

Eastern Encounters: Four
Centuries of Paintings and
Manuscripts from the Indian
Subcontinent

23 July 2020 – 31 January 2021

Plain English Script

Stop 1: Welcome

Welcome to *Eastern Encounters: Four Centuries of South Asian Paintings and Manuscripts*. This exhibition explores wonderful works of art in to the Royal Collection from the Indian Subcontinent.

The works you see here are some of the best of their kind in the world. They are the Indian version of Old Master paintings in Western art. They are usually kept together in books in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle but have been specially mounted for this exhibition.

As you go around the exhibition, you will see headphone symbols with a number beside them. Look for that number in these notes. The notes will tell you about the item on display. They also include some poetry by the poet Imtiaz Dharker. They are new poems inspired by some of the works of art on show here.

We hope you enjoy your visit, but first here is a welcome from HRH The Prince of Wales:

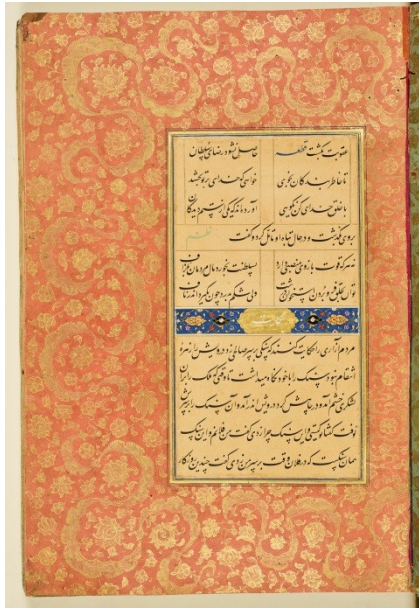
I am delighted to welcome you today.

We have all been living through extraordinary times, where so many things that we might have taken for granted we now cherish more than ever. I know how challenging and indeed, painful, this last year has been for people all over the world. As we emerge from the shadow, still cautious and careful in what we do, valuing our health, families and communities more than ever, we can all take greater pleasure from the things we have not been able to enjoy. Today, as you walk through these spaces, surrounded by the work of talented artists and craftsmen over the centuries, perhaps it reminds us that not only have people lived through trying times before – although few quite like the one the Coronavirus crisis has brought – that they have gone on to flourish creatively after.

Royal Collection Trust, of which I am Chairman, is a charitable trust, and by visiting today, you are personally helping to ensure that not only can the wonderful works of art on display be conserved for future generations, but that the Collection can be seen by as many people as possible. Whether here, in galleries across the country, or online, the Royal Collection is enjoyed by millions of people every year, a source of inspiration, understanding and joy for so many.

I hope you enjoy your visit.

Stop 2: *Gulistan of Sa'di* RCIN I005022



This book comes from Persia, which we now call Iran. In AD 1258 the Persian poet Sa'di – one of the greatest medieval Persian poets – wrote a collection of stories and poetry known as the *Gulistan*. It is one of the most important works by a Persian author ever written. For centuries it was the main book read and studied in schools throughout the Persian-speaking world, but was also a book which people would continue to refer to throughout their lives. For British army officers in India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries it was the book used to teach the Persian language. This is one of the most beautifully illuminated examples of the *Gulistan* in the world.

The poet Imtiaz Dharker, has written a poem inspired by this copy of the *Gulistan*. She noticed a particular Persian word, which in English means 'story' which seems to have been slightly damaged. She imagines it has been nibbled by an insect walking across the page...

Story

*In the manuscript, the verses
are written out on pages washed
with subtle colour, aquamarine, coral, peach.
The artist worked with a crafty hand
and picked out this one word in blue:*

hikayat, story.

*On the gold-flecked page
An insect has bitten through
the edge of story.
Silverfish, I hope you relished
That sliver of gilt.*

The Rose Garden

When I came to the poem *The Rose Garden*, I was looking at the work in the *Gulistan* and it inspired me in ways that I hadn't even expected.

04:28...

*When you come back from the rose garden
your eyes have changed colour
and the scent of attar follows you home
like a lover.*

*Your return to the city of pointing fingers,
to howling sirens and beeping phones,
the clicking, the screens all on, and you
still have petals falling from your mouth.*

*What did you do there? Did you meet
Sa'di or only his words?
Did you lose your way in that script,
its arabesques and curves?*

In that place, did the poets utter in roses?

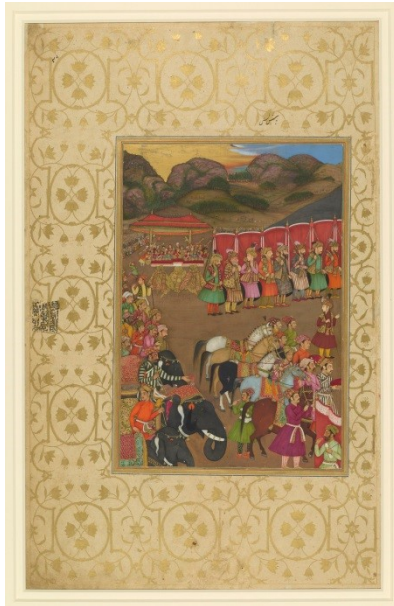
*You cross from corner to corner
like a fugitive in this time. Your eyes
are watercolour, and in them, the city
and all its workings have been stamped*

*with gilt. Calligraphy blazes
over the walls of the meat market.
But the streets are brambled, thorned,
and on the illuminated borders*

there are drops of blood.

Stop 3: *Padshahnama*

RCIN I005025.k



These paintings are from the *Padshahnama* – the ‘Book of Emperors’. It celebrates the life and the family of Emperor Shah-Jahan. It is the most famous Mughal manuscript in the Royal Library.

The manuscript’s first page – the *shamsa* – is on display at the start of the exhibition. Its pages and bindings are shown in the cabinet room nearby.

There is no other manuscript like this one. It is the only copy of a *Padshahnama* left that contains illustrations done at the time that it was made. It has 42 paintings which are all quite spectacular. They show important events in the Emperor’s life –ceremonies, processions, victories on the battlefield – all painted by the Emperor’s top court artists. These are images of power, with the Emperor and princes always shown above everyone else.

This copy of the *Padshahnama* was in the library of the monarchs of Awadh, in Lucknow. It was presented to Lord Teignmouth, Governor-General of Bengal, but he refused to take it. Instead he suggested that its richness would make it more suitable as a gift for George III.

Stop 4: The decapitation of Khan Jahan Lodi RCIN I005025.q



This painting has been in the Royal Collection for over 200 years – ever since the *Padshahnama* manuscript was presented to George III at the end of the 18th century.

The subject is Khan-Jahan Lodi. He was a favourite of Emperor Jahangir, but he openly rebelled against Emperor Shah-Jahan, the man who succeeded Jahangir. On 3 February 1631, Khan-Jahan Lodi paid for his rebellion with his life.

This painting may show a horrific scene but it is full of details that the artist wants the viewer to look at carefully – not simply to glance at and look away. The details of faces and the colour of figures in the painting have been painted with the point of a very fine brush – for example the general on the left, standing with his horse. This method creates a picture made of thousands of tiny dots. The wrinkles around his eyes are painted in a way that shows how he was thinking and feeling as part of this scene. His armour is painted with real silver and gold, ground up and mixed with gum and water. These paints produce the same texture and shine as his armour did in real life. His knee-guards have ugly faces on them which seem to be reacting to the gory scene in front of them.

Right at the centre of the painting we can see blood spilling out of Khan-Jahan Lodi's neck. This was painted with a red pigment made from liquid made by insects – it is shiny and sticky so is quite realistic when used for painting blood. Just behind there are cut-off heads lying on the floor with flies all around them, feasting on fresh blood.

When the poet Imtiaz Dharker looked at this gory painting, she saw that it was filled with so many beautiful images that she almost did not see the blood. She focused in on the smallest object she could find in it, at the centre of the horror. This was the fly – and this is a poem she wrote about it:

Fly...

*Such beauty. You will stop in your tracks
when you see how all the bodies
interlock, in the dance that happens
after war.*

*Perhaps your eyes will be drawn
to the warriors, the victorious stance
and embellishments, the lovingly rendered
gleam and puff of armour, trappings,*

*button, collar, cuff;
the symmetry in the horses' necks,
the way they curve, the downward
dip, pointing to where I am.*

*My coming and going makes
a crown around this severed head,
a lacy ruff around the neck, honeyed
with enemy blood*

*and all is good. A chinar bends
above the scene, watchers are ranged
under a gold-leaf-sky, every hair meticulous,
the hands most delicately placed,*

*each human face serene.
Only the grotesques recoil as if
they have been forced
to witness something obscene.*

*Today the enemy's head lies here;
the victor's head another year, and threading
it all together is my lazy flight. I wind
and weave at the centre of the carnival*

*of the senses, engorged. The unhurried music
my buzzing makes reminds you
of something you always knew.
It stares you in the ears.*

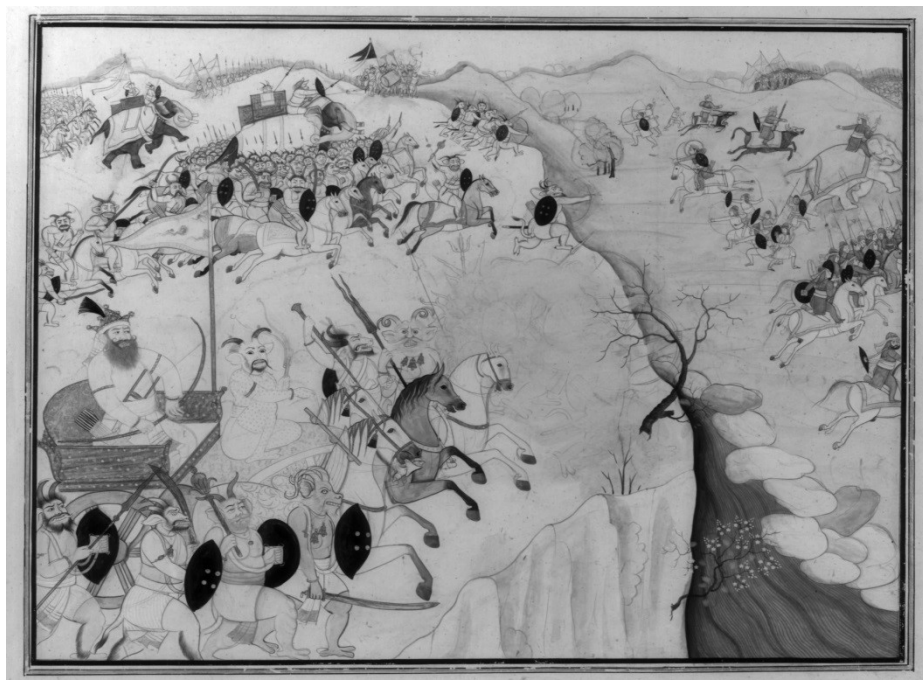
*On every flowered field
Where the beloved lies, I will be the one*

*to deliver the final delirious kiss, to say
the last goodbyes.*

**Stop 5: Conservation and discoveries
RCIN 92523 I**



Rachael Smith, conservator at the Royal Collection, examined this series of paintings using near-infrared spectroscopy, which uses a particular kind of light for scientific analysis. This is an image of the painting she saw ...

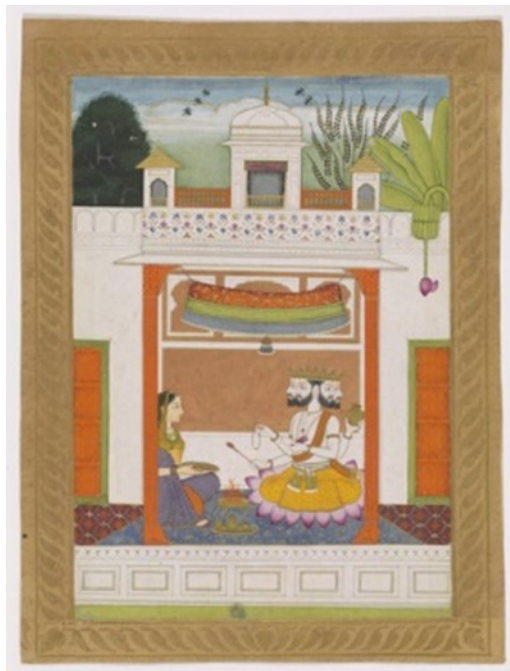


This analysis of the painting showed lots of big changes between the first drawings and the finished painting. Under infrared light an army of demons appears at the centre of the painting, some with tridents and spears, in what is blank space in the finished work. These

figures are drawn very confidently and their outlines are quite detailed. Changes like this tell us that this was the actual sheet of paper on which the artist was working out his ideas.

Rachael also examined the painting by shining a light through the artwork, revealing some drawing underneath in a red ink. Using two colours in the first drawing allowed the artist more opportunity to change and improve his ideas. This is a feature of working in a family workshop, where several different artists were working on paintings, making lots of changes before they were happy with the final composition.

Stop 6: The musical mode *Khambhavati* RCIN 925221



This painting from north India is a picture of a musical tune. The tune is called *Khambhavati*. The artist has painted his idea of what this music is – he imagines it as a beautiful young woman performing a fire ritual for a god with four heads. The god is Brahma, the Creator god.

Music was seen as a way of expressing a longing for spiritual things, and a search for knowledge.

Indian music is very different from Western music. In classical music from north India there are no set musical compositions like Western symphonies. Instead there are different ‘moods’ called *ragas*. *Ragas* are linked to different emotions and sometimes are connected to seasons or particular times of day. They contain the notes musicians use to give their performance – they make the music up using those notes as they play.

Khambhavati is a *raga* associated with autumn and the cool weather after the Monsoon. It is about spiritual feelings and meditation, and is played slowly.

Stop 7: The Holy Quran RCIN I005001



This beautiful Quran belonged to Tipu Sultan and it contains notes written in his own hand. He was the 18th-century ruler of the state of Mysore. It was presented to George III by Sir Charles Wilkins, the Librarian of the East India Company.

For Muslims The Quran is the Word of God. The Prophet Muhammad was aged 40 and living in Mecca when the angel Gabriel started to visit him during the night to recite the verses of the Quran to him. The whole work was revealed to him over a period of about 23 years and Muhammad was able to remember the verses. The language of the Quran is Arabic, but it is unlike the language spoken by millions of people every day – it is of the highest quality, better than even the finest classical Arabic.

After Muhammad's death the verses of the Quran were written down. The writers designed particularly beautiful writing to do this.

The Quran contains the beliefs of Islam. It talks about one God, his messengers, his revelations and the Day of Judgement. It also covers all the practises of the religion, including questions about law, and how Muslims should behave.

Layer 7a: Quran scroll

RCIN I005002



This narrow scroll from southern India contains all 114 chapters of the Quran. As it is rolled the tiny words form the shape of a verse called the 'throne verse' – many people think that this is the most important verse in the Quran. It is made up of fifty words which contain the meaning of 'the oneness of God' – the one who made and runs the universe. It is the best known verse in the Quran and many Muslims know it off by heart.

The 'throne verse' speaks about the special nature of God. He is the only God, ever living, ever watching. He is at the centre of the universe. Everything in the heavens and on earth belong to him. He knows everything. He is watching, preserving and protecting his kingdom. Because he gives protection people recite the verse if they feel that they need protection. Those who recite the verse – and it is meant to be recited, not simply written or read – get a blessing from God.

This is an English translation of the 'throne verse':

God – there is no god but He, the Living, the Great Sustainer. Neither drowsiness nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. Who is the one that would intercede with Him – except by His permission? He knows what is in front of them and what is behind them. And they cannot encompass any part of His knowledge, except that He should wish. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and keeping watch over them does not overwhelm Him. And He is the Exalted One, the Great.

**Stop 8: Maharajah Ranjit Singh by Imam Bakhsh Lahori
RCIN 452414**



Maharajah Ranjit Singh was a Sikh ruler of the Punjab. Here he is shown as a warrior, riding his fine horse. Although he was paralysed on his left side, and blind in his left eye, the Maharaja was a famously brilliant horseman. This is how he was remembered by his descendants, and the painting by Imam Bakhsh captures that powerful side of the Maharaja's character. Above his head are a halo and parasol – symbols connected with an Emperor. This painting was made some time after the Maharaja's death in 1839. The artist has taken us back to the images of Mughal emperors from the 17th and early 18th centuries.

It is interesting to compare this portrait to another of him, painted just a few years earlier by the British artist Emily Eden. She was the sister of the East India Company's Governor General, Lord Auckland. In her portrait – see the image below – she shows the Maharaja sitting in an armchair:



A European visitor to the court of Lahore observed that when the Maharaja was sitting in an ordinary English armchair, with his feet tucked under him, he looked rather uncomfortable. But as soon as he mounted his horse his whole body seemed to be brought to life by a spirit inside him. On his horse he looked very graceful.

Ranjit Singh's son, Sher Singh – the new Maharaja of Punjab – presented this painting to Queen Victoria.

It was given to her at a very important stage in the relationship between Britain and India. Only a few years later, in 1849, the East India Company took over the running of the Punjab, and Ranjit Singh's youngest son, Duleep Singh, was removed from the throne. Duleep was only ten years old at the time. He was the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire.

Later Duleep was brought to Britain where he became close to Queen Victoria. She became godmother to several of his children. Her watercolour sketch of Duleep Singh at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight is displayed in the case below. It shows him dressing Prince Arthur, her third son, in Indian clothes.



Imtiaz Dharker wrote a poem about the sketch called ...

Boy

*There is a crowd standing behind you
but you are unaware, engrossed in the task
of tying a turban for a child from another country,
tucking in the curls to make it right, saying,
This is what we wear, where I come from.
This is who we are.*

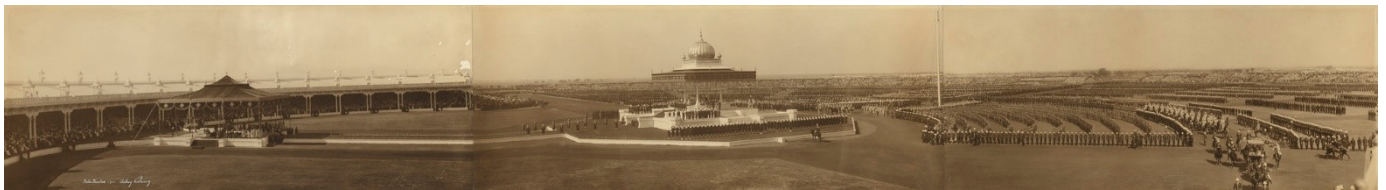
*Who we are. We stand outside the line
of vision, millions of us, like the labourers
in paradise gardens who scurried underground
so they never crossed the path of the king.
If we have faces, they are not drawn here.
There is no paper large enough to find*

*or hold us. The pages of this sketchbook,
turned, rustle like the forest they come from
and speak another language,
knowing the surge of sap and leaves
breaking through to somewhere high
and blue.*

*At sixteen, you are kneeling
beside a royal child, being painted by a queen
with a silver and sable brush. Cobalt
washes over seas and continents, rinses
a country away behind your back,
separating you from who you are,*

and what you could have been.

Stop 9: Durbar Panorama RCIN 2935183



These three photographs form a panorama (an unbroken view) of key moments during the spectacular Delhi Durbar of 1911. When looked at from left to right, King George V and Queen Mary are first seen being welcomed by the Indian rulers; they then appear under the Throne Pavilion for their coronation as Emperor and Empress of India; finally, the King and Queen leave the Durbar in an open carriage.

There had been two Durbars before the 1911 Durbar. There had been one in 1877 to declare Queen Victoria as Empress of India. There was a second one in 1903 for King Edward VII. The 1911 Durbar was particularly elaborate and it provided an opportunity for all the rulers from across India to come to Delhi and to pay respect to their new Emperor and Empress.

A panorama is an exceptionally good way to capture and convey a large amount of information because you can include a lot of information in the view. In this particular photograph, we actually have three photographs – three negatives that were used to make the image, and three different parts of the ceremony are presented. So it's a narrative image – it tells a story.

Conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed this exhibition. It contains many magnificent works of art, created with the greatest artistic skills and finest materials. They celebrate the huge range of work by artists from South Asia – a part of the world whose history is so closely tied in with the history of modern Britain.

These works are still a source of inspiration for different artists as Imtiaz Dharker shows in her poem *Face to Face*.

Face to Face

*Who is telling this story? The one
who gives the gift, or the one who takes?*

*Ask the rose garden
to abandon its symmetry*

*and lift off the shining page
as if it were a bird*

*arriving from another country,
its plumage resplendent.*

*Tell the wind to send rumours
of a language you begin to understand,*

*written in a script that looks
like your heart beating.*

*Reorient the built form to catch
sunlight at a different angle,*

*turn the moon upside down
to be cupped in another palm.*

*Let your hands slide off parchment
to touch human skin,*

*a face you will look into
and love for its difference.*

The Royal Collection

To find out more about the Royal Collection, please visit our website at www.rct.uk. There you can find out about future exhibitions and keep in touch by signing up to our e-Newsletter or by following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Please remember that you can return to The Queen's Gallery, free of charge, for a year, by converting your ticket into a 1-Year Pass. Just sign the back and ask a member of staff to stamp it before you leave.

These notes have been compiled from a tour produced by ATS with information from the following experts:

Emily Hannam, Royal Collection Trust
Sophie Gordon, Royal Collection Trust
Rachael Smith, Royal Collection Trust

Mohammed Abdel-Haleem, King Fahd Professor of Islamic Studies at SOAS, University of London
Saqib Baburi, Curator of Persian Manuscripts at the British Library
Imtiaz Dharker, Poet
Viram Jasani, sitar and tabla composer and musician
Partha Mitter, writer and historian of Asian art and culture
Dr Yuthika Sharma, historian of South Asian art