

COURT PAINTING AT UDAIPUR

Art under the patronage of the Maharanas of Mewar
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Fig. 109a. Maharaja Amar Singh II in an elephant howdah at a tiger hunt. Udipi, c. 1700–05. Private collection, London.
Fig. 109b. Maharaja Amar Singh at a tiger hunt (detail). Udipi, c. 1700–05.

scenes, the Rana, bearded and with hookah, watches a nauch, bathes with his ladies and accompanies them in the Gulab Bari rose garden. There they gather petals on gold trays, for use in making rose-water or the clear *gulabi* liquor. These intimately observed scenes convey this Rana's tranquil, hedonistic absorption in the passing moment.

A few paintings of the reign depict more dynamic recreations, such as hunting. To the hawking scenes and the bear hunt discussed earlier may be added pictures, in the grisaille manner, of the Rana on an elephant spearing a rhi-

nuceros,⁸⁸ a subject probably deriving from a Bundi-Kotah model,⁸⁹ and participating with six sardars in a polo match, against a sparsely grassed, plain ground.⁹⁰ These works by the Rana's leading portraitist show some of his characteristic refinement but are less convincing in conveying a sense of action or movement. Even so, important innovations were introduced in this genre, particularly the application to the recording of court life of the continuous narrative technique first developed in manuscript illustration. Initially used to tell the story of the royal hunts in successive stages, as in the Hodgkin hawking picture, it would later be extended to all the public ceremonies, progresses and *tamashas* of the Mewar Ranas. Thus the narrative method invented for the timeless, mythic events of the epics and *Puranas* was applied, without evident contradiction and often with a similar quasi-religious mystique, to the annual festivals of the court calendar and to the royal hunts, with the nimbate Rana as presiding figure.

It was another unnamed painter, probably trained in the manuscript tradition but also skilled as a portraitist, who produced the most effective hunting picture of Amar Singh, the *Tiger hunt at Dhikali ri Nagra* (figs. 109a–b).⁹¹ Composed in a horizontal format and larger than usual scale, the hunt is set in a stylised hillscape teeming with dense clusters of hunts-



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men in costumes with vibrant yellows, oranges and reds. The Rana himself is less the focus of attention than one onlooker among many, though he is given a prominent position in his howdah amid a large entourage. Within the central thicket the main action of the pursuit and slaying of the lurking tiger is shown in five successive stages. This narrative method would be elaborated and reused countless times in later Udaipur shikar subjects.

The enlarged scale of this tiger hunt is itself a reflection, within the restricted medium of paper, of other developments in court painting, on a still grander, indeed panoramic scale. Probably these included wall-paintings, of which nothing now survives; scenes of palace and court life had been long treated as mural subjects at Bundi and Kotah, and these would have been familiar to Amar Singh. The vogue for large cloth-paintings, initiated by the seventeenth century series of life-size Rana portraits, was certainly continued in his reign, and developed in an ambitious, topographical direction. One such work, almost two metres in length, shows the Rana in full *durbār* with twenty-two nobles on the terrace in front of the City Palace (fig. 130).³⁶ In the

palace courtyard, coloured pale green in the Mughal fashion, animal fights are watched by crowds of spectators, including a contest between elephant and rhinoceros, taking place in front of the Rana. Perhaps for the first of many times in Udaipur painting, the long eastern range of the palace, from the Zenana Mahal on the left to the newly completed Amar Vilas apartments on the right, with cypresses protruding above the roof-line, provide an imposing and carefully

Fig. 130 Maharana Amar Singh II and his court attending an animal fight in front of the palace (detail of a large painting on cloth), Udaipur, c. 1705. Menzies royal collection, Udaipur.



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Fig. 111 Maharaja Amar Singh II at worship at the temple of Ulaggi. *Udaipur*, c. 1700–05. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Fig. 112 Maharaja Amar Singh II supplicating to *Vishu Ji* Creams. *Udaipur*, c. 1705. Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

delimited backdrop for the grand assembly and *tamasha* below. Although the picture surface is much rubbed, the drawing is of good quality, considering the unusual scale of the work, and may be by the painter of the tiger hunt and his assistants.

In another cloth-painting of about the same size, the palace and courtyard are the setting for an epic, apparently uncompleted battle between the royal elephants Raj Hans and Gara Rao, shown in nine successive stages, among animated crowds of onlookers.¹⁰⁹ Very unusually, the Rana himself does not appear; the subject is the elephant fight itself, shown in a fully developed form of continuous narration. The style is similar to the cloth-painting of Amar Singh watching animal fights, and this suggests a dating to his reign, around 1705–10, or less proba-

bly, at the beginning of Sangram Singh's reign, before the construction of the Tripolia gateway in 1726. The view of the palace, here more erratically drawn, is extended northwards to include the outer courtyards.

In a further northward extension of this palace theme, another large cloth-painting takes in not only the full eastern range of the palace but a panoramic view of the city and the hills, lakes and rivers surrounding it.¹¹⁰ An elephant running about the courtyard is again shown in continuous narrative. Rana Amar Singh is seated with several nobles within the Sabha Siroamni ka Darikhana; his portrait is not wholly convincing, a sign perhaps of later re-touching. Authentically of this period is the general deluge of monsoon rain from heavy thunder-clouds; some courtiers wear shields on their