The **Diwan**
of Hafez (1320–1389)

Shams al-Din Muhammad, better known as Hafez, was a scholar of Koranic exegesis in Shiraz and died there in 1389. His collection of poems, the *Diwan*, is a masterpiece of lyric poetry in which he sings of love, wine, nature and its flowers, and looks at human destiny with a sometimes cynical humor.

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**PL. 86** The Drinkers' Feast

*Page from the Diwan of Hafez (1320–1389)*
*Ott. 1527 (Tehran, Iran, or Herat, Afghanistan)*

Painting signed (on the inscription over the door):
Sultan Muhammad (7/1400–1460)


The verses visible at the top explain the image: "The angel of mercy sets the feeding goblet."

What we see here is indeed a feast. Drink is drawn from enormous jugs and circulated to the upper floor via an elaborate distribution system; a figure on the left even appears to want to pour the precious nectar beyond the margins of the jug. Three of the musicians, dressed in animal skins and wearing outrageous make-up, are already drunk.

But the main interest of the scene lies in a line of drunkards engaging various stages of intoxication: drinking, dancing, drawing having lost their turbans, embracing the feet of one of the musicians, one of them has even managed to take himself off to a tavern, with a lover. More surprisingly, there are angels who are also dancing and drinking on the roof while a wide-eyed old man has settled himself comfortably over the door to the storeroom. He has sometimes been identified as being Hafez himself.

This painting is an animated and brilliantly colored assemblage that can be interpreted in two ways. It could represent the members of a mystic sect in a state of intoxication—considered a way of removing oneself from normal life and leading to union, albeit temporary, with the divine. The fact that certain texts were given over to drinkeress is a common theme in Hafez's poetry. The other possible explanation could be that this is a veritable satire in which the artist depicts the debauchery of figures of a certain age, mainly turban-wearing and hence representing the cultural and social elite of the period. In fact, the two explanations are not necessarily mutually contradictory.
The Feast at the End of Ramadan
Page from the Diwan of Iltifat (1320–1360)
c. 1557 (Iran, Isfahan, Afghanistan)
Painting signed on the throne, in the blue and white medallion under the prince’s feet; Sultan Muhammad (?–post 1553)
Washington, the Freer Gallery and Arthur Sackler Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution, 15.99.3.248

In this image too, the subject can be read in the poet’s version: “Boasts and companions await impatiently, for it is the time of celebration [34] that signals the end of the fasting of Ramadan; 6 palm [coupètine], see how the new moon is reflected in the splendid face of the king and bring the winner his happy, this noble king, may God protect him from the evil eye.”

The new moon has just appeared in the upper left-hand corner of the image and seven figures standing on the roof point to it joyously. An enclosure built for the celebration in front of the royal pavilion, the courtiers, seated in a semi-circle around the prince (perhaps Sayf Al-Sirah, whose name can be seen above the door on the right) are preparing to feast, to dance and to enjoy the dancers’ performance. All are dressed in new garments in a variety of colors, but there are sufficient differences between the figures to suggest that these were portraits of actual individuals we are no longer able to identify. The groups are very animated, in constant conversation, perhaps suggesting even more personal or more intimate relationships. In the window embrasure on the right is a solitary woman looking on at the event but not participating—another detail that suggests Sultan Muhammad was depicting a specific event at the court of Shah Isfandiyar. Unlike the previous image, this one shows young courtiers but is free from any satirical intent. It is a great celebration in which everyone is idealized. The men, like the flowering shrubs scattered across the lawn, act as a screen to the games being played by the young people on the left of the miniature (details fig. 91 pp. 158–159, fig. 133 p. 211 and fig. 134 p. 257).
Lyric poetry

The following images served as illustrations for three texts. Firstly, the lyric and almost mystic poetry of Khwaju Kirmani, composed in the fourteenth century; secondly, the Khomsor or Quintet of Nizami, completed shortly before 1200 and including poems on Iskandar (Alexander the Great) and his quest to discover the secrets of the world, on the unfortunate lovers Layla and Majnun; the Sassanian king Bahram Gur who sought perfect love with seven princesses; and another Sassanian king, Khosrow, who again sought perfect love but was assassinated; and finally, the work of Jami who died in 1492 and is recognized as being the last great poet of Iran's classical tradition. Jami was the author of a collection of poems which also featured Alexander the Great and Layla and Majnun, as well as subjects taken from everyday life.

The Diwan

of Khwaju Kirmani

Khwaju was born in Kerman (Iran) in 1268 and died in 1322. He lived in Tabriz, Baghdad and Shiraz. Continuing in the style developed by Nikami, his long compositions recount charming love stories, though often with a mystical moral lesson.

PL. 39 Humay at the entrance to Humayun's palace
Page from the Diwan of Khwaju Kirmani (fourteenth century)
1396 (Baghdad, Iraq)
Painting attributed to Jumayl (fourteenth century)
London, British Library, Add. 16115, fo. 18 v

The scene appears to take place at the very edge of the earth, crossed by a stream, a precipice hanging over the void. It is hard to imagine how the horsesman managed to reach this delicately decorated portal set in a monochrome wall that appears to be made of cardboard. The wall resembles what is an equally monochrome universe, despite the flowers and trees of the formal garden with its tower clad in tiles and finely worked wood. The contrast between the world of the horseman and that of the young woman looking out from the top of the tower is striking. Humay, the rider, sees Humayun for the first time, having fallen in love with her after seeing her portrait at the Indian court.

The scene is not simply that of a love story between two young heroes; rather it is a pietistic metaphor expressing what was a constant theme of Persian and Islamic mysticism: the lover and the beloved constantly seek one another over the course of many adventures and are eventually united—in the same way as each of us seeks to become one with the divine. In this image, emphasis is placed on the contrast between the visual richness of the world desired and the simplicity or even poverty of the dust and world. Only the numerous birds are able to pass easily from one world to the other. Humans are condemned to see and dream of one another (detail fig. 58 p. 160).
This image shows Humayun, disguised as a warrior fighting Humay, the latter does not recognize her, at least until she removes her helmet. This episode, the dramatic force of which comes from the disguise, derives in part from a well-known genre that recurs in a number of legends. It confirms what the names of the two heroes already suggest; they are reflections of one another and form but a single person in search of the divine.

The passage from the poem that accompanies the miniature states: "When the king, filled with love, took out his dagger, his beautiful-faced beloved removed her helmet." This conveys a blend of the erotic and dramatic that one can only grasp by reading the poem. The image on its own simply shows a fight between two small figures who occupy just a tiny space in a clearing surrounded by trees and rocks; the whole scene is suspended in a universe without worldly connection... like a planet other than our own. The serenity of the place and the scene is confirmed by the identical colors used for the people, the horses and the landscape. Only, the numerous birds wheeling around suggest the existence of a more familiar world. This is an image that requires the viewer to immerse himself in its mystery.