



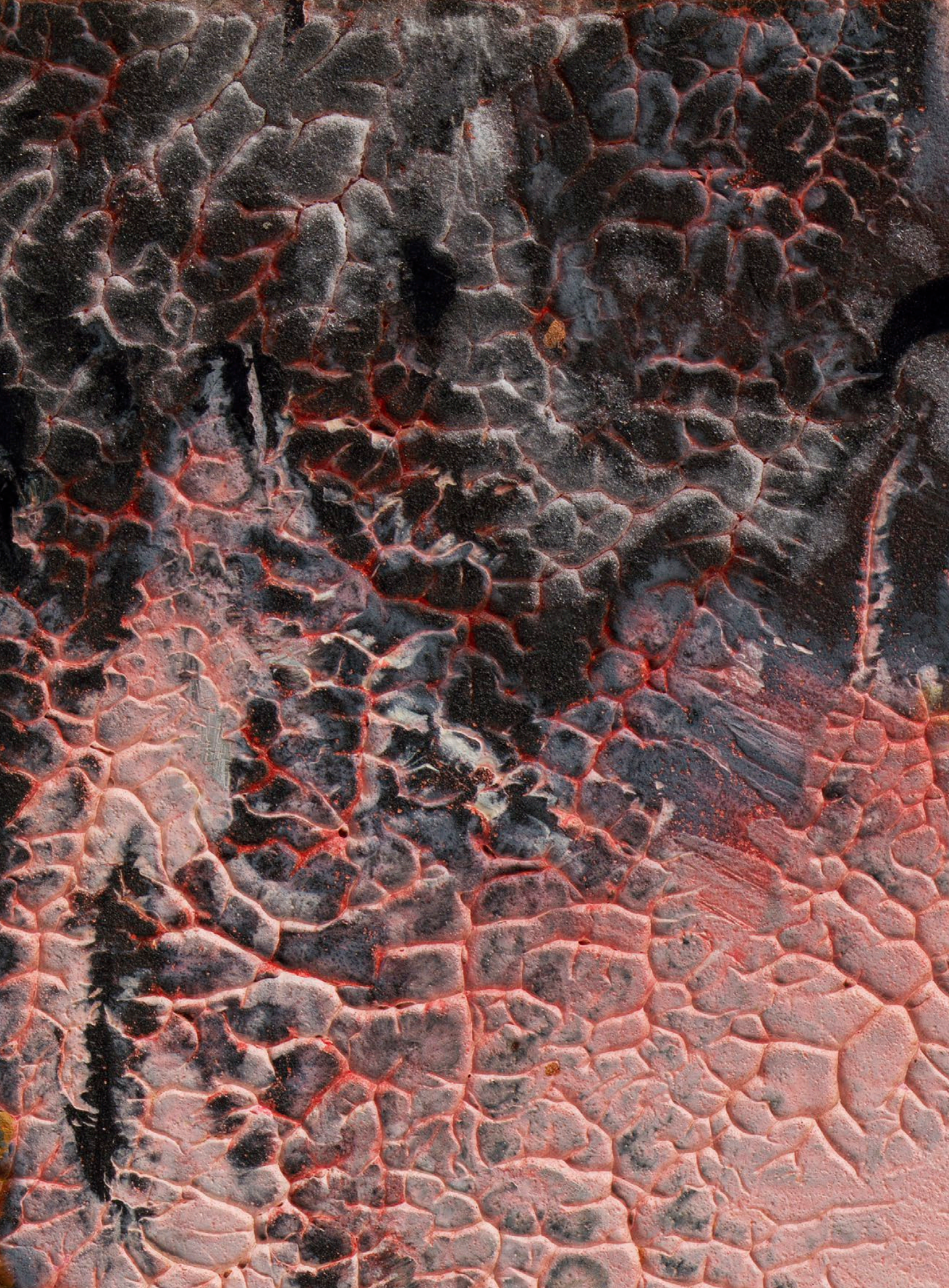
Prahlad Bubbar

SPIRITUAL ARCHITECTURE

FRIEZE VIEWING ROOM

9 - 16 October 2020

Preview 7 - 8 October



PREFACE

Two intellectually stimulating and ground-breaking exhibitions recently opened in London: ‘Tantra: Enlightenment and Revolution’ at the British Museum and ‘The Botanical Mind’ at the Camden Arts Centre, to which our gallery has contributed; these shows explore the themes of spirituality within the organic and inorganic as well as the power of objects to transform religious, cultural and political thought.

In keeping with these thematic approaches, Prahlad Bubbar is delighted to present: ‘Spiritual Architecture’ for Frieze Viewing Room. Moving from interiority and a spiritual space into the world at large, the artworks chosen for our exhibition in this year’s frieze masters document this transcendental passage from medium to eye, and function as conduits for wonder, illusion, introspection and reflection.

A remarkable 17th century altar head of the Hindu goddess Gauri epitomises the divine feminine energy that characterised Tantra as it inspired the dramatic rise of goddess worship in medieval India, while a late 18th century North Indian white marble fountain with Kufic design magnificently embodies the Islamic garden as a place where body and mind find realisation in the dialogue between terrestrial life and the divine. A rare and superb vintage gelatin silver print of 1925-26 by Constantin Brâncuși of his bronze ‘Bird in Space’ challenges the notion of what is medium and what is spirit as, through this image, the celebrated sculpture takes flight into the heart and soul.

All artworks are for sale and prices are available on request.

CATALOGUE

Acknowledgements

Nicholas Moss
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Caroline Turner

I.

HEAD OF THE GODDESS GAURI

Karnataka, Southwest India

17th century

Copper alloy with inlay

H: 33 cm

This exceptional 17th century head of the Hindu goddess Gauri, the wife of Shiva, is an object of devotion and probably the finest extant Gauri head of this period. The consummate and mesmeric power lies both in its structural balance and symmetry as well as in its portrayal of the deity as compassionate and accessible.

The perfection of its physiognomic traits is a great achievement in bronze casting but, beyond the technical accomplishment of its casting lies a profound understanding of character and naturalistic portraiture.

Idealised beauty is reflected in the symmetry of the facial features – in extraordinary and delicate balance, these are modelled so that the left and right sides of the face are perfectly mirrored. There is, however, no mistaking the transcendental compassion of the character as the head is bent slightly downwards, attentive to the supplicant. The eyes, decorated with glass inlays, focus the gaze of the great Hindu goddess on the object of her compassion.

The ears are also angled to reflect engagement with the viewer – facing forward and exaggerated in dimension, they are delicately detailed with internal structures such as the tragus. Perforations along the helix indicate the previous placement of multiple earrings and at the lobes, one still displays such an ornament.

At the nostrils of the great aquiline nose, three perforations, where separate rings were once placed, can be seen; however, as the eminent scholar and writer, Dr Pratapaditya Pal, comments, women in the region frequently used two.

The refined treatment of the parted coiffure is only surpassed by the sheer beauty of the fan-like tiara at the crown of the head, its shell-like form curving and tapering to floret features at the extremities.



In the subtle and exquisite moulding of the internal structure of the human head, the artist also expresses a recognition of the importance of the facial *nadis*, those channels or energy pathways that carry *prana*, or life force, and connect at energy points of the body, or *chakras*. On the present head, these meridians are recognized as points of reference, either *nadis* or *chakras*, throughout the face, notably on the forehead, temples, nostrils, philtrum and chin.

Speaking further about this remarkable object, Dr Pal, adds that “every feature is delineated with nuanced precision, not only revealing the unknown sculptor’s anatomical knowledge but also his skill in modelling.”

Provenance

Important private collection, USA, early 1970s.

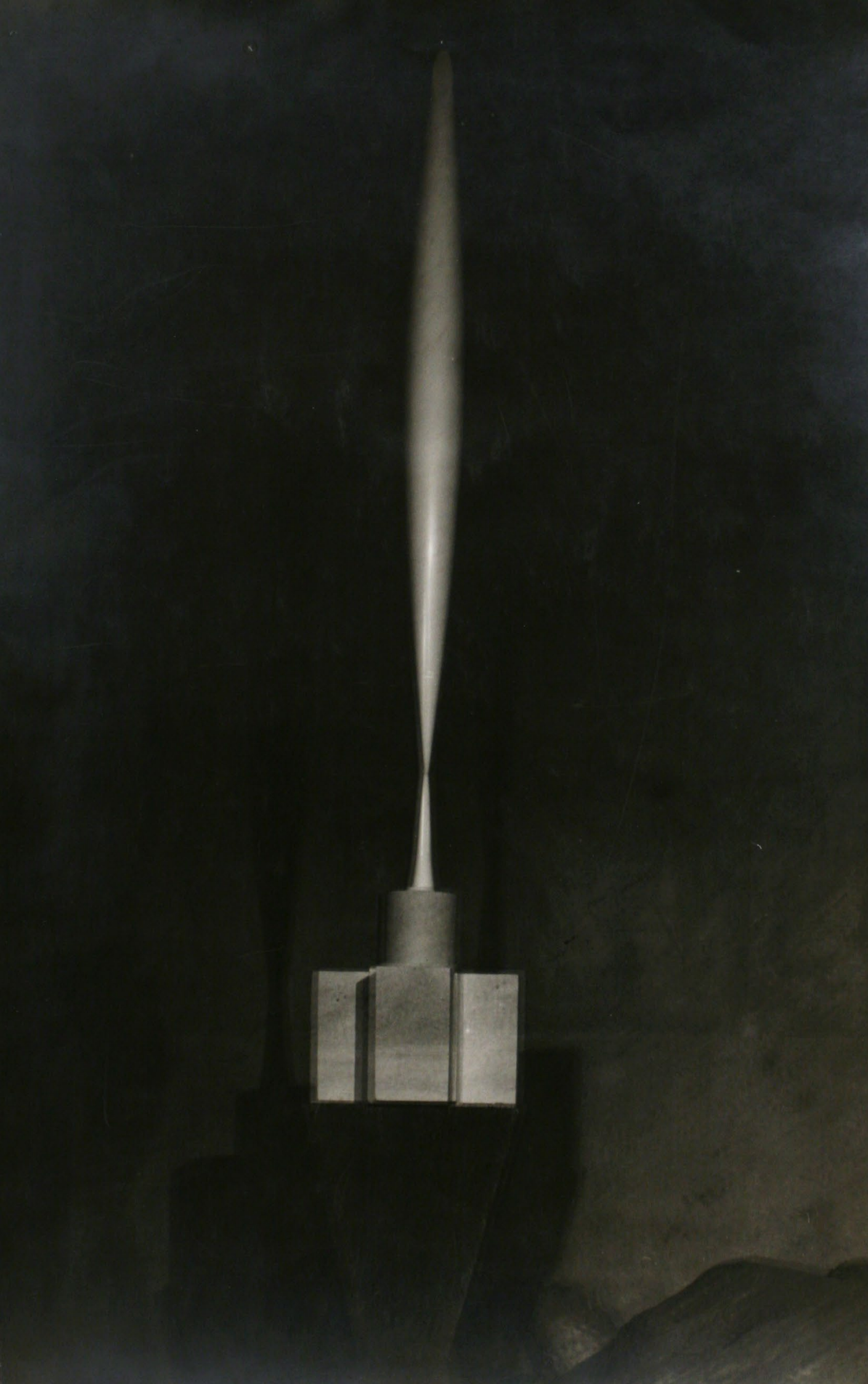
Exhibited and Published

Pal, Pratapaditya. *The Elegant Image: Bronzes from the Indian Subcontinent in the Siddharth K. Bhansali Collection*. New Orleans: New Orleans Museum of Art, and Mumbai: The Marg Foundation, 2011, p. 139, cat. 69. Exhibition: New Orleans Museum of Art, August-October 2011.

References

Figiel, Leo S. 2007. *Ritual Bronzes of Maharashtra and Karnataka*. West Palm Beach, FL.: published by the author.
Mallebrein, Cornelia 1993. *Die Anderen Gotter: Volks- und Stammesbronzen aus Indien*. Koln: Edition Braus.





2.

CONSTANTIN BRANCUSI Bird in Space

Vintage gelatin silver print

Circa 1925

36.2 x 23.8 cm

Vibrating with energy and luminescent, Brancusi's '*Bird in Space*', circa 1925, is an extraordinary image where the sculpture is a work in motion and both light and darkness play pivotal roles in defining, embracing and releasing it in its imminent flight; in this synthesis of materials, together with bronze, they become equals and ascend to a transformative event.

The 'bird' is shown on the inverted triangle of a wooden pedestal, but it is not tethered – Brancusi understood dematerialization and, in capturing the vibration of the bronze sculpture through focal manipulation, made visible the link between matter and spirit. Both sculpture and space partake in this photographic choreography as metals, both as emulsion and solid, coalesce while the final element becomes the human eye in beholding this transformative event.

The inverse triangle of the lowest base sits in complete shade as if presaging the crescendo to come; it is followed by the wooden cruciform of another base, on top of which a cylindrical base sits immediately under the flared base of the bird. These structures are, effectively, metaphoric launch pads. The bird begins its caressing relationship with darkness, each one an integral part of the other, as the spectral form of the luminous bird vibrates as it radiates and almost pulsates with aural energy.

Brancusi saw photography not as a tool for documentary purposes but as a medium to communicate the meaning of his sculpture and to explore it in spatial and temporal terms. In his pursuit of simplicity and of 'essence,' photography was his attempt to represent the ideas behind the world of physical phenomena.

Provenance

Private Collection, USA (collected ca. 2010).

Published

'Brancusi: Sublimation of Form'. Europalia Arts Festival, Snoeck, p. 119, cat. 120.

Exhibited

'Brancusi: Sublimation of Form', Europalia Arts Festival, BOZAR, Brussels, 2019-2020.

Margulies Collection at the WAREHOUSE, Miami. 'Brancusi: The Photographs', October 25, 2014 - January 1, 2015, Special Exhibition.



THE TAMING OF WILD ELEPHANTS

Attributed to Mir Kalan Khan

Lucknow, India, circa 1760

Opaque watercolour and gold on paper

21.5 x 13.2 cm

This exquisite painting displays the mature style of the artist Mir Kalan Khan. Active circa 1734-1770, he began his career in Delhi as a master painter in the atelier of Muhammad Shah (r. 1719-1748), before moving to Avadh circa 1755. Mir Kalan Khan's style was more experimental than his contemporaries, such as Kalyan Das, who popularised the classicising elegance associated with painting of the Muhammad Shah period. He rejected this formal aesthetic in favour of a more expressive and emotive style that incorporated a range of influences, from masterpieces of the Mughal and Deccani courts to works of art from Europe.

Mir Kalan Khan's understanding of Indian painting styles, particularly those of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, is evident in the present work. Employing the traditional vertical format he depicts an elephant hunt, with two fighting elephants as the epicentre of action. Whilst primarily a genre scene, the painting has a strong narrative quality, expressed in three distinct registers. In the distant background a spear-wielding group attempts to capture two wild elephants as they bathe in a lake, while two figures converse with urgency and gesture towards them; in the mid-ground, a princely figure with a radiant halo sits astride a rearing horse, a falcon on his arm as he gazes beyond the picture's frame; and finally in the foreground, two elephants clash with glorious, sinuous aplomb, their gold bells jangling, trunks delicately intertwined and bodies colliding with irrefutable grace.

The theme of fighting elephants, specifically tame beasts gone astray to trample an unfortunate mahout, is widely depicted in Indian painting. It was popular in the Deccan and Mughal contexts and found masterful expression in the paintings of Bundi and Kota in Rajasthan. Here, Mir Kalan Khan's elephants are more dynamic than

those typical of Mughal examples and less heavy and muscular in form than those of Bundi and Kota. Their exaggerated pose, fluttering ears, piercing gold eyes and fluid motion are more reminiscent of seventeenth century renditions from the Deccan, particularly Bijapur. This same energy is found in the magnificently coloured horse, its coat a radiant wash of pale blue through yellow to deep orange. The horse's form, derived from a traditional Mughal and ultimately Persian prototype, embodies a tension and expressive complexity equally akin to works of seventeenth-century Deccani art.

Colour plays an important role in the work of Mir Kalan Khan. Conjuring hot red sunsets and glowing forest glades, his otherworldly use of colour imbues the painting with a fantastical, dream-like quality. The ethereal landscape provides sanctuary to the drama of the hunt, its billowing rock forms and softly flowing streams exquisitely rendered with subtle shading and iridescent gold. The liberal use of gold powder, mixed and applied in a European-inspired watercolour technique, is an important characteristic of Mir Kalan Khan's mature style. The rock forms appear luminescent in warm yellow, fading into areas of deep blue and green.

The scene is rendered with remarkable detail, illustrating Mir Kalan Khan's masterful draughtsmanship. Smooth shading is heightened with fine line drawing, evident in the detail of the portraits, the soft furs of the princely rider and the tiny lock of hair caught before his ear. A distinctive feature of Mir Kalan Khan's work is the freely drawn application of black pigment in the form of expressive outlines. Particularly apparent here in the faces of the elephants and the horse and rider, these lines create areas of dramatic contrast, drawing the viewer in and accentuating the sense of drama and energy throughout.





The scene is also imbued with a strong sense of movement; figures lunge and stride with fluidity, almost as though engaged in a dance. Their distinctive round faces, some in three-quarter profile and with eyes that glance inquisitively to one side, are expressive and delicately painted. They are a further characteristic that defines the mature style of this evocative and enigmatic artist, Mir Kalan Khan.

Provenance

Private Collection, France, 1969-2014.
Collection of Mr. C., Paris, 1969.

References

Beach, M.C., Eberhard Fischer & B.N. Goswamy (eds.). *Masters of Indian Painting*. Zurich: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 2011.
Leach, Linda. *Paintings From India. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art*: Vol. 8. London and New York: Nour Foundation in association with Azimuth Editions and Oxford University Press, 1998.
Markel, Stephen (ed.). *India's Fabled City: The Courtly Art of Lucknow*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2010.



4.

MAN RAY Natural Painting

1958
Signed and dated
Acrylic on photographic metal plate
17.8 x 12.7 cm

Although most celebrated for his contribution to modern photography, man ray was also a painter. He held painting in high regard and even referred to it as ‘the acme of human accomplishment. While he focused much of his energy on photography, according to Arturo Schwarz, he was passionate enough in this medium to feel “free to pursue the more interesting but less remunerative activity of painting”’.

Between 1958 and 1965, man ray experimented with acrylic paints, which, due to their drying rapidly, gave him the idea of building upon the automatic techniques used by max Ernst in his ‘Frottages’ and by Oscar Dominguez in his ‘Décalcomanies’.

Here, Man Ray has lost himself with joyful liberty, allowing the medium to act unfettered by considerations of an end point. By simply applying pressure to the hardboard, panel or plate between which he placed a heavy patch of acrylic paint, the paint is free to agglomerate, spread, run or disperse of its own volition.

The ‘natural painting’ is evidence of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed; much as in Rorschach tests, what emerges on the plate is an individual as what is reflected on the retina. The process transcends all considerations of exactitude and planification.

Portrait, landscape, dream or nightmare – the abstraction, with its colourful interplay and textural variation is truly automatic, functioning in and of itself (with a little help from Man Ray’s body weight). By subverting the concept of naturalism in painting, according to Schwarz, Man Ray achieved “more than a technical device, it was an expression of moral attitude, and pointed to the distinguishing feature of this experiment.” In other words, it fell beyond “the desire to obtain a pleasing aesthetic result” and reflected his interest in the “unpredictable beauty that chance can create”

Provenance

The Estate of Man Ray.

Exhibited and published

National Art Centre, Tokyo, and National Museum of Art, Osaka, ‘Man Ray: Unconcerned but not Indifferent’, 2010. (Forthcoming) ‘Catalogue of the Paintings of Man Ray’, currently being prepared by Andrew Strauss and Timothy Baum.

References

Ray, Man. *Self Portrait*. Boston and Toronto, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1963.
Schwarz, Arturo. *Man Ray: The Rigour of Imagination*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1977.



Man Ray 58



5.

FRAGMENT FROM A KAABA COVER (KISWA) WITH WOVEN CALLIGRAPHIC VERSES FROM THE KORAN

Egypt or Turkey
17th-18th century
Indigo dyes on woven cotton

Of great historical importance, this fragment from a Kaaba cover, or Kiswa, represents a tradition dating back to the 7th century, when a Kiswa was draped around the holy Kaaba, the building at the centre of the great mosque in Mecca in an annual process carried out a day before Muslims mark Eid Al Adha.

The application of indigo dyes on the cloth create a profoundly sober background for the dark thread woven into it with verses of the Koran. The perfection of its application denotes not only the supreme skill of the weaver but a deeply respectful approach to the process of recording the holy script on cloth.

The interplay of calligraphic script on the darkened background is magnetic. The rhythm of ascending and descending curves and lines produces a chiaroscuro geometry that envelops the observer and focuses the mind, and spirit, on the reflective observation of the Kaaba.

Provenance
Lady Beatrice Caroline Marling, Stanley Park, Gloucestershire, 1920's.
Private collection, UK.

6.

FOUNTAIN WITH KUFIC DESIGN

North India
Late 18th century
White marble
W: 71.5 cm, L: 82.5 cm, H: 5 cm

This 18th century marble fountain from north India is a rare Islamic Indian work, particularly for its abstracted ‘calligraphic’ design, which fuses aesthetic perspective with architectural complexity.

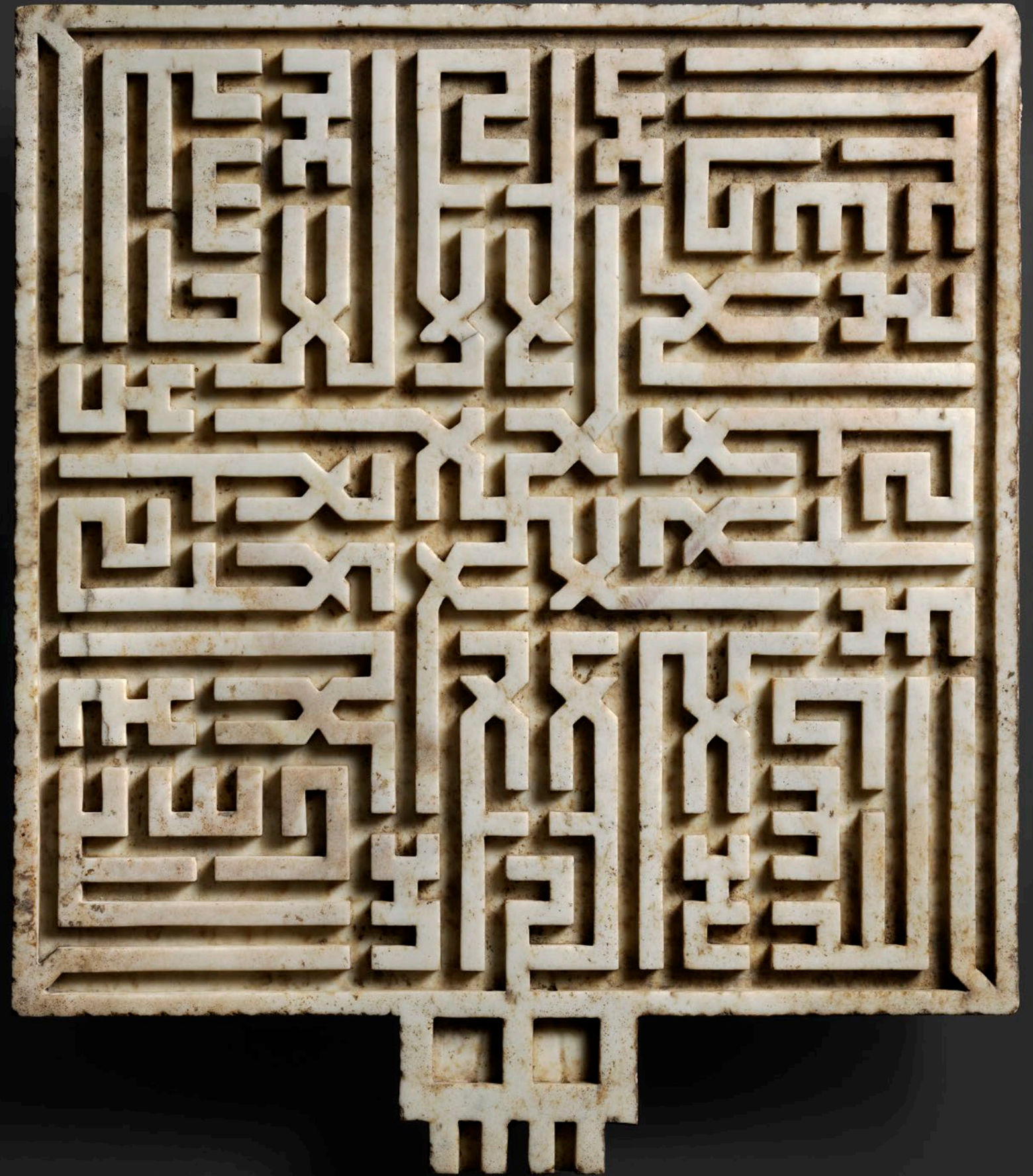
Most likely made for a Mughal pleasure garden, it would have been a focal point of this idyllic environment. The pure white marble has been sculpted to create a compelling square Kufic design, abstracted from an early form of Kufic Arabic script. By referencing the divine name, the sculpted design reads ‘*la ilaha illa allah*’, attaining profound meaning in the process by evoking godly protection.

Fountains and geometric design are important features of Islamic gardens, themselves usually organized in geometric layouts divided by walkways and flowing water. In effect, the Islamic garden has deep religious significance, conceived as an early form of paradise, and intended for rest, reflection and contemplation; it provides a truly multi-sensory experience, devised around the use of water, a symbol of life and the divine, and aromatic plants, where sounds and scents compose a peaceful atmosphere conducive to transcendence.

Poetry is also intimately connected to the Islamic garden as a space of multiple sensations and where the poet would contemplate nature as well as reflect on life and attain closeness to the divine.

Provenance

Private collection, UK, 1970s.







7.

A FINE MANDALA OF THE 'MITRA YOGIN' TRADITION

Tibet, 18th century
Opaque pigments and gold on wood
29 x 29 cm



The Mandala, one of Himalayan Buddhism's most ubiquitous and powerful symbols, was created as an artistic aid for meditation on the path of enlightenment. Depicting a realm that is both complex and sacred, the mandala is a visualisation tool meant to advance practitioners toward a state of enlightenment. Geometry is a crucial structural element of the cosmos and used to create diagrams that place the divine in the centre as the origin of the universe, from which the natural and inhabited world radiates.

The present painting follows the 'Mitra Yogin' tradition of mandalas. Mitra Yogin compiled a collection of one hundred and eight Tantric mandalas in the 12th and 13th centuries, the *Mitra Gyatsa*, which became a key resource for describing the deities and mandalas of Himalayan and Tibetan art.

In an extraordinary state of preservation and chromatic vitality, the four-armed red Guhyasadhana Avalokiteshvara can be seen at the centre with his consort, placed in a lotus flower within a double triangle and seated in *vajraparyankasana*, the diamond pose. He has his principal hands in *anjali mudra*, the gesture of salutation, before his chest, his secondary hands holding *padma* (lotus), and *mala* at each of his shoulders. Outside the palace ground of square shape there are concentric circles with decorative motifs and elements representing the natural world, where we can see detailed and elegant delineation of different figures and landscapes.

The rhythm achieved by balance of iconographic and chromatic elements is mesmeric – its impact on the eye, and mind, is akin to that achieved by poetry as we are carried from level to level of enclosure and release; what appear as enclosures are, in effect, openings into revelation and unity with a higher and more noble state of existence.

The eye passes inwards and outwards through multiple concentric levels of chromatic variation as well as geometric design – from stellar through circular and square-form stages – in what Karl Jung defined as 'archetypes:' continuities between different forms of physical as well as psychic reality and, as in the present work, represented as essential patterns – regularities of form and structure – that appear in nature and arise naturally in the mind. In Jung's seminal work *Libur Novus* (Red Book), mandalas also appear, created in an attempt to 'form in matter' his innermost thoughts and represent the structure of his psyche.

Provenance

Private Collection, Switzerland.



8.

LIFE-SIZE STUDY FOR A TIGER FOR THE MAHARANA OF UDAIPUR

Udaipur, Mewar, India, mid 19th century
Opaque watercolour on cotton
Tiger: 264 x 116 cm

This remarkable and animated large-scale painting on cloth represents a tiger taken in the course of a royal hunting expedition. As such, it functions as a portrait as well as a visual commemoration of the leisurely pursuits and hunting scenes that were a prominent genre of court painting at Udaipur.

The painting presents an accurately observed rendition of the features, and wounds, of the animal during the hunt and thus functions as a visual diary. On a visual scale, its bold outlines and vibrant colours also capture the liveliness and innate energy of the beast and, by extension, praise the hunter's skill in the achievement of their capture.

Provenance

Private collection, UK, 1972.
Private collection, London.

References

Milo Cleveland beach and Nawat Nahar Singh II, 'Rajastani painters: Bagta and Chokha. Master artists at Devgarh' (Zürich: Artibus Asiae, 2005).
Andrew Topsfield, 'Court Painting at Udaipur: Art Under the Patronage of the Maharanas of Mewar' (Zürich: Artibus Asiae, 2001).



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