



SKIRA

FOUR CENTURIES OF RAJPUT PAINTING

* * *

Mewar, Marwar and Dhundhar



30805912

Four Centuries of Rajput Painting

*Mewar, Marwar and Dhundhar
Indian Miniatures
from the Collection of Isabella and Vicky Ducrot*

Preface and Notes on the Collection by
Dr Daljeet, The National Museum, Delhi
and Prof. Rosa Maria Cimino, the University of Salento, Lecce

Texts and Descriptions of Paintings by
Vicky Ducrot



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Cover
Vishnu Saves Gajendra, King of the
Elephants (Gajendra Moksha)
Kangra, 1810–15
(cat. P 6)

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Marcello Francone

Editing
Timothy Stroud

Layout
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To Anna Maria





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Dr Daljeet
Head Curator, Department
of Painting, National
Museum, Delhi

Foreword

Dr Daljeet, an eminent art scholar, obtained her doctorate on “A Study of Central Indian Miniature Paintings, Malwa and Bundelkand” at the Barkatulla University, Bhopal. She has worked as an archaeologist at the Archaeological Survey of India. She was commissioned by the Government of Punjab to organise an exhibition on the Sikh Heritage to celebrate the third centenary of the Khalsa. She has written several books on Indian Art and Painting, among which: *Mughal and Deccani Paintings from the Collection of the National Museum, Delhi*; *Indian Miniature Painting, Manifestation of a Creative Mind*; *Goddess in Indian Miniatures*; *Krishna, Raga se Virak Tak*; and *The Sikh Heritage: A Search for Totality*. At present she is Head Curator, Department of Painting, at the National Museum, Delhi.

‘Four Centuries of Rajput Painting. Mewar, Marwar, and Dhundhar’, a catalogue by Vicky Ducrot of over 250 Indian miniatures from his personal collection, reflects a collector’s passion, a connoisseur’s enthusiasm, and a scholar’s profound understanding and appreciation of art. Most of the paintings in the collection are outstanding specimens of Indian art. Not many museums or libraries, even in India, can claim to have such a large and excellent collection of Indian paintings as Mr. Ducrot’s. A catalogue of a private collection like this, which is not on public display and hence cannot be otherwise accessed, has a rare significance to scholars and connoisseurs of art. In addition to the fact that it numbers more than 250 miniatures, almost all of which are previously unpublished, some of them representing dispersed folios, and perhaps missing links, of such series as *Ramayana*, *Meghdoot*, *Rasikapriya*, *Mahabharata*..., the catalogue carries a well-researched text, with detailed entries and elaborate introductory notes. Published simultaneously in English and Italian, it will reach more eyes than an art book ordinarily does.

As the art collector, researcher and writer of this catalogue, what Vicky Ducrot has done is very rare and commendable. During Europe’s two hundred year long dominance of India several Europeans showed an interest in Indian art and antiquities, and carried away with them huge quantities of her artefacts that after many generations still comprise family legacies. Mr. Ducrot’s collection has a very different origin. He is a first generation collector of Indian art, originally knowing hardly anything of it except that what he looked for had to reveal the essential India. He had little liking for Mughal painting – the most sought after form of Indian art in Europe and the costliest – or anything that

reflected Persia, Europe, or any other style but Indian. “Educated in a Western mould” and having “a solid knowledge of Western painting, sculpture, music and architecture” he could distinguish the essentially Indian from the Europeanized or Persianized. Although his collection contains paintings from almost all schools of Indian miniatures, it does not fail to reveal Mr. Ducrot’s preference for Rajput court painting, whether from Rajasthan, Central India, or the Himalayan hill states, and he has a strong reason for this preference. What he did not find in Mughal painting he found in Rajput painting. In this he discovered the essential India, her soul and ethos. The best sets of paintings in his collection are those executed at the courts or under the patronage of Rajasthan’s three major ruling dynasties – the Sisodias, Rathors and Kachhawahas – who ruled the Mewar, Marwar and Dhundhar regions of the erstwhile Rajputana. In tribute to their art Mr. Ducrot has chosen to name his catalogue ‘Mewar, Marwar, and Dhundhar’.

Incredibly, Mr. Ducrot’s collection, huge and outstanding as it is, is the result of the effort of a single person, though in his wife, Isabella, he always had by his side an enthusiastic supporter. As Vicky Ducrot admits, his wife – who has an eye able to discern a piece of art from piles of rags, and an inborn love and understanding of Indian art – has been his sole companion during his forty years long quest. As his collection grew piece by piece, so his understanding of and love for Indian art increased. Not only did the two travel to India several times to explore street or footpath curio shops in towns and cities, havelis in remote Rajasthani thikanas and Himalayan hill states, or art auctions the world over, even the focus of his business as a tour operator shifted from profit-

A Raja Goes Hawking, detail
Kishangarh, ca. 1780–90
(cat. KS 7)

earning world tours to cultural tours, often confined to India, the Far East and southern Asia – a rare example of taste orientating the character of trade. His efforts to understand his material were just as earnest. He did not hesitate to travel to New York, Delhi or anywhere else just to decipher an inscription or know a painting beyond its colours and lines.

Though the first painting in the Ducrot collection was a chance discovery, Vicky always had a craze for Indian miniatures, something that was subsequently transformed into a passion or addiction. He obviously had a different propensity, for while the love for art was one thing, the love for an Indian miniature was quite another. An Indian miniature is a painting with an altogether different temperament. It is not always the diction of the lines and colours that allows interpretation of an Indian miniature, as it does most other classes of paintings. One is required to delve deep into an Indian miniature beyond its colours and lines, and sometimes beyond its aestheticism and the delight it imparts, to know its underlying pith, its very soul. Often folios of Indian miniatures manifest the Unmanifest; this is a kind of divine aura not actually depicted, and hence only those who have a natural instinct or inclination to look within and discover its manifestation are able to understand and admire this art. To them, what sometimes appears to be crudely executed is often intriguing, exciting and captivating, as something in it, something beyond its formal appearance, moves the observer's mind. This is the case with Vicky Ducrot. He does not just choose an artefact, whether a painting or other artwork: he chooses a certain class of painting, a painting that needs to be explored deeply before it reveals its true nature to the eye. It is a painting that has something to say, therefore the eye is required to listen as well as view.

The collection is not without Mughal and Deccani paintings, though their number is very small – seventeen paintings and three folios with neatly rendered calligraphy. A Ramayana folio, in all probability from Datia in Bundelkhand, a painting representing a group of sadhus in an encampment rendered in *nim qalam* style, two Ragamala folios from Deccan, and a few portraits are some of the more important paintings in this section. One of Ducrot's unique finds is a set of 25 paintings and drawings and 14 folios of Islamic calligraphy and Telegu script pasted recto and verso on 21 separate cardboard folios. The paintings of the set do not reveal any thematic or stylistic unity except that most of them are endowed with great aesthetic beauty and are elegantly rendered.

However, bound together the set was introduced to Vicky Ducrot as a Vizianagram album. Vizianagram is the name of a village in Andhra Pradesh. As claimed, the album once belonged to the princely family of Vizianagram, a thikanadar of the Nizam of Hyderabad. It covers a wide range of themes, from Ragamala and Yogini paintings to scenes of hunting and polo play, and from portraits of princes and nobles to those of Kabir, Plato, Aristotle and King Solomon, obviously with no apparent connection such as an album requires. Some of the folios are in Mughal style, some reveal a blend of Mughal and Deccani (the style that evolved at the Mughals' court when in Deccan), a few others are typical of Oudh, while the rest represent different idioms of Deccani art: Bijapur, Kurnool and Hyderabad. Similarly, some paintings appear to be from the early seventeenth century while others are from the late eighteenth century.

The Pahari section has thirty-six paintings, each an excellent work of art. Though paintings in Kangra style dominate the Pahari section, those from Garhwal, Mankot, Guler, Basohli and the Punjab plains are as just as significant. Paintings illustrating the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Meghdoot and Rasikapriya apart, legends like Sassi Punnu, traditions like Dasavatara, and myths like Shiva and Parvati are the other themes that these Pahari miniatures represent. The collection has just one portrait but it is an excellent one and belongs to the early phase of Pahari art. A few elegantly illustrated folios of an unidentified Gurmukhi manuscript in this collection could be of exceptional significance to scholars of Sikh art. The collection has a small section of sixteen miniatures from Central India but again each piece was rendered by masterly hands. They include five Ragamala paintings, one Baramasa folio, two folios each alluding to episodes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, four episodes from the life of Mahavira, the Jain Tirthankara, one representing the myth of ocean-churning, and another illustrating an unidentified Sanskrit text.

The core of Vicky Ducrot's collection is from Rajasthan: mainly Chittor, Udaipur and Nathdwara, the Mewar region; Jodhpur, Bikaner and Kishangarh, the Marwar region; and Jaipur or Amer, the Dhundhar region. It also has some eleven paintings from Bundi and Kota, which were areas of another region in Rajasthan, called Haroti, once ruled by Haras. Though small in number, Bundi and Kota paintings have amazing thematic width. They include two paintings on the Krishna–Lila theme, one illustrating an episode from the Ramayana, two representing popular

love legends of Sohini Mahiwal and Laila Majnun, two Ragamala paintings, and four others. One of the latter four portrays Dip Singh of Bundi hunting a boar, a second is of Chattar Sal II of Kota riding a horse. The third represents a somewhat different dimension of hunting, in which Bundi's Ram Singh, squatting on the ground with a sword in one hand and a shield in the other, awaits a tiger coming towards him. The fourth painting represents a theme very rarely seen in miniatures: Maharao Ram Singh II is shown reviewing his cavalry from his elephant. The paintings on the Krishna theme give a dramatic twist to the Lila episodes, and the Ragamala painting has used an altogether different imagery for representing the raga-putra Lalit.

The Mewar section, the largest with 69 paintings, ranges from around mid-seventeenth to late nineteenth century. It covers a very wide range of themes, some being quite novel and interesting. Krishna-Lila has been widely represented in miniatures but acrobats' performing for Krishna is almost a new dimension. Similarly, many miniatures portray Hindu princes visiting Sufis at their khanqah, but a khanqah that has a separate compartment and a female divine to instruct and guide the ladies accompanying a prince is a new element. Paintings illustrating Bhagavata Purana, Ramayana, Gita Govinda or even Panchakhyanopatra and Bhakti-ro-patra are not uncommon, but some folios illustrating the Sarangdhara text, or another, the story of some king who had seven daughters, are definitely rare and demand further investigation. The folio from the king's story has a single line inscription reading "A king has seven daughters; they have gone to the garden". Obviously, this is the start of a tale, not its end. Many royal collections have erotic paintings portraying royal personages involved in coition but anything revealing the identity of a prince, as in two erotic paintings in this collection, is quite exceptional. The collection has an excellent series of deity-paintings comprising images of Lord Ganesh, Vishnu attended by his consort Lakshmi and mount Garuda, Trimurti, Rama with Sita, his three brothers and Hanuman, Shiva in Ardhanarishvara form, Harihara, the Shiva family, Radha, and Krishna and Parvati adoring Shiva. A painting inscribed as Raga Nand Malhar, a ragamala painting or otherwise, uses a rare kind of celestial imagery. Animal portraits, those of the royal elephants and horses identified properly with their names inscribed on the top of each folio comprise another significant section of the Ducrot collection. Meetings, processions, hunting, scenes

of sensuous pursuits, and more, are other themes of Mewar art in the collection. It also includes two rare Mewar folk paintings from the early eighteenth century.

There are fifty-one paintings from the Rathor-ruled Marwar region, twenty-three from Jodhpur, twenty-one from Bikaner, and seven from Kishangarh. Most of them portray routine themes characteristic to these schools. Themes of two of the Kishangarh miniatures revolve around Radha and Krishna, the most cherished theme of Kishangarh art. Of the three others, one portrays a royal lady drinking wine, another, Chand Bibi out hawking, and the third, a noble hawking. Though all seven paintings are excellent examples of the Kishangarh art idiom, four of them – two devoted to the Krishna theme, one to the swing festival, and one that portrays Chand Bibi – are simply outstanding. Ten of the Bikaner miniatures represent various Ragas and Raginis, two, Krishna-Lila episodes, another two, royal ladies bathing, one, the Buddhavatara, and another one, the month of Jyeshtha, a Baramasa folio. The collection also has an excellent yogini portrait and two animal portraits, one of an elephant and other of a red mule. In addition, it has a quiz portrait of composite horse figures. A group of four miniatures in which an identical figure is repeated punishing human beings, male and female, is quite interesting. Undoubtedly, these paintings represent the Jain perception of how wrong-doers are chastised by Yama in hell after they die.

Though finely rendered, the paintings from Jodhpur and Jaipur are all devoted to routine themes. The Jodhpur themes are ragas, raginis, processions, hunting, court-scenes, erotic involvement, portraits, rituals, and a couple of them devoted to deity-worship. A major part of the Jaipur miniatures comprises raga and ragini paintings and male and female portraits, including one of a horse. Four paintings represent deity images, and one, Lanka's demon king Ravana. Of the remaining two, one is devoted to Tantra, and another portrays an aspect of harem life.

In conclusion, I congratulate and compliment Vicky and Isabella Ducrot for this massive collection, the catalogue and their entire effort. As an Indian I feel grateful to Vicky for his exceptional love of Indian art, which has led him to preserve this great heritage and bring it to public attention through this catalogue. I feel honoured in being asked to write its foreword.



Collection of Indian Art in Italy

Prof. Rosa Maria Cimino graduated from Rome University with a thesis on the History of Indian Art. She then specialised in Oriental Archaeology, and got her doctorate in Indian Art. She has worked for a long time for the cultural office of Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente. Today she is Professor of Indian Art at the University of Salento, Lecce. She has visited India on study trips more than 30 times. For IsMeO she has organised three exhibitions of Oriental Art. In 1985 she mounted a memorable exhibition of Rajput court painting in Turin, which included works from the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the Rietberg Museum, Zurich, and the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. She has written many books on Indian art, including a seminal one on *Wall Paintings of Rajasthan (Amber and Jaipur)* and is now in the process of publishing the second volume, *Wall Paintings of Rajasthan (Mewar)*.

Asavari Ragini, detail
Bikaner, or Deccan ca. 1740–60
(cat. BN 15)

The miniature collection of Vicky Ducrot has been well analysed by Dr. Daljeet, who has explained its specific strengths: she has underlined its significance not only in terms of the schools of painting and the subjects of the miniatures, but also noted the high quality of the works of art. She has also remarked on the taste of the collector in choosing the paintings, helped by his wife Isabella: they both have an eye for beauty.

Dr Daljeet, an important scholar, has underlined the Ducrots' love for India, which grew and grew during countless trips to its more remote regions. Their love for this country has made Vittorio study its culture, literature, and the myths that condition the life of its inhabitants and lie at the source of Indian artistic inspiration.

I have had the same kind of contact with India for more than thirty years through my research on Indian art, so I share his constant attention to all that is Indian, an attention that is reflected in his choice of miniature paintings. India penetrates the observer: it becomes part of one's cultural identity and year after year one notices that one's way of life has been modified not only by its spiritual values, but by the Indian way of life.

The secret of this osmosis has perhaps been the fact that both of us entered the Indian world at the right time and with the right frame of mind – in the 1970s India was still remote and therefore “new” – and with the desire to explore the remotest parts of the country rather than by reading books on the subject. The wealth of this ancient culture has let us “see” (the seeing of the great rishis, the sages of Indian antiquity) our own world from a different angle, making us rediscover its beauty and its values, and endowing it with new

significance. This is the miracle that results from an encounter with another civilisation, an event that in the Western world is seen with diffidence due to a fear of losing our identity.

The importance of this collection becomes all the greater if we consider the history of collecting Indian works of art in Italy.

Italy has a great history of studies on the Indian subcontinent, but lacks ancient collections in comparison with the countries that have had greater historical and economic contacts with India. The first European travellers to India were Italian, starting with Marco Polo who, on his trip back from China, visited the western coast of the subcontinent. Some famous names come to my mind: Nicolò dei Conti (14th–15th century), Ludovico da Vertema (15th century), Giovanni da Empoli (15th–16th century), Pietro della Valle (17th century) who, delving into Sanskrit scriptures, were the first Europeans to translate Indian religious and philosophical texts directly.

Among the missionaries who travelled to India in the hope of converting another country to the Catholic faith, the most important were Roberto Acquaviva, who resided at Akbar's court, and Roberto de Nobili (17th century), who lived as a *sannyasin*, an ascetic. The writings and the correspondence of these and many other travellers rescued India from the oblivion of medieval times. In Roman times India was not considered very far away: Seneca wrote “if the winds are favourable, a trip lasting some days” (Nat. Quest. 1, Proef 13).

From the writings of travellers and missionaries the West rediscovered these lands, which popular imagination had peopled with horrible monsters – this is how they still appear in the Borgian map of the world in the first half of the

fifteenth century – and curiosity, commercial interests, religious propaganda brought Europeans to India. The first grammars, and first translations from Sanskrit and from Tamil were soon published, as well as the first commentaries on Indian religious and philosophical beliefs, which did away with the “false and lying gods” with many heads and many arms. Giuseppe Costantino Beschi (17th century) was one of the great Italian savants who lived for a long time in India. He was a great scholar of Tamil: in addition to a Tamil grammar and a dictionary, he wrote many poetical and prose works in this language and today is considered an important author of classic Tamil literature.

Indian culture and religion had therefore kindled the interest of travellers, merchants and missionaries, but not Indian art. The Western artistic sense is rooted in Classicism: for centuries this has not let us understand aesthetic parameters distant from our vision of art. Very few collections of Indian art were assembled in Italy before 1950, and all of them are of negligible artistic value: they are mostly stone and bronze statues of gods, ritual objects, late drawings and paintings. It is quite a different story with Chinese art, which was already being collected in the eighteenth century.

The oldest and most important collection of Indian works of art was assembled by Cardinal Stefano Borgia, one of the heads of Propaganda Fide, a Jesuit religious institution that coordinated the evangelic work of missionaries all over the world. Cardinal Borgia had a great collection of Graeco-Roman and Etruscan works of art. He used to ask missionaries to bring back to him statues and paintings of gods and idols from their missions. In Velletri he created a museum that has been named after him: Goethe visited it and was impressed but the collection was dispersed when he died. Some of the works from the Indian section – bronze and stone sculptures and miniature paintings – can be seen in the Ethnologic Missionary Museum in the Vatican, and in the Capodimonte Museum in Naples.

Some minor collections of the same type are the nineteenth-century ones belonging to the indologist Lorenzo Pullè, to Cavaliere Jacopo Nani from Venice, and to the ethnologist and traveller Enrico Hillyer Giglioli. Some better quality artefacts, now in the Florence Ethnological Museum, were assembled by the Sanskrit scholar Angelo de Gubernatis. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Count Luigi Primoli, a descendant of Napoleon, made a long trip to India

but brought back low quality wooden and papier-mâché sculptures of no artistic value, even though he owned a magnificent collection of European paintings and furniture.

The revolution in aesthetic conventions brought on by the artistic experience of Impressionism and other modern art movements, together with the increasing knowledge of Indian thought and culture – this due to the lively activity of the Italian indological school in universities, mainly after the end of World War II, and to the establishment of air services between Italy and India – encouraged the assembly of collections of Indian art in the early 1970s. The greatest Italian scholar in the field of Oriental studies was the traveller and author Giuseppe Tucci, who founded the National Museum of Oriental Art. This museum houses the collection of Gandhara art that Tucci and his disciples excavated for decades in the north-west of the Indian subcontinent, sponsored by the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, IsIAO. However a lack of funds and donations prevented the growth of the Indian collection: only now, in these months, the donation of an important collection from Brescia (bronzes, stone sculptures, miniatures, textiles, ritual objects, and models of temples) will give a wider vision of Indian culture and religion.

The increased interest in Indian culture has encouraged new collectors of great Indian art (sculptures and bronzes, but also miniature paintings, which are more easily transported). In the field of painting preference has gone to the Mughal School because its style, influenced by Persian art, makes it accessible to our taste.

Vicky Ducrot has gone further than the general public's liking of Mughal art. He prefers the “provincial art” of the Rajput principalities of Rajasthan, Central India and the Punjab Hill States. His lack of interest in imperial art and his love for the art of the provinces is due to his deep identification with the peoples he has studied and liked. The distortions of perspective, the simultaneousness of the storytelling, the brightness of the colours where the technical invention of chiaroscuro has not been accepted, and the stylistic and iconographic conventions do not encourage an easy approach to Rajput painting. Only a deep knowledge of these works can capture one's imagination and create “*rasa*”, the artistic taste that texts of aesthetics speak about.

In terms both of quality and size his collection is therefore unique in Italy, because it contains representations – with coherence of style and iconography – of the most important Rajput

schools of painting, in addition to excellent Mughal and Deccani miniatures.

He is not the type of collector who hides works of art from the public at large: the publication of this fine catalogue shows that he wants to share his treasure with lovers of Indian painting. It includes excellent colour reproductions and a well documented text, which lets even a casual reader understand the subtleties of the miniatures.

The text includes detailed accounts of myths and legends that are often difficult to identify. They belong to the mythological and religious world of bards and itinerant storytellers that is fast disappearing. His library includes rare and obscure texts on Indian painting that he has assembled with the same meticulousness as his collecting of miniatures. His extensive knowledge has made him an expert in this field of research.