

invites visitors to immerse themselves in the visual splendour and refinement of Mughal painting.

Guided tours in German: Saturdays, 2 pm.

Another World

Contemporaneous with the exhibition *Akbar's Golden Legacy – Paintings for India's Emperors*, sixty additional Indian paintings will be on display in the exhibition *Another World* at Park-Villa Rieter, providing insights into the artistic traditions of Malwa, Rajasthan and the Pahari region.

Guided tours in German: 25.10.2015 / 6.12.2015 / 10.1.2016 / 21.2.2016 / 10.4.2016 (11 am)

akbar's golden legacy

9.10.2015
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paintings for india's emperors

museum
rietberg

For more information please visit the museum website:
www.rietberg.ch/akbar

The Mughal Emperors in India

Even today the name Mughal or Moghul evokes images of immense power. This Muslim ethnic group of Central Asian origin was descended from the illustrious conquerors Timur and Genghis Khan. From 1526 until well into the eighteenth century they determined the destiny of India, achieving a degree of territorial expansion and consolidation of power not seen on the Indian subcontinent since the Gupta dynasty, which ruled India from the fourth to the sixth century.

When we think of the artistic achievements of the Mughals, it is their magnificent architecture – buildings like the Taj Mahal or the Red Fort in Delhi with their intarsia and delicate latticework windows – that spring to mind. Yet in the *kitabkhana* (scriptorium) of the Mughal court, far from the public eye, painters and calligraphers were busy producing small-format pigment paintings in gold on paper that are regarded as the quintessence of Mughal culture.

Origins of Mughal Painting

Although Babur, India's first Mughal emperor (r. 1526–1530), was regarded as extremely cultivated, there is no evidence that he was a particular patron of painting. That changed under his son Humayun (r. 1530–1556), who is himself reputed to have been a painter. Having been driven out of India by the Pashtuns following his enthronement, he visited the Regent Shah Tahmasp at the Safavid court in Isfahan where he saw outstanding examples of Persian painting. He brought a number of painters back to India with him, but died within a year of his return.

The stylistic and organisational foundations for Mughal painting were laid under his successor, Akbar the Great (r. 1556–1605). In this early phase the émigré Persian artists led the way, recruiting and instructing local painters and supervising the execution of the first major illumination projects.

Sources of Mughal Painting

Mughal painting was not simply a continuation of the Safavid tradition, however. India already had a centuries-old tradition

of Buddhist and Jain illuminated manuscripts patronised by the Sultan rulers who preceded the Mughals. These also played a role in the evolution of Mughal painting.

Alongside traditional Persian literature and poetry, a large volume of new texts were translated into Persian during Akbar's reign and richly illustrated. The fact that these also included collections of fables, Hindu texts like the *Ramayana* and even the life of Christ testifies to the open-mindedness of the foreign rulers. The Mughal dynasty also invested significant resources in copying and illustrating historic texts, Babur's autobiography and the chronicle of Akbar's rule being two of the most important examples.

Later Mughal Painting

The size of the imperial workshops was reduced by Jahangir, Akbar's successor, and became smaller still under Shahjahan. Initially, at least, this did not have a detrimental effect on the quality of the paintings: witness, for example, the illustrations in the *Padshahnama*, the chronicle of Shahjahan's rule, most of which is today preserved in the Royal Collection in England.

In the medium term, however, the erosion of court patronage meant that many painters had to find new clients. The governors of the courts in Awadh, high-ranking officials and Rajasthan princes followed in the footsteps of the Mughal emperors. The consequence was a new, more broad-ranging repertoire of painting that blended local traditions with the subject matter in which the new clients were interested.

Mughal Painting at Museum Rietberg

The collection of around 1,700 Indian paintings held by Museum Rietberg enjoys an outstanding international reputation. In particular, the holdings from Rajasthan and from the Pahari region at the foot of the Himalayas are among the best in the world. Thanks to a permanent loan of superb paintings, the Museum has been able to mount an extensive exhibition devoted to the artistic achievements of Mughal painting. Showing eighty-five works divided into six thematic groups (Imperial Biographies, Foreign and Native Themes, Life at Court, Albums, Portraits, and the Artistic Response), the exhibition