A PAINTING BY RIZA-I ABBASI

51

A youth kneeling and holding out a cup, his other hand holding a gold bottle. Signed by Riza-i Abbasi, Isfahan, c.1650

ink drawing with gouache and gold on paper, vegetation and clouds in gold on uncoloured background, signed at left ‘rām hamshīn Rizā-i Abbās’, inscription on lower edge ‘shāhshāh Khan Kh̄ān’, on an album leaf with a border of stout blue paper decorated in gold with birds and beasts amongst trees, reverse with six lines of nasta’ī by calligraphy by Muhammad Bakhtar and pale pink borders decorated with gold floral motifs, miniature 160 by 88mm., page 311 by 200mm.

Formerly in the collection of Hagop Kevorkian, sold in these rooms 12th April 1975, lot 31.

Riza-i Abbasi, the greatest draughtsman and artist of the Isfahan court of the early seventeenth century, specialised towards the end of his career in depicting youthful figures, fully-coloured against backgrounds drawn only in gold. The poses of his figures were repeated by him and his followers, so becoming icons of 17th-century Persian art. In the case of the present work, it is possible that it was intended to be fully coloured and was never completed. The only part which remains uncoloured is the robe.

It compares extremely closely with a painting by Riza-i Abbasi sold in these rooms 26th April 1995, lot 81. Compare also with the drawing from the ‘Riza Abbasi Album’ in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, illustrated in E. Attil, The Brush of the Masters, Washington (Frecer Gallery) 1978, no.36.


£6,000-8,000

52

Farhad carrying Shirin and her horse over rocky terrain, Persia or Turkey, mid-seventeenth century
gouache with gold on paper, vertical and horizontal crescent, framed, 370 by 271mm.

Formerly in the collection of Hagop Kevorkian, sold in these rooms 7th April 1975, lot 86. Sotheby’s, New York, 4th June 1994, lot 142.

This is an unusually large depiction of the popular episode from the Persian tale of Khusrav and Shirin, in which Farhad, the inventor, mason and sculptor, is introduced to the Princess Shirin to solve practical problems at her mountain castle. Farhad falls deeply in love with Shirin and enacts extraordinary feats to gain her favour. In this painting Shirin shows her astonishment at Farhad’s strength by putting her finger to her mouth. The large size of the miniature (the figure of Farhad alone is 190mm. high) indicates that it was probably not made for inclusion in a manuscript.

For another miniature of this scene in a complete manuscript of Khusrav va Shirin see lot 47 in this sale.

£6,000-8,000
A prince and princess consummate their marriage in a palace chamber. Persia, Shiraz, mid-sixteenth century

illustrated leaf from a manuscript, probably Nizami's Khamsa, text in four columns above and below the miniature, frame, miniature 136 by 96mm., text area 182 by 96mm.

Sold in these rooms, 11th October 1991, lot 842.
£1,500-2,000

A king receiving a hook from an elderly poet who brings the volume before his throne, three other courtiers present. Miniature on an illuminated manuscript leaf, attributable to Mirza Baba, Persia, Qajar, early nineteenth century

gold and silver, miniature illustration on a leaf from a manuscript of masnavi verse by Hafiz, 15 lines of fine nasta'liq script written in two columns with interlinear decoration in gold, the margin illuminated in colours and gold, miniature 82 by 66mm., text area 116 by 60mm., page 133 by 92mm.

This leaf is from an apparently unrecorded Qajar illustrated poetic manuscript of good quality. Although on a smaller scale, the miniature compares favourably with those by Mirza Baba in the manuscript of Fath 'Ali Shah's poems, now in the collection of Her Majesty the Queen (Windsor Castle, MS A/A: L.15, C.15). Wilkinson and J.V. Wilkinson and B.Gray, Persian Miniature Painting, London, 1953, no. 304; B.W. Robinson, Persian Drawings, New York, 1965, Fig. 5).

£5,000-6,000

A ewe standing in a field, her lamb lying beside her. By Abu'l-Hasan Ghaffari Kashani (Sani' al-Mulk), dated the month of Rajab A.H.1275/February A.D.1859

watercolour on paper, inscribed at lower left: 'Abu'l-Hasan ... Ghaffari Kashani ta'lik ... salar Rajab al-Murjib 1275', framed, 203 by 320mm.

Abu'l-Hasan Ghaffari was the native of Kashan and became official court artist to Muhammad Shah Qajar. He was sent to Italy to study and returned to Iran full of enthusiasm for the western approach to painting. Under Nasir al-Din Shah he was given the title Sani' al-Mulk (artist of the kingdom) and placed in charge of several important artistic projects including the illustration of a monumental copy of Alif Lyafa wa Leyla (Thousand and One Nights), the newly founded college of art (Dar al'Fawani) and the weekly government newspaper.

He was a master draughtsman whose naturalistic style and incise observation profoundly influenced the later Qajar artists. B.W. Robinson has described him as 'arguably the greatest Persian artist of the Qajar period' (B.W. Robinson, 'Painting in the post Safavid period' in R.W. Ferrier (ed.), The Arts of Persia, London, 1989, p. 229). Here we have one of Abu'l-Hasan's rare paintings of animals and his skill as a draughtsman and keen observation are fully evident.

£12,000-18,000
The execution of prisoners, who are hung upside down and shot with arrows. Illustrated leaf from a Shahnama, Persia or Sultanate India, mid-fifteenth century

gouache and gold on paper, a single line of thuluth text inscribed at top, mounted on an album page with borders of silver brown paper, joined, miniature 190 by 175mm., page 365 by 256mm.

The single line of thuluth script is unrelated to the scene on the miniature, which originates from an interesting dispersed manuscript of Firdausi's Shahnama attributed by B.W. Robinson to Sultanate India, although provincial Persia is another possibility. Other illustrated leaves from the same manuscript are in the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and four have been sold in these rooms 22nd November 1985, lots 181 and 182 and 4th April 1978, lots 2 and 3.

For references and discussion see:
B.W. Robinson, Persian Drawings, New York, 1965, pl.76.
B.W. Robinson, Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book (Keir Collection), London, 1976, no.102, p.172, pl.45.
E. Grube, Muslim Miniature Painting, Venice, 1962, pl.36.
Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray, Persian Painting, London, 1933, no.35.

The final leaf of a manuscript copied by Muhammad bin Mulla Mir al-Husaini al-Ustadi with colophon and full-page illustration, Isfahan, dated A.H.1068/A.D.1659

text in four columns of neat nasta’iliq script relating to a single column for the colophon, which is signed and dated 'sennna al-f an thawran min al-khizra al-nuha'izya ... hadabaha al-abl al-wasulu al-faqir al-haqir Muhammad bin Mullahin. ...'; the illustration depicting three youths and a maiden enjoying refreshments in a landscape, margins ruled in blue and gold, reverse with 21 lines of neat nasta’iliq script written horizontally and diagonally in four columns, miniature and text area 180 by 99mm., page 296 by 178mm.

Formerly in the collection of Hagop Kevorkian, sold in these rooms 7th April 1975, lot 19

£1,500-2,000

Muhammad bin Mulla Mir al-Husaini al-Ustadi was a skilled calligrapher who flourished in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Examples of his work in western collections are rare - a manuscript of Ibn ‘Ishaq’s Rauzat al-Muhitins dated 1577 is in the Austrian National Library, Vienna (Ms.1240) and a Shahnama of Firdausi with 85 miniatures dated 1605-7 is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

£1,500-2,500
50 Rustam and Kamus, mounted on horses, discuss the King of Mazandaran, who has turned into a rock. Illustrated leaf from a manuscript of the Shahnama, signed by Mu'in Musavir, Persia, Isfahan, c.1650. Illustration in gouache and gold on a manuscript leaf with text in four columns of nasta'liq, text area 250 by 141mm., page 362 by 223mm.

From a manuscript of Firdausi's Shahnama, of which Mu'in illustrated three or more copies during his career. Other leaves from the same manuscript have been sold in these rooms 27th April 1994, lot 93 and 11th October 1991, lot 949.

In this scene the king of Mazandaran is depicted as the black rock behind Rustum and Kamus, his white face just visible at the top. £2,000-3,000

60 Rustam rescuing Bizhan from the pit. Illustrated leaf from a manuscript of the Shahnama, style of Mu'in Musavir, Persia, Isfahan, c.1650. Illustration in gouache and gold on a manuscript leaf with text in four columns of nasta'liq, text area 255 by 123mm., page 363 by 237mm.

From a manuscript of Firdausi's Shahnama. Although not signed by Mu'in, as some are, this illustration is very close in style to his own works and probably originates from a manuscript in which he had a hand. A version of the same scene signed by Mu'in is illustrated in Grobe, Muslim Miniature Painting, Venice, 1962, pl.115. £2,000-3,000

61 A maiden wearing diaphanous robes standing on a rock. Signed by Mu'in Musavir, Persia, Isfahan, dated A.H.1108/A.D.1696. Gouache with gold on paper, some spotting; laid down on modern straw paper, in mount, 184 by 115mm.

Formerly in the collection of Huggo Kevorkian, sold in these rooms 7th April 1975, lot 60. A painting of the same maiden, shown lying down, was sold in these rooms 1st June 1987, lot 99. £1,000-2,000

LACQUER AND OIL PAINTING

62 Painted lacquer pen-box, the top showing a couple enjoying a romantic picnic entertained by musicians, the sides with pastoral and hunting scenes, style of Muhammad Zaman, Persia, nineteenth century. The underside with finely painted foliage and cloud-scrolls in gold on a red ground, the sides of the donor inscribed with verses of the poet Sai'id and a fictitious date 1089 (probably altered from 1289), some cracking and retouching, length 290mm. £1,000-1,500
A QAJAR OIL BY THE 'SHIRIN PAINTER'

A maiden dressed in a pearl-embroidered jacket, a flowing pearl-edged skirt and an elaborate jewel-embroidered headdress, seated on a high-backed chair holding a pomegranate and a patterned glass. Attributed to the ‘Shirin’ painter, Persia, Qajar, c.1840

oil on canvas, framed, 139.5 by 78.5 cm.

This painting is in the characteristic style of the ‘Shirin Painter’, the name coined by B.W. Robinson in reference to the portrait of a girl inscribed ‘Shirin’, formerly in the Amery Collection. The artist in question seems to have specialised in pictures of courtesans, sometimes acrobatic, with notably languid features. A painting by the artist in a Tehran collection is inscribed ‘ya Muhammad’ which, although not a proper signature, raises the possibility that the artist’s name was Muhammad. For further information, and illustrations of the pictures in question and others by the Shirin Painter, see: B.W. Robinson, ‘The Amery Collection of Persian oil paintings’ Studios Iranica, 1, 1972, p.362; S.I. Falk, Qajar Paintings, London, 1972, p.43, figs. 19-25; pls. 44-49; B.W. Robinson, ‘Lacquer, Oil-paintings and Later Arts of the Book’, Treasures of Islam, Geneva, 1985, nos. 185 and 186. Another oil painting by the Shirin Painter was sold in these rooms 9th October, 1978, lot 70.

£30,000-40,000
Large painted lacquer panel showing the women of Egypt, astonished by the beauty of Yusuf, swooning and cutting their hands as they peel oranges, Persia, Qajar, mid-nineteenth century

border of gilt foliate motifs on black ground, plain brown-painted reverse, 414 by 612mm.

This is an unusually large depiction of one of the most famous scenes of Persian literature. The Persian poet Jami (1414-92) took the story of Yusuf (Joseph) as told in chapter 12 of the Qur'an and embroidered it to create one of the great symbolic love stories of Persian literature, one which quickly became popular and often illustrated. The large size of the present scene affords the artist the opportunity to show the women in various stages of astonishment and swoon, while the servants stand unmoved at the back.

£1,200-1,400

Large painted lacquer panel showing a battle taking place in a mountainous landscape, the massed cavalry arrayed on either side, Persia, Qajar, mid-nineteenth century

border band of gilt floral motifs on black ground, plain blue-painted reverse, 395 by 587mm.

The similar dimensions and border design of this and the previous lot indicate that they may have been part of a series.

£1,200-1,300

INDIAN MINIATURES

The Jumma Masjid at Delhi, viewed from one corner across open ground. Delhi, Company School, c.1840

watercolour on paper, slight creases, framed, 430 by 586mm.

£1,000-1,500
A NATURAL HISTORY ILLUSTRATION PAINTED BY ZAYN AL-DIN FOR LADY IMPEY

An Indian Blue Jay or Roller preening its wing as it perches on the flowering branch of a broad-leaved shrub. By Zayn al-Din, Calcutta, dated 1779.

A watercolour on European (Whatman) paper, inscribed in English and Persian 'In the Collection of Lady Impey / Painted by Zayn al-Din, Native of Patna 1779', the shrub identified in Persian characters as 'daramki-starw' and the bird 'raul khanah', slight vertical central fold mark, framed, 515 by 720mm, within mount.

Provenance: Sir Elijah Impey (1732-1809) and Lady Impey; his sale, Phillips, 21st May, 1816.

The animal and bird drawings made for Lady Impey between 1777 and 1783 are among the earliest and without doubt the finest of natural history illustrations made for the British in India. Sir Elijah Impey was appointed first Chief Justice in Bengal in 1774 following the new Regulating Act which called for the establishment of law courts in Calcutta. When Sir Elijah left for India with his wife Mary they took their household with them, including servants and a moonshie from whom Sir Elijah could learn Persian. He was about collecting manuscripts and miniatures almost immediately, having his personal Persian collector's seal cut within the year. But it was his wife, bound to the house by family duties and frequent child-bearing, who collected exotic creatures in the garden of their Calcutta house, which must have become a veritable menagerie. From 1777 she employed Shaykh Zayn al-Din to record the flora and fauna in a true-to-life style, satisfactory to the eighteenth-century passion for recording new species. Zayn al-Din came from Patna where, it can be assumed, he had been trained in the Mughal techniques of miniature painting. After three years Zayn al-Din was joined by two Hindu painters, Bhawan Das and Ram Das, both also from Patna. The project continued until Impey was recalled to London in 1783, by which time a total of 326 drawings, 197 of them birds, had been completed.

Examples from the Impey series of natural history drawings are today in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Wellcome Institute, London, the Radcliffe Science Library, Oxford, the San Diego Museum of Art (Birnley Collection) and in private collections.

The Blue Jay or Roller (Cyanus leghabandia) frequents most habitats of the Indian subcontinent and is easily recognisable as the Oxford and Cambridge bluebird so often perched on telegraph wires by the roadside.


£15,000-20,000

Portrait of a Mughal prince standing on flowery ground holding a jewelled sword, with radiant gold halo and jewelled mauve turban. By Isma’il, Mughal, c.1630. Gouache with gold, signed in black nasta’liq ‘Isma’il Pir Hauzari’, slight flaking, on an album page with gold-trimmed borders, 164 by 103mm.

Formed in the Kevorkian Collection, sold in these rooms 5th April, 1975, lot 121.

The prince could be Shah Jahan, resembling his likeness at the beginning of his reign. The artist is not otherwise recorded, not being identified with Isma’il Kashmiri who worked on the Baburnama in the Akbar period.

£1,500-2,000

Afraziah in battle with warriors in a mountainous landscape. Mughal, early seventeenth century.

Illustrated leaf from a manuscript of Firdausi’s Shakhnameh, nasta’liq text in two and four columns within picture area, margins decorated in gold with birds perched amid vegetation, reverse with 23 lines of text in four columns, some flaking of pigments, top right corner slightly discoloured, some wearing to margins, miniature 270 by 193mm, page 239 by 191mm.

£1,000-1,500