washington, Tacoma) in ‘A contemporary pantheon: popular religious imagery in South India’, Anna Dal- lapiccola discussed the traditional tem- ple arts of late twentieth-century Tamil Nadu. She demonstrated how modern imagery and aesthetics, such as those discussed by Jyotindra Jain, are influencing brick and plaster sculptures and temple murals, adding a wealth of new elements to age-revered forms.

Dr Parker examined the construction, during the last century, of a grand temple of Hindu architecture, which had a decisive impact on contemporary crafts, policies, and interventions, but also shaped the way we perceive Indian crafts today.

In his paper, ‘British interventions in the traditional crafts of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) c. 1850–1930’, Robin Jones examined the British reappraisal of the material culture of Kandy in the late nineteenth century, including attitudes towards local arts, crafts, and architecture, in response to the rediscovery of Sri Lanka’s ancient cities. From the 1870s to the 1910s the colonial govern- ment and missionary societies established industrial schools, for the local population that affected traditional arts. This influence has been examined, not least through Ananda Coomaraswamy’s early twentieth-century writings.

Jyotindra Jain, (Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) and Sharadha Srirnivasan (National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore) explored the impact of colonialism and modernity on the production and reception of Hindu images. In ‘The Hindu icon: between the cultic and the exhibitory space’, Jyotindra Jain examined mass-produced Hindu imagery of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

With the shift to mass-production and the use of print technology, a new genera- tion of printed images of Hindu deities and mythological characters came into being.

Using new techniques, these printed pictures displayed an amalgamation of a whole range of pictorial elements, including the idioms of the colonial art schools, traditional fresco and manu- script painting, European prints, pho- tography, Western and regional Indian theatre, and contemporary cinema. This fundamentally changed depictions of Hindu imagery and went alongside the rise of new exhibitory contexts, from the consecrated, sacred space of the Hindu shrine to the living rooms, restaurants, shops, trucks, and taxis of modern times.

In her paper, ‘From temple to manu- telope: changing paradigms in the art and craft of South Indian metal images’, Sharadha Srirnivasan explored the ways in which current artistic practices help inform our understanding of past images and their production. South Indian metal images have also undergone various paradigm shifts, from objects of ritual veneration and proces- sional worship to mannequins in the marketplace. These transforma- tions are now shaping prevalent artistic trends.

In Pakistan, with a keen interest in tradi- tional architecture, discussed two cur- rent projects for a mosque and a tomb in Pakistan. Nimish Patel and Parul Zaveri similarly discussed the charac- teristics of traditional architecture and the creative process, and how this under- standing can be used in contemporary architectural practice and conservation, as illustrated by their work on a number of projects in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

At the start of the twenty-first centu- ry we are in the position of being able to better assess the legacies of colonial- isms and twentieth-century modernity in the representation and appropriation in present-day practice of the tradition- al arts of South Asia. This will lead to a greater appreciation of the vitality and variety of the region’s traditional arts, both past and present.