

DAY ONE – FLORA: THE LIVING WORLD

The Citrasūtra prescribes that the citrakāra begins with the natural world – with the forms that the trained eye learns to govern before any figure is attempted. Day One works entirely within this vocabulary.

Session 1 – The Lotus (Padma) The padma is the first form the citrakāra's hand learns to hold. The Citrasūtra teaches that beauty resides not merely in colour (varṇa) but in form (ākṛti) and freshness (navatva) – qualities the lotus embodies completely. At Ajanta it appears in every register: as the sacred attribute of the Bodhisattva, as the prabhāmaṇḍala, as the repeating unit of the ornamental border, painted from closed bud (mukulita) to full flower (vikasita). Participants work through three compositions – Vertical Cascade, Balanced Asymmetry, and Sama, perfect bilateral symmetry – the same geometric principle that governs figure construction at a different scale.

Session 2 – Lotus Borders, Vines and Patterns The Citrasūtra distinguishes mukhya citra – principal paintings – from ālaṅkāra citra – ornamental painting, borders, creepers, geometric and floral bands. The frame is not decoration. It is the sacred geometry that stabilises and sanctifies the image-field. Borders must repeat with measured intervals (māna), flow with vitality (prāṇa), and delight (harṣa) the viewer. Participants draw from the Ajanta border vocabulary – the continuous lotus vine with Haṃsa among waterborne blooms; the integrated border with Yakṣa, foliage (Vallarī), and creeper (Latā) – before working a full vertical vine composition.

Session 3 – The Bodhi Tree (Bodhi-vṛkṣa) The Bodhi tree carries the full weight of the enlightenment narrative in a single botanical form. At Ajanta it appears as a canopy of heart-shaped pīpal leaves clustering around the seated figure as a natural prabhāmaṇḍala – precise botanical observation embedded in sacred imagery. Participants render the tree as living flora within the compositional field using the traditional Ajanta palette of red ochre, terre verte, lamp black, and yellow ochre.

DAY TWO – FAUNA: THE SACRED ANIMAL

The Citrasūtra's treatment of the animal form is governed by the principle of chetana – the life-force that distinguishes the living from the dead, visible in every correctly drawn line. Day Two applies this principle through the sacred animal forms of Ajanta.

Session 4 – The Haṃsa (Sacred Swan) The Haṃsa is the bird of discernment – the one that separates milk from water, pure consciousness from the mixed conditions of the world. At Ajanta it moves among waterborne lotus blooms, its form inseparable from the vine and the lotus vocabulary of the border compositions. Participants work the Haṃsa within the full lotus and vine compositional field – experiencing how animal, flower, and vine are governed by the same formal intelligence, the same axis, the same rhythmic departure and return.

Session 5 – Elephants (Gaja) and Bulls (Vṛṣabha) The white elephant composition demonstrates three Citrasūtra principles simultaneously: foreshortening – front legs compressed as they advance toward the viewer, spatial depth without Renaissance geometry; vartanā – the three shading methods of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa (pātraka, binduka, rekhikā) creating the illusion of form curving into space; and spatial layering – vine scrolls behind the feet establishing foreground and background planes. The paired bulls

introduce kṣaya-vṛddhi — diminution and extension as forms compress and expand through movement — and chetana, the life-force visible in every correctly held line.

DAY THREE — THE CITRASŪTRA IN PRACTICE: THE FIGURE

Day Three brings the Citrasūtra's full technical vocabulary to bear on the human figure — the most demanding subject in the tradition, and the one for which everything in the first two days has been preparation.

Session 6 — The Ṣaḍaṅga: Six Conditions of a Complete Image The Citrasūtra prescribes six foundational qualities of a correct painting — the Ṣaḍaṅga: Rūpabheda (the precise distinction of forms), Pramāṇa (correct proportion), Bhāva (the inner emotional truth the figure must carry), Lāvaṇya Yojanam (the infusion of grace), Sādrśyam (likeness to the canonical form), and Varṇikābhāṅga (the correct application of colour). These are not aesthetic preferences. They are the structural conditions through which a painted figure acquires presence. Participants are introduced to each of the six and begin their figure study.

Session 7 — Rekhā and Kṣaya-vṛddhi: The Line and the Science of Depth The Citrasūtra's treatment of line — rekhā — is precise: line weight alone creates depth, the thick line advancing toward the viewer, the thin line receding. Combined with kṣaya-vṛddhi — the controlled diminution and extension of form — the flat painted surface acquires spatial depth without perspective, without a vanishing point, through the painter's trained governance of the line alone. Participants apply both principles to their figure study.

Session 8 — Vartanā: Rounding the Form The final session introduces vartanā — the tonal system through which the Ajanta painters gave their figures three-dimensional presence. The governed balance of chāya-tāpa — brightness and dimness — applied in correspondence with the zones of the illuminated form. Not Western shading but a codified system prescribed in the text and visible in every correctly executed Ajanta figure. Participants complete their figure study.