

Realms of Heroism

INDIAN PAINTINGS AT
THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM

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Indian Drawings in The Brooklyn Museum

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Every Indian workshop that produced miniature paintings also produced drawings, many of which were made as preliminary sketches for paintings. Because most drawings were considered to be works in progress or rough studies, patrons of Indian painting rarely expressed interest in these unfinished works. For this reason, very few drawings have been found in royal collections (S.C. Welch 1976, p. 14), and until recently, relatively little attention has been paid to Indian drawings by scholars or collectors.

Indian drawings survive primarily because they were kept by painting workshops and by families of artists who passed them down through the generations. These drawings served as records of past work and as examples of draftsmanship for study by apprentice painters. Unfinished paintings and even fragmentary sheets of scratch paper were saved if they contained one fine sketch.

Many drawings are unfinished miniature paintings that were abandoned at various stages in the painting process. As such, they provide a valuable explanation of how the Indian artist composed and prepared a painting. Miniatures were often created by a team, with the most skilled and experienced artist delineating a composition, which would be finished by a colorist or team of colorists. One unfinished painting from Kangra (cat. no. 217) shows the coloring in progress and suggests that backgrounds and minor figures were completed before any color was applied to the central figure. Perhaps work on this painting was interrupted as the first colorist passed the piece on to a more skilled colorist, who was to finish the figure.

The master draftsman maintained control over the finishing of the painting by leaving instructions for the colorists. Notations, either written (as seen in the Sirhi Malkot flag drawing D52) or in spots of paint (visible in several of the Museum's drawings, among them D39, D41, **D43**, and D55), indicate the colors to be used throughout the composition or in particularly important segments. Other drawings are carefully shaded and detailed even though this extra effort would be hidden beneath the opaque colors of the finished painting. By adding modeling and detail to the out-

line, the master could indicate to the others the sort of subtleties and mood he hoped to express in the painting.

A master draftsman's work might be copied several times for coloring by others. Pouncing was the most common mode of transferring a composition and is still practiced today. The original drawing is covered with a thin, translucent page, often of deer skin, and tiny holes are pricked through the two sheets along the outlines. The thin sheet is then lifted off and placed on a clean page, and charcoal dust is poured onto it, passing through the holes to produce a dotted outline identical to the original. Careful examination reveals the tiny pounce marks in several of the drawings in the collection; in one of the Museum's drawings (D17), the marks are particularly visible. The translucent page was used to keep the original drawing clean, but workshops often skipped this step and sifted the charcoal through the original drawing. This would explain why some of the drawings (notably D1, D20, D26, D28, and D30) are extremely dirty or dark. The pouncing process was used to transfer entire compositions as well as individual figures or other details that were then worked into new scenes.

Copying was the primary means by which young apprentices learned to paint and draw. By repeatedly tracing the works of the masters, the student's hand and eye memorized important forms and figures. One drawing in the collection (D10) illustrates the importance of the Mughal tradition to Rajasthani artists at Bikaner. Here, a Bikaner artist has carefully copied a Mughal *darbar* scene in order to gain a better understanding of Mughal style and techniques. Probably a number of the drawings in the collection were made as educational exercises, which may explain why they were left unpainted. Although many may be copies from, or preliminary sketches for, known images in other collections, none of the Museum's drawings have so far been linked to finished paintings.

All the drawings in The Brooklyn Museum's collection are on paper. The finest paper was reserved for the Mughal imperial court and was often imported from Persia. Paper of varying degrees of roughness was made in India from combi-

textures of jute, linen, silk, and bamboo fibers. To create a stronger surface for painting, numerous pages were glued together; occasionally, particularly in the Panjab Hill schools, scraps from past sketches and old ledgers were used as backing for a clean page (Pill and Glynn 1976, p. 3), which was burnished to create a smooth drawing surface. In the Panjab Hills school at Kangra, the page was often painted white before any drawing was made (S.C. Weldt 1976, p. 15). The image was usually drawn in a black, carbon-based ink with a thin squirrel-tail brush, or sometimes with a stylus. Lead pencil was not used by Indian painters until the early nineteenth century (Parimon and Newman 1986, p. 108). The Museum's collection includes two drawings from this later period in which lead pencil was used: a Pahari sketch (D56) and a Western-style portrait study of a maharaja (D82).

When the artist drew an image that was to be painted, he generally began by sketching on the page in a thin or lightly colored ink. Even the most rudimentary outlines are remarkably precise, set down on the page in clear, confident lines unlike the loose freeland drawings of many Western artists. A number of planning sketches were made prior to drawing on the painting surface. The practice drawing (*bastakka*) was usually made on a rough scrap of paper. (All traditional Indian terms for the painting processes are from Sivaramamurti 1978.) The Museum's collection includes a number of these scratch pages, some containing finished, fully colored and shaded studies interspersed with scribbled notes and thumbnail sketches (see D27, D32, and D81).

After a preliminary sketch (*sanpauvalika*) had been made on the painting surface, some workshops would prime the page with a thin coat of primer, usually a lead or kaolin white, which was burnished to create a smooth painting surface. Many Rajput schools did not use a white ground for painting, but the Mughal-influenced schools, such as Kangra, Bikaner, and Jaipur, seem to have preferred it (Johnson 1972, p. 141). The first sketch, occasionally in orange (as in the Kangra drawing D75), can be seen faintly through the white priming layer. The final composition (*chhambanika*) was drawn in black or sepia ink on the new surface, often with alterations to the first sketch. In the *Illustrations from a Harvir Hall scene* (D75) one can see numerous differences between the orange and black compositions. Often corrections were made to a preliminary drawing by blocking out sections with opaque white paint and then redrawing the image. The patches of bright white correction paint seen under the figure of Krishna in D19 would have been invisible in the finished painting.

As preparations for painting, the final drawings were refined to varying degrees. Some are merely outlines, some are enhanced by thin washes of ink or color; some outlines are bold and thick while others are needle sharp, allowing for greater elaboration. The means of refining final drawings seems to have differed from workshop to workshop and often corresponds to the painting style of the area. The

Vishnukhacharya, a seventh-century text on painting techniques, notes that the great masters most valued the line drawing, and other early texts state that the ideal figure is one evoked in a small number of flowing, continuous lines (Sivaramamurti 1978, p. 28). This tradition of expressive outlines and an economy of means is apparent in Indian drawing and painting as early as the Ajanta cave murals of the fifth century AD and continues into the Rajput styles that are sometimes described as indigenous or folk. The drawings from Sirshi (D49, D51, and D53), with their bold lines of varying thickness and their spare, static compositions, have a graphic quality that gives them the appearance of finished works. The drawings from Nagaur (D48) and Mysore (D80) and those in the Kishanganj folk style (D28 and D80) are similarly flat and easy to read. The drawing from Deoghar (D23) uses a more fluid line, which gives a softer, more expressive quality to the image. In the paintings of all these schools it is often the outline, repainted over the colors, that provides the painting with complex volumes and textures.

The Mughal style, which essentially introduced Persian and European traditions to the Indian, did not rely as heavily on outline or on line in general. Typically, the schools that look to the Mughal tradition used a uniformly thinner, lighter outline and gave volume to their images with shading. The unfinished paintings of these schools, with their subtle variations of tone and their carefully rendered details, are more refined by Western standards. Bikaner artists in particular took special pains to "finish" a drawing even though it was intended for painting (see D4 and D5). Other Rajasthan schools and some Deccan workshops produced similarly shaded and detailed drawings, although within a single school the degree of refinement may vary from drawing to drawing.

Some of the Pahari schools show the apparently Mughal-influenced tendency toward the use of tone and away from the heavy line, as, for example, in the work of an artist at Guler who carefully shaded the faces of the figures in a drawing for an illustration to the *Rajavata Purana* (D67). Although shading is not evident in every drawing from Guler (D64, D66, D68, and D69), they all move away from the strong, expressive calligraphic line, seen in drawings from Sirshi and Deoghar, in favor of a thin, rudimentary outline. Other Pahari schools at Kangra and Chamba show a similar tendency toward a thin line (D57 and D71). Although line plays a part in the paintings of all of these schools, it tends to be very delicate and is subordinate to hue and tone.

The artists of the schools most influenced by the Mughal tradition were probably looking at the finished, monochromatic wash paintings on unprimed paper that Mughal artists produced for their emperor (cat. nos. 39, 41, and 43). These paintings are often described as drawings because they contain elements that are simply an outline with little shading. Unlike the bulk of Indian drawing, however, they

were considered finished pieces, made for the patron's delectation and framed with ornate colored borders. In these portrait drawings, the faces are fully rendered in subtle tonal washes with a single dark outline along the profile. The bodies and clothing of the figures are more sketchy, with occasional areas of shading. The Mughal tendency to call attention to specific areas of the composition through varied degrees of refinement contrasts with the more linear "indigenous" Rajput preference for spreading the focus over the entire surface of the drawing in a flat pattern. Lines, where they appear in Mughal drawings, tend to be uniform in width, and the expressive content of the image seems to come from the forms created by the lines and not from the lines themselves.

A small number of finished drawings produced by Rajput artists seem to have been inspired by Mughal drawings. The Museum's collection includes three lightly colored drawings (D25 from Jaipur, D27 from Kishangarh, and D31 from Kota), which appear to be finished works rather than preliminary sketches. All three are portraits. Like the Mughal drawings, they emphasize the face, delicately highlighting jewelry, and merely suggesting the body and its surroundings. These drawings may have been studies for more formal portraits, but they are so exquisitely finished, with touches of gold and finely burnished colors, that it seems likely that they had some value beyond that of a mere exercise.

The Brooklyn Museum has collected Indian drawings since the 1930s, when Dr. Asanda K. Coomaraswamy super-

vised the acquisition of a number of Rajput drawings, most of them from Kangra. Coomaraswamy was an innovator in the study of Indian painting and was the first scholar to devote volumes entirely to Indian drawings (Coomaraswamy 1910 and 1912). If one compares the first of the Coomaraswamy acquisitions, a *Rasamanohari* from Kangra (D76), with a 1980 acquisition, an unusual South Indian drawing of the same subject (D80), one can see how connoisseurship of drawings changed over the years. Early collectors favored the sweet, lyrical images of Kangra and related schools, which were among the first non-Mughal styles to be celebrated by Coomaraswamy.

The history of the Museum's collection generally mirrors the history of Western connoisseurship, and although the Museum would continue to collect drawings in the Kangra style, in later years it would expand its interests to the more abstracted, indigenous styles, including that of the South Indian *Rasamanohari*. After the 1930s, the Museum was slow to acquire more drawings, until the late seventies, when the family of Paul F. Walter donated a large collection of drawings from states throughout Rajasthan, the Deccan, and the Punjab Hills. A second large group of drawings was donated to the Museum in 1981 by Dr. and Mrs. Robert Dicks. Other important acquisitions include a portrait of a Jaipur prince of circa 1799 (D25), donated by J. Aron, and the Mughal drawings donated by the Ernest Erickson Foundation, Inc. (cat. nos. 41 and 43).



D43 *Ram Singh II of Kotah and his son Chattrar Singh hunting wild boar*

Rajasthan, Kota, circa 1840

Sepia ink and color on tinted paper

Full sheet 9 1/2 x 12 in. (24.5 x 30.5 cm)

Gift of Marilyn W. Grounds, 80.261.10



D44 *Rama, Lakshmana, and Hanuman worshipping Shiva and Durga*

Rajasthan, Kota, circa 1850

Ink and color on paper

Full sheet 18 5/8 x 8 1/2 in. (27 x 21 cm)

Gift of Marilyn W. Grounds, 80.261.12



D45 *Equestrian portrait of Ram Singh II of Kota*

Rajasthan, Kota, circa 1850

Ink and color on paper

Full sheet 10 5/8 x 8 1/2 in. (27 x 21 cm)

Gift of Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy,

56.246



D46 *Gaudmalar or Ganda Malhara Ragini*

Rajasthan, Kota, circa 1850

Ink and color on paper

Full sheet 9 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (23.3 x 13.3 cm)

Gift of Marilyn W. Grounds, 80.261.18



D47 *Palace scene*

Rajasthan, Kota, circa 1850

Sepia ink and color on paper

Full sheet 14 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. (37.5 x 26.5 cm)

Gift of Marilyn W. Grounds, 80.261.39



D48 *Raja and ladies at Holi festival*

Rajasthan, Nagaur, circa 1725

Ink with color, pointed for transfer

Full sheet 7 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (18.4 x 13.6 cm)

Gift of Marilyn W. Grounds, 80.261.78