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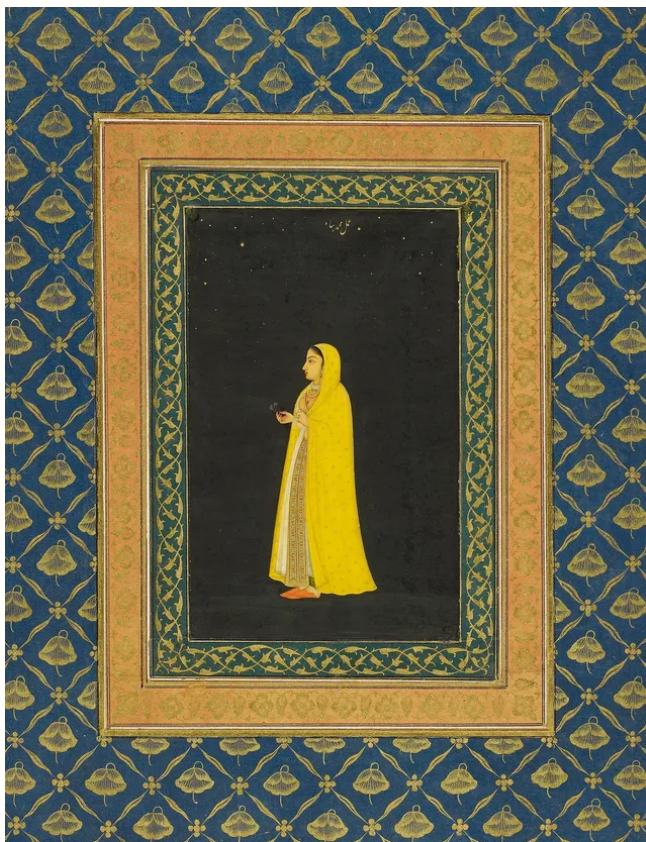
Never-before-seen South Asian miniature paintings from British Royal Collection to go on view in Milton Keynes

The exhibition at MK gallery will track the development of the art form from the 16th century to the present day and will explore how the works ended up in the UK to begin with

Gareth Harris

19 June 2023

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Unknown Artist, A Late Mughal Album of Calligraphy and Paintings c. 1720-1740
Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023

An exhibition of South Asian miniature paintings opening at the MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, UK, this autumn (*South Asian Miniature Painting and Britain, 1600 to Now*, 7 October-26 January 2024) includes four items from the Royal

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ninth-century Saint Rabia al-Adawiyya of Basra, the first female saint in Islam.

The show brings together more than 180 small-scale works dating from the 16th century, which were prized for their portability and technical skill. The miniatures depict scenes from sacred and secular texts, mythological figures and political narratives. The curators Hammad Nasar and Anthony Spira will also explore how the miniatures ended up in UK collections via acquisitions made by James I in the early 17th century and also through employees of the colonial East India Company.

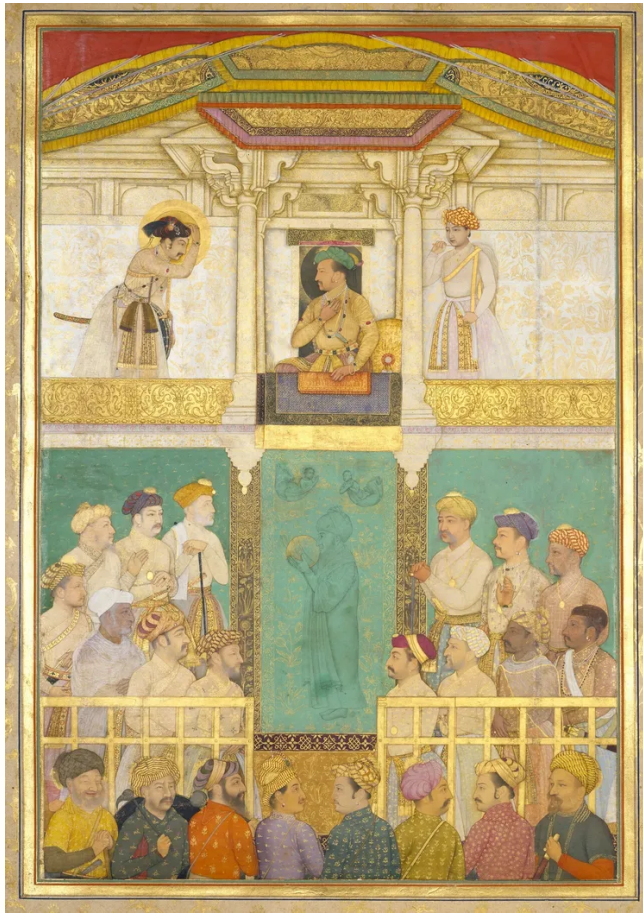
Other Royal Collection items seen for the first time include a gold painted page of Persian verse, written by Nizami, an epic poet in Persian literature and an illustrated copy of the *Ishqnama* (Book of Love) a manuscript containing 104 illustrations commissioned during the reign of the last King of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah (reign, 1847-56).



Shahzia Sikander's *The Explosion of the Company Man* (2011)
Private Collection, London / Karachi

Meanwhile, works by contemporary artists inspired by the miniature tradition also feature including *The Explosion of the Company Man* (2011) by Shahzia Sikander and Imran Qureshi's *A Lover Waiting For His Beloved* (1999).

The Pakistani artist Ali Kazim is showing a series of 16 portraits in response to a Company School drawing (a style of miniature Indian miniature painting developed by artists who worked for patrons in the East India Company during the 18th and 19th centuries) housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London along with a large watercolour drawing (*Conference of the Birds*, 2020).



Attributed to Abid, Padshahnamah, *Prince Khurram departs from Ajmer for his first Deccan campaign* (30 October 1616), c.1635-40
Royal Collection Trust / © His Majesty King Charles III 2023

Kazim tells *The Art Newspaper*: “I remember my formative years at the National College of Arts Lahore had inspired me in various ways. I wasn’t aware about the miniature painting and the printmaking until my first year at the art college. I enjoyed learning these disciplines during the foundation year.”

Kuwaiti-born Hamra Abbas, another participating artist, says: “Miniature painting has influenced my works in multiple ways, from painting to digital works and sculptural installations. Currently, I use a combination of miniature painting and gongbi [a Chinese painting technique] to paint small-size photorealistic portraits on silk.”

The exhibition will also feature works from the collections of London’s British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

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