Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures

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Oriental Manuscripts
and Miniatures

Sale LN7255

Auction: Wednesday 23 April 1997 at 10.30 am

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This catalogue may be referred to as LN7255 "DEVI"
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Friday 18 April
9 am to 4.30 pm
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Toby Falk’s contribution to the discovery and study of Islamic and Indian manuscripts and miniatures was enormous, both within Sotheby’s and without, and his wisdom and generosity benefited numerous scholars, institutions, collectors and students. As cataloguer and consultant he was involved in almost every Sotheby’s sale in this field since 1964, including some of the greatest ever to take place, such as the Hagop Kevorkian Fund Collections (1967-83), the Phillipps Collection (1968 and 1974), the collection of Stuart Cary Welch (1972), The Fraser Album (1980), the Bachofen von Echt Collection (1992) and the British Rail Pension Fund Collection (1994 and 1996).

A service of thanksgiving for the life of Toby Falk, who died from cancer on 10th January, will be held at St. George’s Church, Hanover Square, London, on Tuesday, 6th May 1997, at 12 o’clock.
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Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures

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Lots 1-193

Wednesday
23 April
1997
10.30 am
Order of Sale

Lots 1-38

AN IMPORTANT EUROPEAN PRIVATE COLLECTION OF INDIAN, PERSIAN, TURKISH AND ARABIC MINIATURES AND MANUSCRIPTS

The first thirty-eight lots of this sale constitute a highly important collection of the Islamic and Indian arts of the book, formed by a European collector from the early 1970's to the mid-1980's. Geographically the collection spans an area from the shores of the Bosphorus to the Bay of Bengal, and includes Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Mughal and Rajput manuscripts and miniatures. Chronologically it spans a period of seven hundred years, from the early thirteenth century to the late nineteenth century.

The majority of the Indian works are from important series or are by well-known artists, but two in particular are outstanding examples of Indian art. The illustration from the Basohli Tamrac Dev series (lot 8) is an icon of Pahari painting, while the 1583 Khud-i Se'ar made for the Emperor Akbar's foster brother Aziz Kola at Haiipur (lot 18) is a manuscript of enormous significance for the history of Mughal painting.

The Persian arts of the book are represented by a strong group of illustrated manuscripts of poetry from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, including the works of popular writers such as Firdausi, Sa'di, Nizami, Jami, Hatifi and Hilali, and the rarer works of Lutfi Beg, Wahsi and Websal. An anthology of Turkish poetry illustrated with fifty-nine miniatures and dated 1588 (lot 34) is a rare example of early Ottoman manuscript production with a splendid contemporary binding. The earliest piece in the collection is a leaf from a thirteenth century Arabic copy of the De Materiâ Medica of Dioscorides, one of the most important scientific texts of the ancient and medieval worlds (lot 38).

As a whole the collection presents a fascinating cross-section of the Oriental arts of the book and offers scholars, museums and collectors alike some rare opportunities.

A fine group of Islamic metalwork from the same collection will be sold on Thursday 24 April 1997 in our Islamic Works of Art sale, lots 41-53.

Other Property

Lots 39-65 Qur'an leaves and manuscripts

Lots 66-90 Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts and calligraphy

Lots 91-133 Persian and Turkish miniatures

Lots 134-160 Indian miniatures

Lots 161-195 Later Persian painting and lacquer

1. Illustrated leaf from a manuscript of Nizami's Iskandarnama: Iskandar mounted on a piebald charger in combat with enemy cavalry, North India, Sultanate, c.1500

gouache with gold on buff paper, text written in four columns of neat nasta'liq script above and below illustration with double intercolumnar rules in red, margins ruled in red and blue, reverse with 21 lines of text and one heading in red, few wormholes mostly restricted to margins, in mount

miniature 56 by 122mm., page 246 by 171mm.

Provenance and published:

From one of the few extant illustrated manuscripts which can be certainly attributed to the pre-Mughal period in India. Four other leaves from the manuscript were formerly in the collection of Stuart Cary Welch and were sold in these rooms, 12th December 1972, lots 178-181. They are now in the San Diego Museum (see Bney, 1973, nos. 5), the Keir Collection, Ham (Robinson, 1976, nos. 204-5, pp. 173-4) and in another English private collection.

A further illustrated leaf was sold in our New York rooms, 21st September 1985, lot 447.

Further literature:
Welch and Beach, 1965, no.2.
Chandra, pl.X

£1,500-2,500

2. A princess wrapped in a gold sari attends her toilet while standing on a footstool between two slender cypress trees, by Wajid, Isurda, c.1860

gouache with gold on stout paper, wide red border, reverse with inscriptions in sugangi giving Wajid's name and the subject of the picture, in good condition, in mount

miniature 218 by 112mm., with border 296 by 191mm.

Provenance:

Published:
Pasricha, 1982, fig.14.

The artist Wajid, who painted mainly ruler and animal portraits, repeated motifs to which he was partial in this lyrical picture of a princess bathing. The gently rolling sky, for example, is also utilised in two Isurda ruler portraits (Pasricha, 1982, figs. 6, 10). The floral pattern on the gold sari is also a favourite Wajid motif (Pasricha, 1982, figs. 10, 12).

This inscribed depiction of a woman bathing makes possible the attribution of two other female portraits to Wajid (these miniatures are attributed by Pasricha, 1982, p.207).

£2,000-3,000
Illustration to the Bhagavata Purana: Balarama attacks the demon Prahlada on the head while riding on his shoulders, North India, c.1530

gouache on stout paper, yellow border defective at edges, green strip at bottom, some flaking, reverse with ten lines of descriptive text in nagari, edges frayed, in mount including border 180 by 236mm.

Provenance and published:

The importance of this Bhagavata Purana not only arises from its early date, but is also attributable to the great energy which pervades the illustrations done prior to the commencement of the Mughal period. The artistic sophistication of Rajput painting schools in later decades can be traced back to this manuscript and to the few other examples of pre-Mughal Hindu patronage that survive. The fervour of the colours in this Bhagavata Purana, the dynamism and freedom with which its subjects are treated, and the beauty of the textile or vegetal patterns illustrated all testify to the achievements of Hindu painters. Miniatures of this type are rare, and their importance cannot be overestimated.

Early Rajput pictures in this style are usually identified as belonging to the Chaumukhwar group, a term referring to a slightly earlier series of that title (Shiwshwarkar, 1967). The series has been attributed to several locations: in Northern India, including the Delhi-Agra region and the Mewar region of Rajasthan.

Illustration to the Rasikapriya of Keshav Das: a lady embraces her companion in the doorway of a palace while gesturing towards her lover, shown as Krishna, who stands behind a plantain tree, Mewar, c.1650

gouache with gold on paper, pink border, yellow strip at bottom and top, numbered "117" in yellow strip at top, reverse yellow with three lines of nagari script, corners slightly defective, in mount including border 265 by 224mm.

Provenance and published:

From a series of illustrations to the Rasikapriya ("Lover’s Breviary"), a Hindi poem by Keshav Das which analyses romantic themes in terms of incidents involving Radha and Krishna. The illustration shows the influence of the distinctive style of Sahibdin, the most innovative artist at Mewar during the second quarter of the seventeenth century, who worked on more than one Rasikapriya series of this format. Another page from the same series was sold in these rooms, 18th October 1995, lot 94 and a related page was sold in our New York rooms, 28 October, 1991, lot 17. For similar pages see Spink, 1982, nos.97 and 98; Pal, 1995, no.28A. Others are in the following:

- British Museum, London
- Government Museum, Varanasi

Illustration from a Sikapriya series: Radha welcomes the approaching Krishna outside a pavilion at night, Malwa, c.1660

gouache on stout paper, pink border, yellow strip at bottom and top, numbered "17" in yellow strip at top, reverse yellow with three lines of nagari script, corners slightly defective, in mount including border 265 by 224mm

Provenance and published:

It has been conjectured that it is possible to distinguish the somewhat similar sets from Central India and perhaps even to distinguish their specific provenance by the architecture depicted. In the Sikapriya leaves, the buildings are more extensive and complex with distinctive scalloped archways which seem to stand for halls, sometimes containing staircases, as here. The series is also distinguished by slender, elongated figures, in contrast to the heavy or short, slim figures generally characteristic of Central Indian painting. The present example includes an exceptionally beautiful vignette of trees and peacocks. The numbering on the known pages of this series suggests that there must once have been more than one hundred leaves.

Others from the series have been sold in these rooms, 18th October 1977, lot 47 and 8th July 1980, lot 121.

£3,000-5,000

£3,000-5,000

£3,000-5,000
Illustration from the ‘Isarada’ Bhagavat Purana: Karna’s soldiers attack Krishna and Balarana, North India, Delhi region, c.1580

gouache on gold, yellow border with red strip at bottom, descriptive inscription in lower border and on reverse, numbered 43 on reverse, in wonst
including border 193 by 264mm.

Provenance:

This Bhagavata Purana series is named after Isarada, the place where it was discovered, and is usually classified as belonging to the 'Chaurapanchashika' group (Shiveshwarakar, 1967). Though later in date than the Bhagavata Purana series of c.1580 (see lot 3 in this sale), it is slightly larger and the figure size is correspondingly greater. Importantly, it also shows some influence from contemporary Mughal painting, confirming that it dates from after establishment of the Mughal atelier. Compared with the earlier Bhagavata Purana the Isarada series is organised in a more disciplined fashion, with more restrained actions, and more attention paid to precision and detail. There is no definite evidence on which to locate these pictures geographically, though the Mughal influence indicates a location not far from Delhi.

In this particular episode, from Book X, chapter 42, the evil king Kansa sends his army against Krishna and Balarana at Mathura, after Krishna has broken the sacrificial bow. Krishna, of course, triumphs over the forces of evil and goes on to kill Kansa himself.

As few as ten pages survive from this series in public and private collections including the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the San Diego Museum (Binney Collection), the Bellak Collection in Philadelphia, the Goeka Collection in Calcutta, the Kanoria Collection in Patna, the Kronos Collection in New York, and the Walter Collection in New York. A page formerly in the collection of the Baron and Baroness Bachtos von Echt was sold in these rooms 29th April 1992, lot 28, while two pages formerly in the Peter Bieristock Collection, were sold in our New York rooms, 21st September 1995, lots 115-116.

For illustrations of other leaves from the series see: Spink, 1971, figs.11 and 117; Welch 1978, no.7; Khurshid and Mital, 1974, figs.14; Chandra, 1976, pls.85-6; Pal, 1978, no.3; Wiener, 1974, no.35; Binney, 1979, no.16; Hutchins, 1880, figs.2-4, 25-6, 31; Lerner, 1980, no.35; Kramisch, 1980, no.9; Leach, 1986, no.9; and Falk and Lynch, 1988, no.1.

£15,000-25,000

Illustration to the Ramayana: Hanuman and Angada with fellow monkeys pausing at a lotus pool, Mankot or Npur, c.1710

gouache with some gold on vellum paper, red border with double inner black rule, reverse with two lines of nanakshani, edges very slightly soiled, otherwise in good condition, in wonst

miniature 164 by 264mm., including border 208 by 310mm.

Provenance:
Sold in these rooms, 8th October 1979, lot 192.

The very individual series from which this illustration comes is notable for conveying the lyrical as well as confrontational aspects of the Ramayana legend and for its unusual palette, in which greens and orange predominate. In the years since this series was first discovered, no illustrations except for those from the Kishkindhakanda, or canto on the exploits of Rama’s monkey friends, have come to light. The thirty or forty known leaves of this section illustrate these episodes of the Ramayana in great detail, but it is possible that this was the only portion of the epic ever produced. This canto shows the monkeys searching for Rama’s abducted wife Sita, but, as in this miniature, time is often taken out for relaxation, and the atmosphere is serene. A great deal of emphasis is placed on vegetation, with the artist accentuating numerous varieties of tree, as here. When it was first considered by scholars, it was thought to originate from Mankot (Archer, 1976, nos.65-6), but more recently it has been attributed to Npur (Leach, 1980, no.157).

Others from the series are in various private and public collections including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the San Diego Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art and several have been sold in these rooms, 11th December 1973, lot 255, 9th October 1978, lot 338, 29th April 1992, lot 20, and in our New York rooms, 22nd March 1989, lot 180 and 28th October 1991, lot 44.

For further illustrations and discussion see: Pal, 1976, no.4; Spink, 1976, no.163; Pal, 1978, no.55; Ebihinom, 1985, nos.182-3. £5,000-7,000
Illustration from a Tantric Devi series: the Goddess worshipped by the Sage Chyavana, Basohli, c.1660-70

gouache with gold on stout paper, raised white pigment and beetle wing-cases for jewellery, red border with inner black rule, inscriptions in right and left border in takri
waving the sage as Chyavana and the Goddess as IlAhākali, numbered 57 in left border, reverse with two lines of Sanskrit text in devanagari, in good condition, in mount

173 by 213mm., border 212 by 231mm.

Provenance:


Published: Goswamy and Fischer, 1990, no.8, pp.38-9.

This is one of the most arresting illustrations from a crucially important series from the earliest period of painting at Basohli. The series has been attributed to the artist Kripal (Goswamy and Fischer, 1990, nos.7-12), who is also thought to have painted the 'first' Rasamanjari series for Raja Sangram Pal of Basohli (d. circa 1675).

The 'Tantric Devi' series is a visual expression of Devi worship and hence essentially iconic. The theme has allowed, even forced the painter to pare down the composition to exclude unnecessary features, leaving only the essential aspects that encourage a meditative state. This process has generated an extraordinary series of paintings, all of which possess almost unrivalled psychological and visual power and intensity.

The present image shows the sage Chyavana, one of the seven celebrated avatars and an important figure in Indian mythology, sitting on an animal skin in a grove of trees, paying homage to the goddess, who sits on a giant corpse just outside the circle of trees. The goddess is in her benign form and carries symbols normally associated with the tranquil aspects of Vishnu: the mace, the discus, the lotus and the conch. Further leaves picturing darker aspects of the Devi also seated or standing on corpses furnish interesting comparisons with this page, showing how iconography and settings varied within the series (Kramrisch, 1980, pls.98, 99; Archer, 1973, vol.II, Basohli I (iii)). The fiery colours of this and other examples of the series (and of the 'first' Rasamanjari series) play an important part in conveying the psychological force of the image, while the use of raised white pigment and beetle wing-cases for jewellery lend sparkle to the surface of the picture.

The series has been known for many years, but the majority of examples from it have only recently come to light. Six leaves from the group were acquired by the Lahore Museum in February, 1929 (Ahmaduddin, 1977, Basohli, p.4). Those pages of the series recently discovered in America are said to have been wrapped in a newspaper of the 1920s, a date which coordinates the Asian and American portions of the manuscript (Goswamy and Fischer, 1992, p.35, fn.17). Two additional Devi series also produced in Basohli at approximately the same date are known from only a very few pages with long horizontal dimensions, but these illustrations help to confirm the enduring significance of goddess worship in the state, despite the efforts of the Basohli ruling house to promote Vaishnavite devotions (Archer, 1973, vol.II, Basohli nos.2, 3, pp.34-35). One further page of a square format (also showing the Devi on a corpse) has been conjectured to come from a 'fourth' series (see Ethom, 1989, nos.88, 89).

The numbering in the borders of the pictures suggest that originally there were as many as sixty in the series, but extant examples are now few. They are in public and private collections including the Rietberg Museum, Zurich, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the National Museum, New Delhi and the Museums of Chandigarh and Lahore, and one was sold in our New York rooms, 28th October 1991, lot 39.


£100,000-80,000