A folio of ghazal composed by Jami

Calligrapher: All Asghar al Hamadani
Date: c. 19th century
Style: Shikasteh
Size: 14.9 x 9.4 cm
Accession number: 1996.2.203

Description

The folio includes six couplets of poetry written in black Shikasteh within cloud-shaped compartments outlined in red against a gold ground. The poems were composed by the famed Abdul Rahman Jami and have been selected by the calligrapher to test his new reed pen. The last section of the text is a message by the scribe Ali Asghar, describing his new trimmed pen as a good tool, implying his satisfaction with the written calligraphy. He proudly signs the folio.
Wise sayings

Calligrapher: Ali Aghar al Hamedani
Date: 12th century AH / 18th century AD
Style: Shikasteh
Size: 16 x 11.7 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.104

Description

A letter written by Mirza Ali Asghar. The short messages, and the random arrangement of the verses, make for a typical composition in Shikasteh. The ruling of the page, may perhaps add to the folio or indicate that it was part of a larger sheet of paper reused by the calligrapher.
Catalogue no. 93

A decorative single folio with bird designs

Calligrapher: Dedicated to the deceased Mirza Ali
Date: c.17th century
Style: Shikasteh Nasta’liq
Size: 10.7 x 8.9 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.195

Mirza Ali, a capable calligrapher, chose as the background of his folio a beautiful composition of birds and flowers. The theme is known in the decorative repertoire of the Persian ateliers as ‘Bulbul ve Gul’. The soft-toned decoration adds greatly to the flowing lines of the Shikasteh Nasta’liq composition. The birds are placed as if singing the melody of the verses, while the movement of the leaves carries with it the sound of the words.
Siyah Mashq
Siyah Mashq

In the process of patiently practising a script, copying letters over and over, regulating their curvatures and conjunctions, a group of practice folios emerged into the world of Persian calligraphy. Numerous practice sheets would be necessary before the young calligrapher would rise from discipleship to mastery. In this category the apprentice copies his master’s folios diligently; forming isolated letters, short compositions and even his master’s own signature. Nevertheless, these folios reveal the scribe’s spontaneity and imagination, two qualities that were not encouraged in the more formal calligraphic scripts.

Practice was an essential part of the calligrapher’s training. Each letter must be practised alone or in combination with other letters, and these exercise sheets needed to be perfected, even though they convey no meaning. They came to be known as Muswadda (blackened), connoting a practice sheet where the words have been crossed and overlapped, eventually producing a sheet blackened with ink. All available areas within the practice sheets were used, as paper was then a precious commodity. In some instances paper washing was attempted to further re-use the sheet.

The practice sheets that were in many cases personal to the calligrapher showed up his weak areas, his strengths as well as his newly acquired innovative ideas. In Iran the beauty of the Siyah Mashq comes from the elegant impression revealed through the spontaneity of its execution. In numerous cases these folios were signed.

Through the contemplation of the inner beauty of the produced folios, mystical visions and imaginary meanings started to develop. As these folios acquired a new image they were sought after and desired by patrons. Nowadays, such folios have lost their ability to be deciphered but they represent the unity of the calligrapher’s mind and purity of heart within their rhythmic composition. The young calligrapher would develop these exercise sheets to perfection, their aesthetic charm exuding from the overlapping of phrases.

Mir Ali Haravi stressed the need for constant practice:

"Forty years of my life became wasted by calligraphy;
The tip of calligraphy's tresses did not come easily in my hand.
Everyone who sits leisurely for a moment without practising,
Calligraphy goes from his hand like the colour of henna"
An exercise folio

Calligrapher: Mir Imad
Date: 961-1024 AH / 1592-1611 AD
Style: Siyah Mashq
Size: 10.2 x 19.0 cm
Accession number: 1998.2.116

Description

The few phrases written in the folio are placed within cloud compartments against a foliated golden ground. The single folio of Siyah Mashq was written by Mir Imad to show the perfect rendering of certain letters. The folio is a display of five lines with a few letters being repeated and perfected. The last line is a prayer phrase. The method in which calligraphers exercised writing letters was uniform in Iran; certain letters would be written attached to each other with an additional letter to join them. When the additional letter is joined in writing in the perfect manner, the following letter in the alphabet would then join the original conjugated letters. In this manner the way in which the letters are attached to each other is perfected. The text, therefore, does not have a meaning, yet a prayer is added for blessing.
**Catalogue no. 95**

**An exercise folio of Mir Imad**

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>The folio is written in black <em>Nasta’liq</em> in a diagonal composition. The folio repeats words and letters, enlarges some and reduces others. The composition makes use of the curvature in letters to create movement. A large portion of the exercise is the name of the calligrapher, Mir Imad.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>961-1024 AH / 1592-1611 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style:</td>
<td><em>Nasta’liq</em> in <em>Siyah Masqh</em> style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>21.3 x 16.7 cm</td>
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