

Artists and the
East India Company
1750–1850

Painters Ports and Profits

Edited by Laurel O. Peterson and Holly Shaffer

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Sculptural Pictures of Karla

Kalyani Madhura Ramachandran

Gangaram Tambat was sensitive to the materiality of architecture. His sculptural style is best illustrated in his renderings of Karla, an ancient Buddhist cave site among a cluster of rock-cut complexes constructed in the Satavahana period along the Western Ghats of peninsular India.¹ In 1793, Gangaram became one of the first artists to record the site.

His artistic approach focused on two of Karla's physical characteristics: stone and scale. In a painting of the main cave, Gangaram rendered the basalt facade in black ink and gray wash on six pieces of paper joined together (PLATE 70; see also FIG. 8, p. 35). Although an inscription on the verso reads "Ekvera," referring to a Hindu temple built in front of the ancient Buddhist cave at a later date, his depiction highlights the Buddhist elements of the site. The dark vertical bands on either side of the picture can be folded, like a triptych, and correspond to the carved right and left walls of the cave's entrance. This inventive technique imbues the picture with a sculptural quality that accentuates its dynamism.

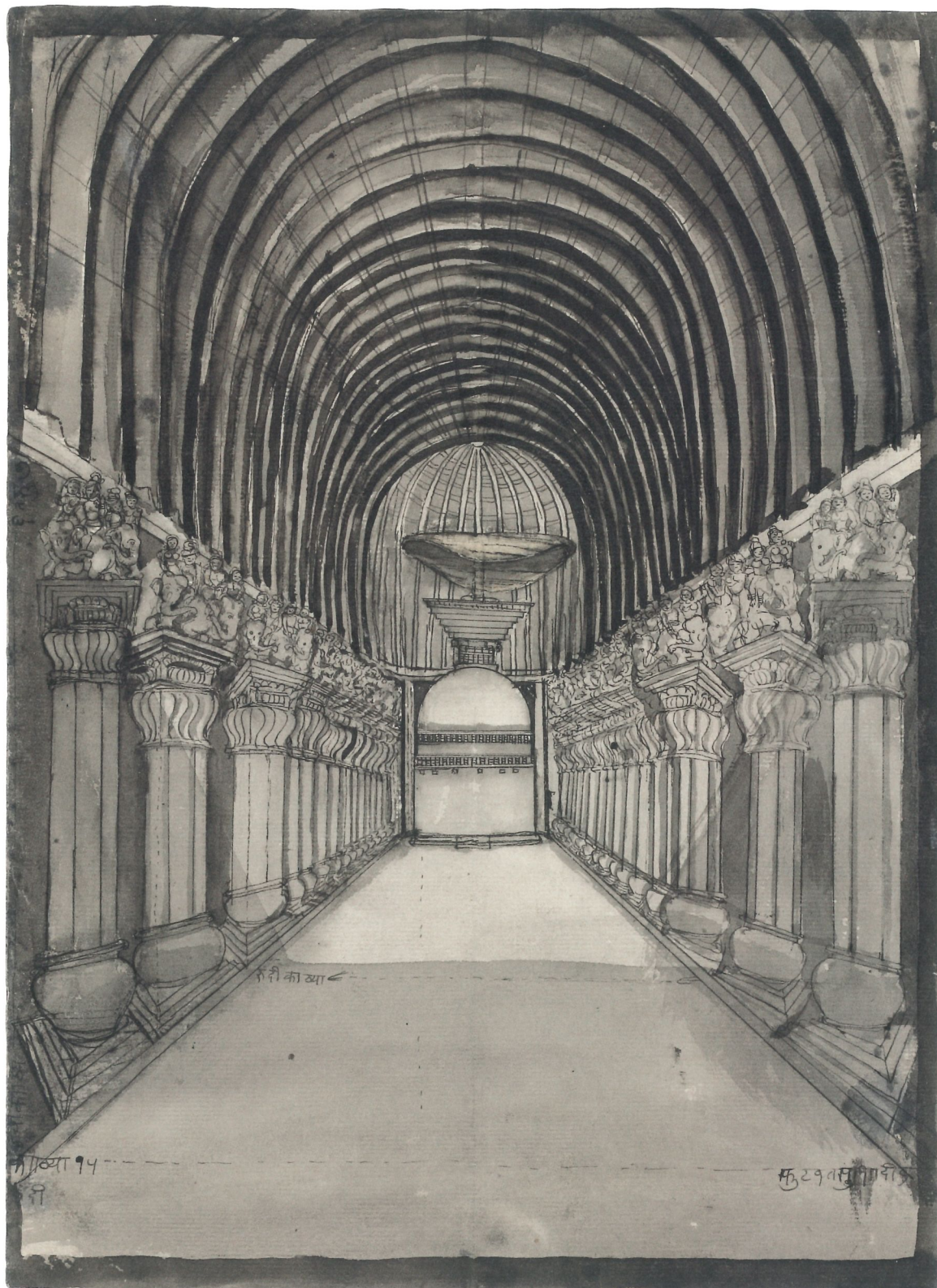
The architectural scale, barely contained within its thick border, is fittingly dramatic. Karla is one of the largest ancient rock-cut caves in the Indian subcontinent. A monumental *chaitya* arch occupies the center of this drawing. Gangaram rendered the horse-shoe-shaped window, a standard feature of ancient Buddhist caves, including at nearby Bhaja and Bedsa, in a teak-brown hue that contrasts with the ashen shades used to depict the rock. Faint lines hint at the inner world of the cave, its sheer depth, and the wooden ribs of the barrel-vaulted ceiling. This *chaitya* arch is set in a wall replete with sculpture; forward-facing elephants, intertwined *mithunas* (loving couples), repetitive *chaitya* arches, and railing patterns form a stone screen demarcating the secular and sanctified spaces of the cave.

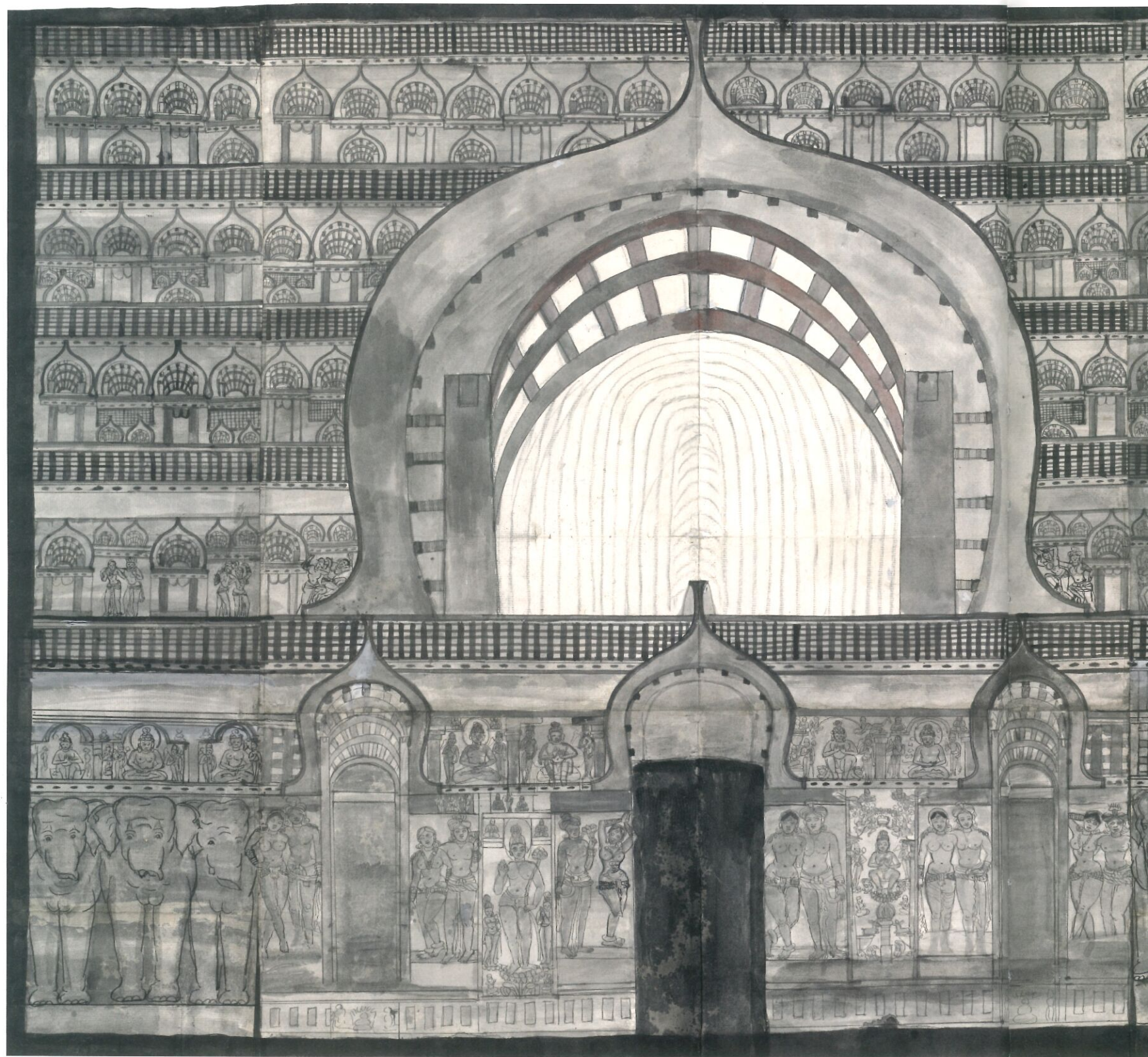
Gangaram also reflected on the interplay of stone, wood, and light in creating perspectival effects. His painting of the cave's interior invites the viewer through a slender doorway under the monumental arch and into a long apsidal chamber 125-foot-long (PLATE 71). This terminates in a *stupa* (Buddhist relic mound),

bathed in natural light filtered through the *chaitya* window, the cave's only source of illumination. The variations of light and shadow emphasize the volume of the inner chamber. The space is enclosed on either side by a row of fifteen stone pillars that creates a circumambulatory path along the walls of the cave and guides the eye upward to the arched ribs of the barrel-vaulted ceiling. Gangaram was particularly attentive to the use of wood, an older medium, since these beams were replicated in stone at other rock-cut caves—an aesthetic rather than structural choice. His interest in the relationship of wood and stone is evident in the disproportionately large size of the wood parasol surmounting the stone *stupa*.²

Two incomplete drawings by Gangaram consider the history of the site's materiality: one includes a depiction of the caves' rocky milieu, and the other is of an isolated stone pillar. The first is in landscape format and folded in the middle (PLATE 72). On the right, a watery graphite wash distinguishes the cave's veranda from the facade behind it, which is left sketchy and unadorned. The entrance is flanked by the latter-day Hindu temple and a pillar from the reign of Emperor Ashoka, whose third century BCE empire depended on a vast network of communication, as marked by the installation of stone pillars carved with edicts, which link the site to the early and intertwined spread of Buddhism and stone working in the Indian subcontinent.³ On the left, Gangaram depicted the rock face in which the complex is set, emphasizing its distinctive character.

In the second study, the octagonal shaft of a monolithic stone pillar from the cave's interior emerges from a *ghata* (vessel); at its top end is an upturned lotus and a capital carved with addorsed elephants bearing coupled riders (PLATE 73). This architectural scheme dates to the Ashokan period and became standard repertoire for ancient stoneworkers thereafter. Notably, columns at Karla bear Brahmi inscriptions recording the presence of *yavanas* (Greeks), which would have appealed to the British antiquarian sensibility that dominated the intellectual and ideological context in which Gangaram worked.





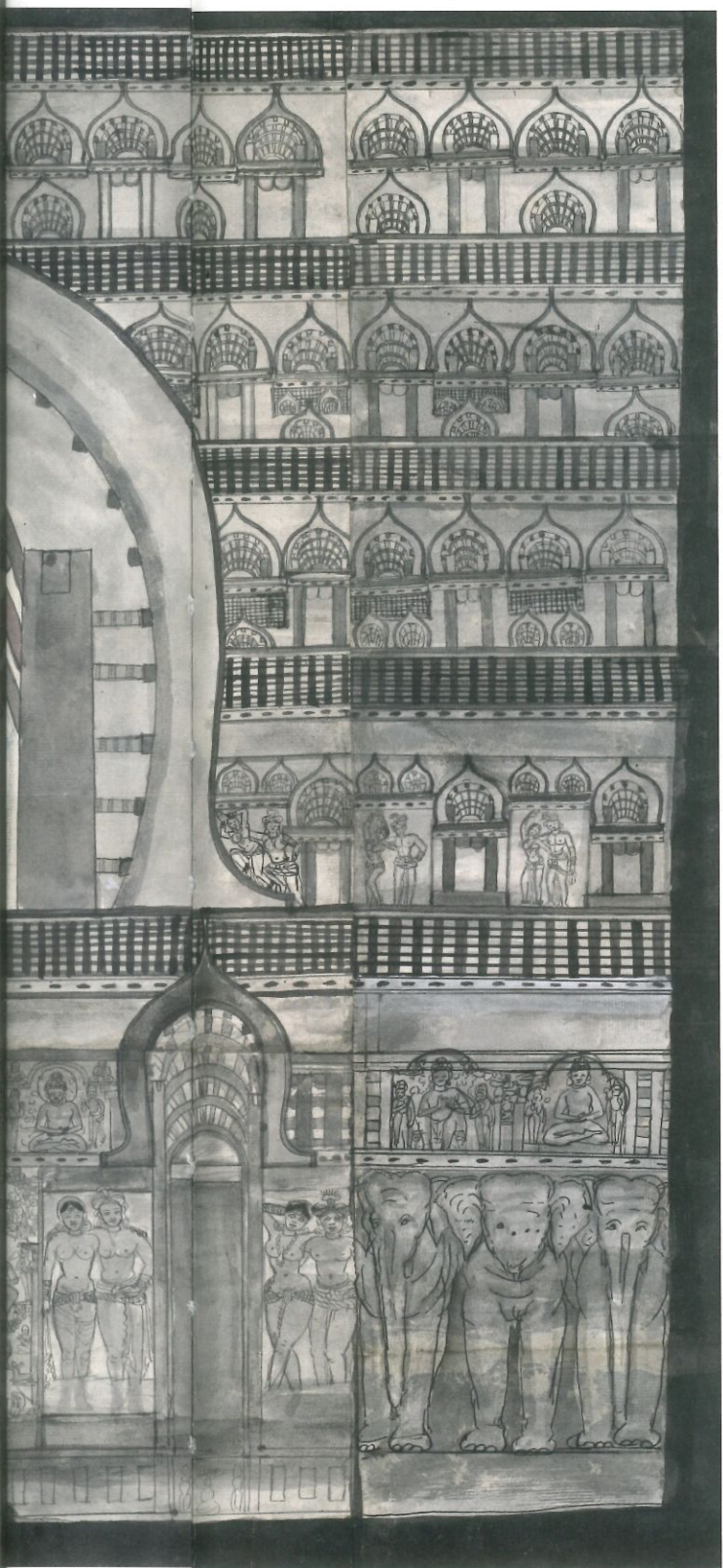


PLATE 70
Gangaram Chintaman Navgire Tambat (active 1790s),
Great Chaitya Hall at Karla, 1793
Watercolor, gray wash, pen and black ink, and black
chalk on six joined sheets of laid paper with I. Taylor
watermark, 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 33 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (63.8 x 84.5 cm)

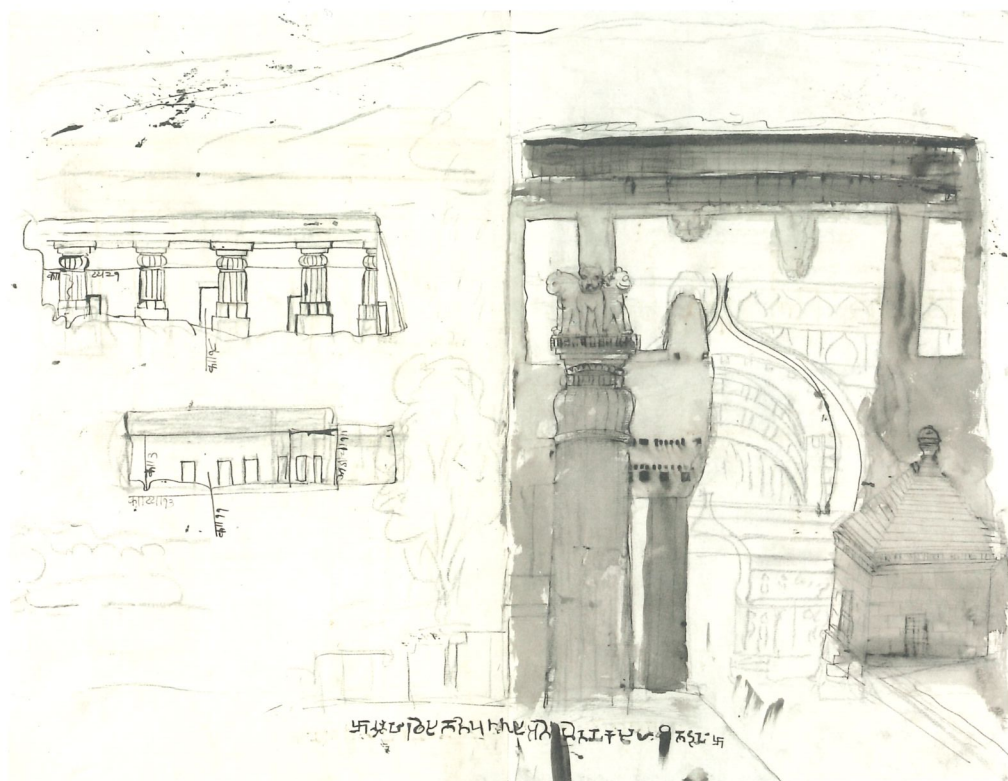


PLATE 71 (OPPOSITE)

Gangaram Chintaman Navgire Tambat,
Interior View of the Great Chaitya Hall
at Karla, 1793

Gray wash, pen and black ink, and
graphite on laid paper with Portal
and Bridges watermark, 15¼ × 11½ in.
(38.7 × 28.3 cm)

PLATE 72 (ABOVE)

Gangaram Chintaman Navgire Tambat,
Temple Complex of Great Chaitya and
Viharas at Karla, Ekvira Devi Temple
at Right, 1793

Gray wash, pen and black ink, black
chalk, and graphite on laid paper with
J. Larking watermark, 16½ × 21½ in.
(41.6 × 54.3 cm)

PLATE 73 (RIGHT)

Gangaram Chintaman Navgire Tambat,
Drawing of a Pillar at Karla, 1793

Gray wash, pen and black ink,
and graphite on laid paper with
unidentified watermark (ornamented
fleur-de-lys and GR), 15¼ × 11¼ in.
(38.7 × 28.6 cm)

