

Galerie Hioco

Detailed file – Mughal panel (P621)

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What do we like in this sculpture?

- The composition, at first sight very symmetrical and composed, turns out to be animated and joyful with a food-loving parrot and an emancipating acanthus.
- Birds, stylized vegetal foliage, blooming flowers: this omnipresence of the natural world skillfully reproduced in the stone recalls the passion for nature of the great Mughal rulers.
- All these elements put together give *in fine* an extremely decorative character to this large architectural panel (1 m or 39 ⅜ in high!).

I. Detailed description

Architectural panel (P621)

Sandstone

Central India

18th century, Mughal Empire

H. 101 cm or 39 ¾ in

The Mughal Empire (1526 – 1858)

This work is to be linked to the remarkable artistic production of the Indian subcontinent when it was under the domination of the Mughal dynasty. India was conquered by the Mughals as early as 1526, but it was during the reign of Akbar (r. 1556-1605) that the dynasty really established and painting and architecture flourished. His successors, Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) and Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1657), also had sumptuous reigns and further developed the arts. A great naturalism can be noted during this period. Mughal India is very open to exchanges and the resulting art combines Persian aesthetics with local craftsmanship and European images that circulate via engravings as early as the 16th century.

A panel for a palace

With the development of major construction programs during the reign of the Mughal rulers, the architectural decor plays a very important role. This large sandstone panel was part of a wall cladding and probably decorated the façade of a pavilion within a palace. The great skills of stone carving are evident here in the rendering of the finely carved decoration in low relief. Here we see a pair of graceful parrots perched on the leaves of a large, stylized acanthus, the one on the right standing on one leg only, using the other to carry a seed to its beak. This scene, surprisingly vivid despite its almost perfect symmetry, is set within a quadrangular frame that turns into an arch of scrolled foliage, elegantly curling up in the upper part of the relief. The panel is summoned in its spandrels by a pair of open rosettes.

Interest in nature, local influence and European herbaria

The floral naturalistic decoration triumphed during the reign of Shah Jahan and the decorative patterns of acanthus leaves and rosettes on this beautiful panel derive from the classical Mughal style that persists in palace architecture even after Mughal power began to weaken. This type of decoration seems to be partly influenced by the spread of European herbaria in the subcontinent, such as the famous *Hortus Floridus* of the Flemish Crispijn van de Passe. Some European inspiration can also be seen in the loops of the ornamental arch above the birds. Finally, if Islam is the religion of the Mughal Empire, a local interpretation is also possible here: the parrot is a symbol of love in Indian art. It is also the vehicle of Kama, the god of love, whose name derives from kam, which means desire or envy.

II. Image of the piece



III. Images of the piece – views of details

All it takes is a raised leg and the love for food of just one of the two parrots to make the very careful and meticulously composed representation of this lower part of the relief lose its fixed symmetry, in favor of a lively, anecdotal, even amusing scene. To preserve the visual balance, the tip of the central acanthus leaf, however, falls on the side of the other parrot.



The naturalist decorations omnipresent in Mughal artistic production reflect the interest of these rulers in observing nature. An obvious attention is given here to the details of the feathers of the wings, those of the tail, but also of the legs, the beak and the eye of the animal.

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It is interesting to note the European influence in Mughal art in general and on this architectural panel in particular. Stylized vegetal foliage, acanthus leaves, rosettes in the spandrels, here all these motifs testify to the great openness of the Mughal Empire to trade and the dynamic character of exchanges at that time.



Very refined, the carving is here also particularly accomplished. One only has to look at the two acanthus leaves passing under the frame delimiting the edges of the panel, and opening out freely on the outside to convince oneself of this. A third, smaller one, takes the same direction. This also makes it possible to see the different levels of the relief: the multiplication of leaves and plant contortions creates as many recessed and protruding parts catching the light and the glance.

IV. Provenance

. This piece comes from the large private collection of an English gentleman. He had acquired it from the London dealer of Indian and Islamic art, Amir Mohtashemi, in 2005.

. We are always very cautious and diligent about the provenance of the artworks we offer. Ensuring the seriousness and reliability of the information given by the former owners is one of our priorities and we then guarantee this origin by engaging our responsibility.

. In order to reinforce this guarantee, we systematically verify that these artworks have not been registered as missing or stolen. As Interpol has granted us the right to directly consult their database of stolen or reported items, we verify by ourselves and issue a certificate attesting to this.

V. Condition report

This large architectural panel is made of sandstone, dated from the 18th century and measures 101 cm high and 50.5 cm wide (39 ¾ x 19 ⅞ in), including the upper tenon, on the right edge. This tenon indicates that the panel had to be inserted into the masonry and attached to another panel, creating a continuous decoration. Remains of mortar are still present on the same edge. On the carved face, only a few slight losses are visible: a superficial loss of material on the birds' legs is evident, a small part of the right bird's tail is also missing, as is the end of the leaf next to it and as are the protruding edges of some other leaves. On the lower right corner of the panel, a detachment of material has caused the end of the leaf to flatten out. Thin lines are visible in the thickness of the left side of the central leaf and the seed held by the parrot, creating a small material discontinuity between the surface layer and the rest of the panel. The whole appears stable. The edges of the panel have some asperities and some losses are evident at its base. All these breaks are old as evidenced by their weathered surfaces. The background of the stele has been patiently polished as indicated by the smooth surface. The sculpted face of this panel was, in an earlier period, entirely covered with a white limewash layer, applied as a preparatory ground for polychrome decoration that once covered many sculptures. Residues of this layer are visible in abundance on the left half of the panel, especially in the upper corner, and much more sparsely on the right half. No restoration was evidenced.

Please note that since we are not conservators or restorers, it must be understood that any condition report we made is a subjective qualified opinion, even if we do our best efforts. Prospective buyers should inspect the piece to satisfy themselves as to condition.

VI. Comparable museum artwork - 1

A panel decorated with flowers and parrots preserved at the Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University in the United States:



[Search Cornell](#)

JOHNSON MUSEUM OF ART

ARCHITECTURAL PANEL WITH DESIGN OF PARROTS, LILIES, AND IRIS



India, Mughal dynasty

Architectural panel with design of parrots, lilies, and iris, 17th century

Red sandstone

39 15/16 x 19 1/2 x 4 15/16 in.

(101.5 x 49.5 x 12.5 cm)

Acquired through the George and Mary Rockwell Fund
2000.141.001

In the seventeenth century, a celebrated floral style developed under the Mughal emperors Jahangir and Shah Jahan that manifested itself in painting, textiles, architecture, and gardens. Influenced by Persian aesthetics and inspired by European herbals, the basic motif was a formal, blossoming plant. Sometimes rather fantastic and decorative, as in this panel, the artist has created an imaginary hybrid of lilies and iris, the lithe, sinuous stems barely able to support their lush, full blossoms.

VII. Comparable museum artwork - 2

A panel with flowers and parrots preserved in the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore:



Relief panel with three flowering plants

This Mughal architectural panel features three flowering plants (lilies and tulips) and four parrots perched on some of the branches. The parrots nibbling the buds is lively and visually engaging.

Date/Period: Late 17th century

Region: Mughal, Agra area, Uttar Pradesh, India

Dimension: Object size: 61 x 138 x 4 cm

Accession No.: 1993-01751

Material: Red spotted sandstone

Collection of: [Asian Civilisations Museum](#)

Credit Line: Purchased with funds from the Indian Bank, Singapore

Category: [Furnishings](#)

VIII. Our guarantees

- More photos will be sent to you on request.
- In case of purchase, we will establish an invoice that you can pay by bank transfer.
- You will receive our certificate of authenticity with the photo of the artwork, its detailed description and the mention of the provenance.
- We will define together the shipping modalities and we will take care of all customs formalities if you live outside of France.
- If you do not like the piece, we give you the possibility to return it to us and we will assist you with the resulting terms and conditions.