14 Portrait of a lady holding a rose and a glass of wine, standing in a richly ornamented interior, Persia, Isfahan, c.1660-1700 Oil on canvas, framed 161.5 by 83cm.

The lady is shown wearing rich clothes consisting of trousers with gilt-floral bottoms, a dress of cream cloth richly embroidered with floral patterns, and a short-sleeved red cut and uncut velvet and metal thread brocade coat with a fur trim. She wears a gold-trimmed white scarf around her shoulders which is tied in a distinctive fashion around her head, beneath which is a square, jewelled and pearl-set gilt cap. She wears three bands of necklaces made up of gold discs (or coins) and a gilded belt set with stones, from which hangs a gold disc bearing an engraved portrait of a man wearing a crown. The embroidered cream dress is typically Safavid and the cut of the short-sleeved coat is also Persian in style. However, the cloth of the short-sleeved coat is almost certainly of European origin, probably Italian. The hood-scarf is tied in an Armenian style, but the square jewelled cap underneath, and the jewelled gold belt are more reminiscent of Turkic jewellery in general. The identity of the crowned figure on the gold disc of the belt is a mystery.

She wears rings on the little fingers of both hands. In her left hand she carries a tall, elaborate wine glass and in her right hand is a single pink rose. To her right is a marble-topped table on which rests a glass decanter half-full of red-wine. Behind the figure are two spiral pillars decorated with putti amongst vine-scrolls, and a green curtain (also in number 2 above). Behind the table is an orange balustrade beyond which stretches a stylised landscape.

Significantly, this is the same person depicted in number 3 above, and almost exactly the same composition. The facial features are obviously those of the same person, although painted by a different artist. They wear the same clothes, both carry a wine glass (of slightly different design), both wear rings (on different fingers) and also hold flowers. Furthermore, the pillar, balustrade, landscape, table and decanter all appear in both paintings, although, again, to slightly different designs. The whole composition has been reversed - the present figure facing to her right while number 3 above faced to her left.

£200,000-300,000
15 Portrait of a maiden holding a jewelled pendant, attributed to Muhammad Sadiq or Mirza Baba, Persia, c.1775-1800
oil on canvas, framed
65 by 53cm.
This portrait of a maiden and the following one of a youth are very close in style to the work of the artists Muhammad Sadiq and Mirza Baba, who were active in the last decades of the 18th century. In painterly terms the pertinent characteristics of these two artists were the languid, pretty, oval faces, painted with soft modelling, and the sleepy, doe eyes. These characteristics, along with compositional features such as the dress, poses and geometric wall designs in the background, can be seen in several paintings by these artists.
1. A girl playing a mandolin, by Muhammad Sadiq, dated 1769-70 (in which the facial style and geometric wall are very similar to the present picture. See Falk 1972, fig.9).
2. A girl with a rabbit and parrot (in which the girl holds up a jewelled pendant in a very similar manner to the present portrait. The geometric wall is also similar. See Falk 1972, fig.10).
3. A youth and maiden drinking wine, by Muhammad Sadiq, late 18th century (the facial characteristics and the jewelled pendant are pertinent, see Falk 1972, no.3).
4. A portrait of Rustam Khan Zand, by Muhammad Sadiq, c.1779 (similar facial style; see Diba and Ekhtiar, no.26).
5. Two lovers embracing, attributed to Muhammad Sadiq, c.1770-80 (similar facial style and geometric wall. See Diba and Ekhtiar, no.27).
6. A maiden holding a fruit and a glass of wine, by Mirza Baba, dated 1800-1801 (similar facial style and geometric wall. See Diba and Ekhtiar, no.28).
£30,000-40,000

16 Portrait of a youth with a bird, attributed to Muhammad Sadiq or Mirza Baba, Persia, c.1775-1800
oil on canvas, framed
65 by 53cm.
The youth is wearing a turban of a distinctly Indian type. Whether he was of Indian origin or simply wearing it as a fashion statement is impossible to tell, but Qajar artists are known to have painted Indian princes on occasions, for a retrospective portrait of Farukh Siyar signed by Mhr Ali, was sold at Christie's, London, 11th April 1989, lot 41. For a full discussion of attributions and related paintings see footnote to previous lot.
£30,000-40,000
Portrait of a Qajar Prince, probably the young Muhammad Mirza, attributed to Mihir Ali, Persia, Qajar, c.1830
oil on canvas, framed 183.5 x 97cm.

This is a magnificent portrait of a young Qajar prince, almost certainly Muhammad Mirza, the future Muhammad Shah Qajar, and son of Abbas Mirza. The same young prince can be seen in a large portrait of Fath Ali Shah kneeling against a bolster, the prince standing to Fath Ali’s right, and in both cases the young prince wears a cravat, which was rather unusual at that time. That painting has recently been on exhibition in London and the United States in ‘Royal Persian Painting: The Qajar Epoch - 1795-1925’ and has been attributed in the exhibition catalogue to either Mihir Ali or Muhammad Hassan (Diba and Ekhlas, no.62). There are several aspects of the present portrait which point to the hand of Mihir Ali.

Firstly, the regal power of the portrait is very marked. This power comes from the combination of the size and posture of the prince, and his strong orange robe set against a dark, neutral background. This has the effect of increasing the definition of the figure and making him stand out, almost glowing with inherited power. And yet at the same time his face displays a modesty and shyness which would have been natural in a young man in his late teens. This careful balancing of the overt majesty of a portrait with the more graceful and delicate aspects of the sitter’s features and costume was a characteristic of Mihir Ali’s skill (see Diba and Ekhlas, p.181). Secondly, the cravat in the present portrait is painted in a naturalistic manner, the knot folded around the prince’s neck in an almost informal manner, easily conveying the three-dimensionality of the folded cloth. This contrasts with the cravat in the double portrait, which is depicted as stiff and flat. Thirdly, the face itself, and particularly the eyes and eyebrows, are painted with a delicacy which was a hallmark of Mihir Ali’s style.

The fact that this particular prince should be painted by this particular artist is interesting. Toby Falk pointed out that the large-scale portraits of Fath Ali Shah by Mihir Ali were intended for a specific political as well as decorative function, serving to present the monarch in no uncertain terms as the supreme ruler:–

“In every case...Mihir Ali has missed no chance to include all the jewelled finery...and in addition has chosen the most powerful and imposing attitudes, which give the pictures their particularly awe-inspiring effect. There is every reason to see why Fath Ali Shah so consistently employed this artist for his most important portraits” (Falk 1972, p.35).

Layla Diba has pointed out that the double portrait of Fath Ali Shah and Muhammad Mirza mentioned above was intended as a specific statement of the legitimate line of succession (Diba and Ekhlas, p.188). It is not surprising, therefore, that Mihir Ali should have been chosen to portray the young Prince Muhammad Mirza, who was to succeed Fath Ali Shah in 1834 as supreme ruler.

£100,000-150,000
A maiden playing a spike fiddle, a fawn listening at her feet, Persia, Qajar, c.1800-1820
oil on canvas, framed
193 by 98cm.

This large painting of a female musician is typical of early Qajar taste, in which the two main themes of large-scale painting were royal portraiture and musicians, dancers and acrobats. Falk describes the latter as follows: “The other main subject - girls - apparently resulted from a desire for decoration which would suit the purpose of the building for which the paintings were intended...sometimes they are playing a drum, a long-necked mandolin, or a guitar, sometimes dancing with castanets, and sometimes just sitting in a languid or inviting posture...” (Falk 1972, p.10), while Sir Robert Ker Porter, the famous traveller and archeological artist, wrote of a visit to Crown Prince Abbas Mirza’s Tabriz Palace in which “Various compartments in the walls were filled with pictures of former Shahs...The semeliances of beautiful women, had also found a place in the saloon of this gallant prince” (from Sir Robert Ker Porter’s Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia &c &c During The Years 1817, 1818, 1819 and 1820, which was published in London in 1821; see Falk 1972, p.23-4).

This particular portrait is not signed, but bears a very close stylistic resemblance to three others of similar subjects. The facial style and the background are very close indeed to those in a portrait of a woman holding a rose, datable to the first quarter of the 19th century (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, VR-III3, see Diba and Ekhtiar, no.56), and it is plausible to attribute both works to the same artist. The general style, with predominantly muted colours and a diaphanous shirt, is close to two portraits of maidens, datable to the early years of the 19th century (one is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (710,1876), see Guadalupi pp.304-5; the second is in private collection, formerly the property of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, sold in these rooms, 9th December 1975, for £30,000).
19 The Court of Fath Ali Shah with Foreign Ambassadors and Envoys, Persia, Qajar, c.1815
oil on gold on paper, painted on three panels, in good condition, in two giltwood frames
central panel 54.3 by 52.3cm, left panel 32 by 125.5cm, right panel 31.8 by 129.3cm.

This important depiction of Fath Ali Shah’s court is one of a small number of small-scale versions of a large wall-painting of the same scene, executed in the Negarestan Palace outside Tehran in the years 1812-13 by a team of artists led by Abdullah Khan. The wall-paintings represented a symbolic gathering of Fath Ali Shah’s court and the foreign dignitaries, and Layla Diba has suggested that the presence of so many foreign diplomats from countries as diverse as Great Britain, France, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Sindi and Arabia, paying homage to Fath Ali Shah indicates his own view of the submission of the world powers to the Persian Shah (Diba and Ehtiat, p.174).

It is thought that several small-scale versions, such as the present one, were made at the request of Fath Ali Shah and given as diplomatic gifts to foreign worthies. Evidence of this practice is confirmed by the fact that one version was given to Sir Henry Willcock (1798-1855), who was attached to the embassy of the British envoy Sir Harford Jones in 1812. Willcock stayed in Iran and later became the British-Charge d’Affaires to the Persian Court. He was awarded the Order of the Lion and the Sun by Fath Ali Shah in 1826. The version which was given to him, which was extremely similar to the present, except that it lacked the names of the envoys and courtiers written in gold nasta’liq, was sold in these rooms on 3rd May 1977, lot 75. Only a handful of these small-scale versions are known to exist, including one in the India Office Library (see Guadalupi, pp.40-41) and one in the Art and History Trust Collection (sold in these rooms, 9th December 1975, lot 291, now on loan at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., see Diba and Ehtiat, no.34). Printed versions based on these small-scale paintings, engraved in London in 1834 by Robert Havell, have been sold in these rooms, 9th December 1975, lot 283, and in our New York rooms, 25th June 1992, lot 387.

The early 19th century was a key period in the development of relations between Iran and the western powers. The Persians, having received no support from the British in repelling Russian attacks in the Caucasus, concluded the treaty of Finkenstein with the French in 1807. This being the period of the Napoleonic wars, the British reacted to this with alarm, and simultaneously sent two envoys to Persia - Sir Harford Jones from London and Brigadier-General John Malcolm from India. Jones reached Tehran in early March 1809 and there followed a period of intense diplomatic activity, from which the British emerged as the dominant allies of Iran. In this context, Diba’s suggestion of the role of the wall-paintings in the Negarestan Palace as symbols of the world’s (especially the western world’s) submission, is confirmed.

The British ambassadors depicted in the present scene are Sir Gore Ouseley, Sir Harford Jones and Sir John Malcolm, and the French Ambassadors are General Gardanne, Monsieur Jouannin and Monsieur Joubert. Also included in the scene are the Princes of Persia and the Royal Guard.

For a further discussion of these paintings and this period see Diba and Ehtiat, no.34, Wright, 1977. £38,000-320,000
20 A mother seated holding a child
and a bowl of flowers, attributed
to Muhammad Hassan, Persia,
Qajar, 1820-30
oil on canvas, framed
186 by 84cm.

This painting of a mother and child
is close in style to the artist
Muhammad Hassan, who worked
during the second half of Fath Ali
Shah’s reign and the first part of
Muhammad Shah’s. Falk describes
Muhammad Hassan’s pictures as
having great charm and a lightness
of touch, especially when the sitter
was female, as here (Falk 1972,
p.42). In the present picture the
artist has paid particular attention
to the jewels on the headdress and
necklace, and to the bowl of
flowers. The latter are executed
with considerable skill and detail.
Related portraits signed by or
attributed to Muhammad Hassan
are as follows:
portrait of Prince Yahya, c.1830, in
the Brooklyn Museum of Art (for
similarity in treatment of face and
geometric wall design); portrait of a
mother and child, c.1820-40, in a
private collection (for both these see
Diba and Ehtiarz, nos.47,58); a girl
with a pet parrot, Fath Ali Shah
period; a mother and child with a
parrot and a vase of flowers, Fath
Ali Shah period (both formerly in
the Sadabad Museum of Fine Arts,
Tehran, see Falk 1972, nos.18,31); see
also Guadagni, pp.89,137; two
portraits of maidens, period of Fath
Ali Shah (State Museum of Fine
Arts, Tehran, see Falk 1972,
figs.17,18).
† £20,000-40,000

21 A female acrobat performing a
handstand, style of Muhammad
Hassan, Persia, Qajar, c.1820
oil on canvas
164 by 80.3cm

Pictures of maidens, musicians and
acrobats were the most popular
subject outside royal portraiture in
the early Qajar period. Falk
describes these maidens as “the
other main subject” and continues:
“A curious group of pictures is that
which depicts the girl-acrobats who
played a prominent part in the
entertainments provided at court.
Here the artists have found an
opportunity to exercise their
ingenuity at depicting attitudes and
contortions of the human body for
which they have no models in
earlier paintings.”

The present picture shows the girl
standing on her hands, balancing
herself by bending her knees
forward over her body. The knees
are depicted here as bent sideways,
both to avoid the difficulty of
painting foreshortened legs, and to
show more of the patterning of the
textile of her wide trousers, which
was an important part of the
decorative aspect of these
paintings. She is surrounded by
fruit, and a small white cat sits at
the lower right corner. The
background shows a wine flask and
glass on a shelf, beyond which is a
curtained window. All these
features were typical of the
decorative vocabulary of early
Qajar paintings.

The girl’s face is notable for its
linguist, seductive, almost
smouldering look, which owes a
good deal to the style of Mirza Baba
at the beginning of the 19th century.
However, it is more likely the work
of one of the artists of the next
generation, such as Muhammad
Hassan. Related paintings are
illustrated and discussed as
follows: Diba and Ehtiarz, nos.57-
61; Falk 1972, figs.3-5, nos.18,31.
† £20,000-30,000
22 Two lovers embracing, style of Ahmad, Persia, Qajar, c.1825-35
oil on canvas
140 by 87.3 cm.

The faces of these two young romantics are close in style to a pair of portraits of female acrobats attributed to Ahmad, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (719-1876, 720-1876, see Diba and Ekhbat, nos.60, 61). The composition is closely related to a painting attributed to Muhammad Sadig of circa 1770-80, which may have provided the basis for the present work (see Diba and Ekhbat, no.27), while another related composition was sold in these rooms, 14th April 1976, lot 223. A portrait of a young man wearing a coat and leaning against a bolster of very similar design to the present picture was sold in these rooms 13th April 1976, lot 215.

† £20,000-30,000

23 A female musician playing a drum, Persia, Qajar, c.1825-30
oil on canvas, framed
164 by 96.5 cm.
For related paintings see Guadalupi, pp.94-5, 108-9, 142-3.

† £40,000-60,000

24 Large ceiling painting with portraits of youths and maidens, architectural details, and birds and flowers, all set amidst scrolling foliate tendrils, Persia, Qajar, c.1845-50
oil on canvas
247 by 465 cm.

This is a wonderful example of the Qajar style at its most flamboyantly decorative. The artist has taken several of the most popular aspects of the Qajar pictorial vocabulary, such as portrait of pretty youths and maidens, a winged putti, little architectural vignettes, partridges, parrots and other birds, and floral sprays, and has set them within hotel-shaped cartouches on a ground of intensely scrolling foliate tendrils from which sprout the heads of animals and birds, the interspersed further decorated with flowers in a variety of colours. The overall effect as one looks up at the ceiling is inspiring and conveys some of the gaiety which is such an important part of Qajar art.

A similar ceiling painting, dated 1846, is in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (D.1181, see Diba and Ekhbat, no.65).

† £30,000-40,000
REVERSE-GLASS PAINTINGS

The following five lots are all examples of the 19th century medium of reverse-glass painting, or églomisé. It was popular in much of the Orient, from Iran to southern India and China. The Iranian artists depicted mostly pretty maidens and youths, painting in the typical Qajar manner, but a few specific portraits exist, such as a very fine early 19th century portrait of Abbas Mirza, in the Ethnographical Museum, Tehran (see Ferté 1989, p.230). For other related reverse-glass paintings see Diba and Ekhtiar, no.63. See also sale in these rooms, 30th April 1998, lots 572-4.

25 Reverse-glass painting of a maiden holding a wine flask and glass, Persia, Qajar, early 19th century

glass, painted in reverse, spandrels decorated with floral motifs in colours and gold, carved and painted wood frame
portrait 22.5 by 17.3cm.

For related reverse-glass paintings see Diba and Ekhtiar, no.63. See also sale in these rooms, 30th April 1998, lots 572-4.

£10,000-15,000

26 Reverse-glass painting of a maiden holding her necklace, Persia, Qajar, c.1820-40

glass, painted in reverse, the oval portrait surrounded by spandrels of floral decoration in colours and gold, wood frame with band of blue and mirrored glass chevrons
portrait 38.5 by 24cm.

For related reverse-glass paintings see Diba and Ekhtiar, no.63. See also sale in these rooms, 30th April 1998, lots 572-4.

£5,000-12,000

27 Reverse-glass portrait of Nur Ali Shah, Persia, Qajar, dated A.H.1265/A.D.1848

glass, painted in reverse, carved and painted wood frame
24.2 by 20.1cm.

For a portrait of Nur Ali Shah by Isma’il Jalayir and accompanying notes see Diba and Ekhtiar, no.85.

£5,000-8,000

28 Reverse-glass painting of a standing maiden, Persia, Qajar, c.1830-50

glass, painted in reverse, spandrels decorated with floral motifs in colours and gold, wood frame with band of blue and mirrored glass chevrons
portrait 38 by 24.2cm.

£4,000-6,000

29 Reverse-glass portrait of Nur Ali Shah, Persia, Qajar, c.1850

glass, painted in reverse, spandrels decorated with floral motifs in colours, carved and painted wood frame
portrait 25.2 by 20.2cm.

See footnote to lot 27.

£2,000-3,000
30 Qur’an, illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, Persia, Qajar, c.1830
219 leaves, 18 lines per page written in fine naskhi script on paper, with interlinear gilt throughout, illuminated florals between verses, sura headings written in gold thuluth script on finely illuminated panels, margins ruled in colours and gold, juz’ and hash divisions marked in margins within illuminated devices, marginal commentary written in shikasteh script within illuminated cartouches, catchwords in black, three double pages of fine illumination in colours and gold, fine contemporary floral lacquer binding, chipped at corners 19.5 by 12.4cm.
£6,000-£8,000

31 Qur’an, illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, copied by Zayn al-Abidin al-Isfahani and Muhsin, Persia, Qajar, dated A.H.1288/90-A.D.1871-3
242 leaves, 19 lines per page written by Zayn al-Abidin al-Isfahani in 1288/1871 in naskhi script on cream paper with interlinear gilt throughout, small illuminated florals between verses, sura headings written in gold thuluth script on illuminated panels, margins ruled in colours and gold, juz’ and hash divisions marked in margins within illuminated devices, marginal commentary written by Muhsin in black shikasteh script within illuminated cartouches and dated 1270/1855, catchwords in black, six double pages of fine illumination in colours and gold, fine contemporary floral lacquer binding 17.5 by 10.8cm.
£64,000-£86,000

32 Small Qur’an, illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, Persia, Qajar, with a floral lacquer binding by Muhammad Ali dated A.H.1257/A.D.1841
280 leaves, 17 lines per page written in fine naskhi script on thin gold-sprinkled paper, gold dots between verses, sura headings written in gold thuluth within ruled panels, margins ruled in blue and gold, re-margined, juz’ and hash divisions marked in margins within illuminated devices, marginal commentary in nasta’liq cursive on shikasteh script, catchwords in black, gilded lacquer binding with green and gold floral border bands 15.6 by 9.9cm.
£800-1,200

33 Qur’an, illuminated Arabic manuscript on paper, copied for Abdul Javad, Persia, Qajar, dated A.H.1295/A.D.1880
239 leaves, 18 lines per page written in naskhi script on cream paper, interlinear gold decoration throughout, small gold florals between verses, sura headings in red thuluth on illuminated panels, margins ruled in colours and gold, juz’ and other text divisions marked in margins within illuminated devices, marginal commentary in shikasteh script, catchwords in black, three double pages of fine illumination in colours and gold, floral and calligraphic lacquer binding with cartouches containing poems on the patron’s name, and dated 1285/1868 13.4 by 8.2cm.
£2,000-3,000

34 Qur’an, Arabic manuscript on gold-sprinkled paper, Persia, 18th-19th century
153 leaves, 25 lines per page written in naskhi script on gold-sprinkled paper, gold dots between verses, sura headings written in gold thuluth within ruled panels, margins ruled in blue and gold, re-margined, juz’ and hash divisions marked in margins within illuminated devices, marginal commentary in nasta’liq cursive on shikasteh script, catchwords in black, gilded lacquer binding with green and gold floral border bands 13.5 by 9.5cm.
£5,000-£10,000