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MASTERPIECES OF RAJPUT PAINTING

O. C. GANGOLY

Calcutta, 1926



ONE OF ONLY 210 COPIES PRINTED

THIS COPY NO. 116

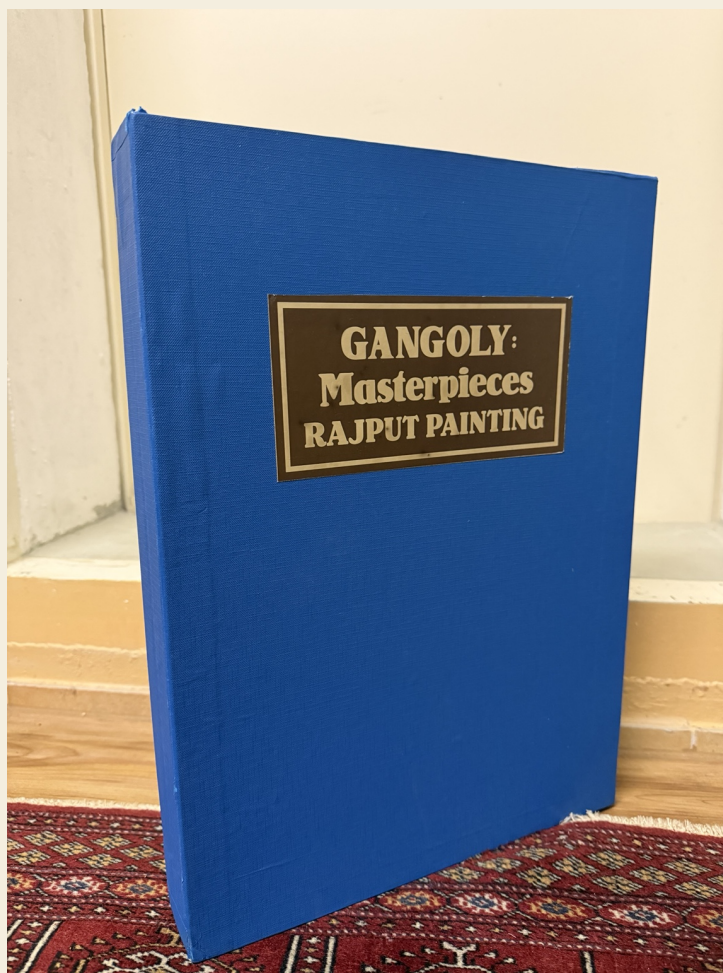
COMPLETE WITH 28 COLOUR PLATES
AND 24 HAND-MADE PHOTOGRAVURES

MONUMENTAL FOLIO
A LANDMARK PUBLICATION IN THE HISTORY
OF INDIAN MINIATURE PAINTING

MASTERPIECES OF RAJPUT PAINTING

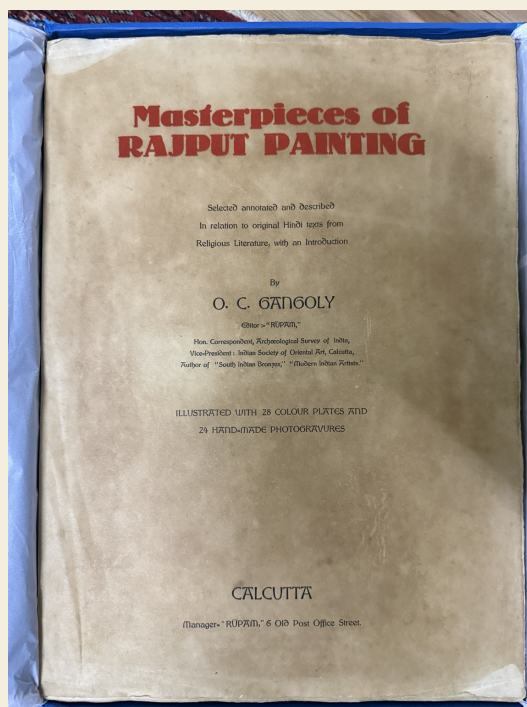
O. C. GANGOLY

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One of only 210 copies printed - this copy No. 116
Complete with 28 colour plates and 24 hand-made photogravures
Monumental folio
A landmark publication in the history of Indian miniature painting

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION



The title page of the present copy.

GANGOLY, O. C. [Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly]. *Masterpieces of Rajput Painting: Selected, Annotated and Described in Relation to Original Hindi Texts from Religious Literature, with an Introduction.*

Calcutta: Manager, "Rupam," 6 Old Post Office Street, 1926.

Monumental folio. 116 pages. Illustrated with 28 colour plates and 24 hand-made photogravures. Edition strictly limited to 210 copies, the present example number 116. Printed by Thacker's Directories, Ltd., Calcutta, and published by A. K. Gangoly, Manager of Rupam. Dedicated to Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "To Whom All Students of Indian Painting Are Heavily Indebted."

A remarkably well-preserved and, importantly, complete example of O. C. Gangoly's monumental study of Rajput painting, one of the most ambitious Indian art publications of the early twentieth century. Conceived not simply as an illustrated reference book but almost as a portfolio of paintings, its enormous sheets provide generous settings for the mounted colour plates and finely produced photogravures. Gangoly accompanies the works with discussions of their literary, devotional and musical sources, seeking to reconnect Rajput painting with the cultural world from which it emerged.

Published in Calcutta in 1926, when the modern scholarly classification of Rajput and Pahari painting was still being established, the book belongs to the formative generation of Indian art history associated with Gangoly, Coomaraswamy and the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Paintings reproduced here subsequently entered major collections, while others were reattributed as scholarship developed, making the volume an important historical record of early twentieth-century connoisseurship and collecting.

The present copy retains all 28 colour plates, all 24 hand-made photogravures and the complete text. The sheets remain exceptionally attractive, with expected natural age-related tonal variation, occasional spotting and somewhat greater toning to an opening leaf. Overall, the work presents extremely well for a publication approaching its centenary.



Housed in a later custom-made blue cloth protective portfolio, sympathetically constructed to the dimensions of the book. The protective case is modern and is not represented as part of the original 1926 issue.

A rare opportunity to acquire a complete copy of one of the foundational monuments in the literature of Indian miniature painting.

MASTERPIECES OF RAJPUT PAINTING

O. C. Gangoly's Monument to the Indian Miniature

A Book Made Like a Collection

There are books about paintings, and there are books which attempt to recreate something of the experience of possessing and studying paintings themselves.

O. C. Gangoly's Masterpieces of Rajput Painting belongs emphatically to the second category.

Published in Calcutta in 1926 in an edition restricted to only 210 copies, it was conceived on a scale that seems almost extravagant today. Its monumental folio dimensions, mounted colour reproductions, hand-made photogravures, substantial sheets and deliberately spacious typography turn the act of reading into something approaching the examination of a portfolio of miniature paintings.

This was never intended to be an ordinary handbook.

It was an art object made for collectors, scholars, museums and connoisseurs.

The present example is copy number 116 of the 210 copies produced. More importantly, it survives complete, retaining the full complement of its illustrations: 28 colour plates and 24 hand-made photogravures, together with the accompanying text.

The survival of all these constituent elements is significant. A publication constructed around separately mounted plates and portfolio-like components is inherently more vulnerable to dispersal than an ordinary bound book. Plates can be removed for framing, separated for study or simply lost as a volume passes from one owner to another.

Here, remarkably, the ensemble remains intact.

And that completeness matters, because Masterpieces of Rajput Painting is not merely a collection of reproductions. It is itself an artefact from one of the formative periods in the modern discovery, classification and appreciation of Indian painting.

To open it today is to encounter Rajput and Pahari painting twice over: first through the historical works reproduced on its pages, and secondly through the eyes of an Indian scholar attempting, a century ago, to establish those paintings as masterpieces worthy of serious aesthetic and intellectual attention.

O. C. GANGOLY AND THE REDISCOVERY OF INDIAN ART

Ordhendra Coomar Gangoly, generally known as O. C. Gangoly, occupied an unusual position in the intellectual culture of early twentieth-century India.

He was at once connoisseur, scholar, critic, editor, collector and advocate.

Gangoly belonged to the remarkable generation of Bengali intellectuals for whom the study of Indian art became inseparable from a larger reconsideration of Indian cultural identity. Closely associated with the Indian Society of Oriental Art in Calcutta, he was also the editor of Rupam, the celebrated illustrated quarterly devoted to Indian art.



The importance of this context is difficult to overstate.

When Gangoly was writing, Indian miniature painting did not possess anything like the universally recognised position it occupies today. Paintings that are now among the most sought-after works of Indian art had frequently been inadequately classified, poorly published or treated primarily as decorative curiosities.

Even the terminology through which we now discuss schools such as Basohli, Guler, Kangra, Mewar, Bundi, Kota, Jaipur and Kishangarh was still being refined.

The discipline itself was young.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy had made one of the decisive intellectual interventions. His pioneering work on Rajput painting argued forcefully for the independent aesthetic character of these traditions and helped separate them conceptually from Mughal painting.

Gangoly belonged to the generation that carried this project forward.

Indeed, the present book is explicitly dedicated:

To Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy To Whom All Students of Indian Painting Are Heavily Indebted.

The wording is revealing.

This is more than a courteous dedication from one author to another. It acknowledges an intellectual genealogy. Gangoly understood that Coomaraswamy had altered the terms upon which Indian painting could be studied.

Masterpieces of Rajput Painting was therefore conceived not in isolation but as part of an emerging scholarly movement seeking to recover, classify and interpret the pictorial traditions of the subcontinent on their own terms.

That makes the book historically important even where subsequent scholarship has revised some of Gangoly's individual attributions.

Indeed, that is part of its fascination.

One is looking at Indian miniature connoisseurship while the discipline itself was being invented.

1926: A REMARKABLE MOMENT

The date of publication is particularly significant.

The volume appeared in 1926, at a moment when some of the fundamental scholarly architecture surrounding Rajput and Pahari painting was being established.

This was the age of Coomaraswamy and Gangoly and of a relatively small circle of collectors, museum scholars and historians attempting to create order within a vast body of material whose provenance had often been lost.

Paintings had moved from royal ateliers and aristocratic collections into the hands of dealers and private collectors. Sets had been broken apart. Manuscripts had been dispersed. Folios originally belonging to a single series could emerge decades later in Calcutta, Bombay, London, Paris or Boston with little documentation of their earlier histories.

The scholar therefore had to become something of a detective.

Style, costume, architecture, inscriptions, facial types, borders, pigments, subject matter and comparison with related paintings all became evidence.

Much of what today constitutes the normal apparatus of Indian miniature scholarship was still experimental.

Seen from this perspective, Masterpieces of Rajput Painting is a document of extraordinary intellectual confidence. Gangoly was not merely reproducing attractive paintings.

He was attempting to organise a field.

THE BOOK AS OBJECT



Plate V, Padumavati and Hiramani: the monumental sheet turns reproduction into display.

Monumental Folio

The first impression of Masterpieces of Rajput Painting is its scale.

This is a monumental folio publication. Its proportions immediately distinguish it from the ordinary illustrated books of its period.

The format was purposeful.

Indian miniatures are paradoxical objects. They are physically small but visually immense. Their scale encourages intimate examination: the viewer approaches closely, discovers minute architectural details, jewellery, vegetation, expressions and gestures, and gradually enters the pictorial world.

A small printed reproduction destroys much of this experience.

Gangoly's enormous format was an attempt to solve that problem.

Instead of compressing paintings into conventional book illustrations, the folio allows them space. Mounted within large expanses of paper, the images acquire something of the isolation and visual authority of works displayed in a museum mount.

The generous blank margins are therefore not wasted space.

They are part of the design.

The eye is given room to approach the image without distraction.



This is beautifully demonstrated by the plate of Padumavati and Hiramani in the present copy. The painting occupies only the central portion of an enormous sheet. Around it stretches an expanse of warm paper. The effect is almost architectural: the page becomes a wall, the mounted reproduction a miniature hanging within it.

Padumavati stands alone upon a terrace, reaching towards the parrot Hiramani perched upon the branches of a slender tree. The composition is sparse, poetic and slightly mysterious.

The accompanying text does something equally important.

Gangoly does not merely identify the subject.

He reconstructs its literary world.

IMAGE AND TEXT

□In Relation to Original Hindi Texts□

The full subtitle deserves attention:

Selected, Annotated and Described in Relation to Original Hindi Texts from Religious Literature, with an Introduction.

That phrase explains Gangoly's project.

He believed that Indian paintings could not properly be understood as autonomous decorative objects detached from the literary, devotional and musical traditions from which they emerged.

This sounds self-evident today.

In 1926 it was not.

A European collector encountering an Indian miniature could admire its colour, drawing or exotic subject while remaining completely unaware of the literary world that gave the scene meaning.

Gangoly wanted to restore that world.

Thus his discussion of Padumavati is accompanied by the relevant literary episode. Elsewhere Krishna paintings are connected with devotional poetry. Ragamala subjects belong to the synesthetic relationship between music, poetry, season, emotion and image.

The book therefore asks its reader to perform several acts simultaneously:

to look;

to read;

to recognise;

to interpret;

and finally to understand the painting as part of a larger Indian cultural vocabulary.

This is one reason the work retains scholarly interest despite the enormous advances in attribution made since its publication.

Gangoly was asking the right fundamental question:

What did these images mean within the culture that created them?

KRISHNA AND THE GOPIS

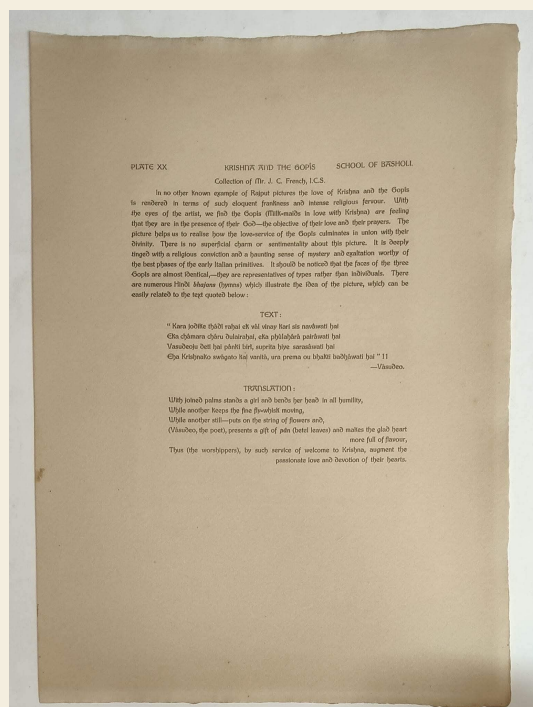


Plate XX commentary, demonstrating Gangoly's union of image, text and devotional interpretation.

One of the surviving text leaves in the present copy accompanies Plate XX, “Krishna and the Gopis,” School of Basholi, then in the collection of J. C. French, I.C.S.

Gangoly begins not simply with costume or pigment but with emotion.

For him the painting embodies the love of Krishna and the gopis as an expression of religious fervour. The gopis are not merely female figures gathered around a handsome blue deity. Their love is devotional surrender.

The accompanying verse describes their actions.

One approaches with joined palms and bowed head.

Another moves a fly-whisk.

Another prepares a garland.

Another presents betel leaves.

Every apparently domestic act becomes seva—devotional service.

Gangoly consequently interprets the image on two simultaneous levels. On the visible level it is a gathering around Krishna. On the spiritual level it is an image of the human soul approaching divinity through love.

Whether every aspect of this interpretation would be expressed in precisely the same terminology by a scholar today is less important than the method itself.

Gangoly refuses to reduce the painting to decoration.

RAGINI VIBHASA



Ragini Vibhasa, reproduced within the original folio presentation.

When Music Becomes Painting

Another striking plate in the present copy depicts Ragini Vibhasa.

The composition is immediately arresting: architecture stands against an almost impenetrably dark background; figures inhabit the pavilion while flowering vegetation rises dramatically into the darkness.

To understand why such an image appears in a book on Rajput painting requires entering one of the most remarkable territories of Indian visual culture—the Ragamala tradition.

Ragas were not merely musical structures.

Through centuries of poetic and visual imagination they acquired personalities, moods, seasons, times of day and emotional associations.

Music could become poetry.

Poetry could become image.

And the image could evoke music again.

Gangoly would later devote still greater attention to this subject. But already in Masterpieces of Rajput Painting we encounter his fascination with the interconnectedness of Indian artistic forms.

For the collector today, a plate such as Ragini Vibhasa consequently possesses several layers of interest.

It reproduces an Indian miniature.

It records the state and attribution of that painting approximately a century ago.

It preserves Gangoly's interpretation.

And the plate itself is an example of luxury Indian art publishing of the 1920s.

The book has become historical evidence for the history of the very paintings it originally set out to describe.



THE TWENTY-EIGHT COLOUR PLATES

The 28 colour plates deserve particular emphasis.

It is easy for the twenty-first-century viewer, accustomed to almost limitless high-resolution digital imagery, to underestimate what colour reproduction represented in 1926.

For Indian painting, colour was essential.

A monochrome photograph could record composition, but it could not adequately communicate the emotional force created by saturated reds, intense blues, luminous yellows, greens, whites, blacks and metallic accents.

In Basohli painting especially, colour is not an accessory to drawing.

It is structural.

Gangoly therefore faced a fundamental problem: how could a publication devoted to these paintings communicate their visual power to someone who might never see the originals?

The colour plates were his answer.

They should not be judged as twenty-first-century facsimiles. They belong to the reproductive technology and aesthetic expectations of their period.

But that is precisely what makes them fascinating.

Each reproduction occupies an intermediate territory between painting and print.

Mounted upon the enormous sheets of the portfolio, the colour plates acquire a presence quite unlike ordinary book illustration.

They demand to be looked at.

THE TWENTY-FOUR HAND-MADE PHOTOGRAVURES

If the colour plates provide immediate visual appeal, the 24 hand-made photogravures represent another dimension of the publication's ambition.

Photogravure was among the finest methods available for reproducing works of art photographically.

Unlike inexpensive halftone printing, photogravure could produce considerable tonal subtlety. The process was particularly well suited to paintings, drawings, sculpture and photography because it allowed a rich progression between dark passages and delicate intermediate tones.

The specification "hand-made photogravures" therefore matters.

It tells us that Gangoly's book belongs to the tradition of deluxe art publishing rather than mass-produced illustration.

This was expensive production.

It was laborious production.

And it helps explain why the edition could be restricted to only 210 copies.

Today the photogravures also contribute substantially to the bibliographical desirability of a complete example. Individual plates could readily have been removed during the century following publication.

The present copy retains all twenty-four.



THE COLLECTIONS BEHIND THE BOOK

Another important aspect of Masterpieces of Rajput Painting can easily be overlooked.

The book is effectively a snapshot of the collecting world of Indian miniature painting in the 1920s.

The captions identify works belonging to museums, scholars and private collectors. Some paintings came from Gangoly's own collection. Others belonged to prominent collectors of the period.

This has become valuable provenance evidence.

Paintings move.

Collections disperse.

Owners die.

Attributions change.

Works disappear from public view and reappear generations later at auction.

A reproduction in Gangoly can therefore establish that a particular miniature existed in a particular collection by the mid-1920s.

The publication has consequently acquired a second life that its author could scarcely have anticipated.

It has become a provenance source.

For today's collector of Indian miniature paintings, this is one of the volume's most intriguing characteristics. A book originally intended to teach its readers about paintings has itself become part of the documentary history of those paintings.

WHEN ATTRIBUTIONS CHANGE

There is another reason the serious collector should value the book.

Gangoly was not always correct.

This statement diminishes neither the book nor its author. Quite the contrary: it makes the work more interesting.

Indian miniature scholarship advanced dramatically during the decades after 1926. Later scholars refined the identification of individual courts, workshops, series, artists and families of painters.

Some works Gangoly placed within one school were subsequently moved to another.

This is not a defect in the publication.

It is evidence of history.

Attributions are not immutable labels attached to works of art at birth. They are hypotheses constructed from available evidence.

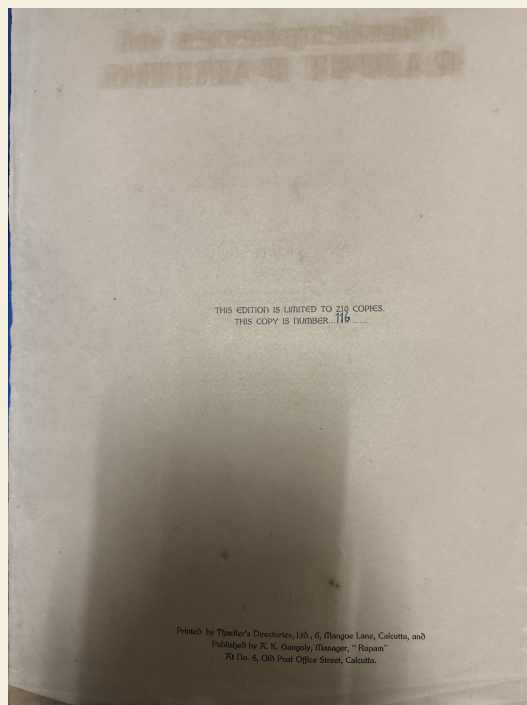
A great early publication preserves an earlier stage in that intellectual process.

The modern reader can therefore place Gangoly beside later generations of scholars and observe the discipline evolving.

Few books allow this so vividly.

And few better demonstrate a central truth of connoisseurship: knowledge advances because one generation looks again at what the previous generation thought it knew.

ONLY 210 COPIES



Limitation statement: copy No. 116 of an edition of 210.

The limitation leaf of the present example states:

THIS EDITION IS LIMITED TO 210 COPIES. THIS COPY IS NUMBER 116.

Those two lines fundamentally determine the bibliographical character of the book.

Two hundred and ten copies was an extraordinarily small edition even when the work appeared.

And 210 copies printed in 1926 does not mean 210 complete copies surviving today.

During the intervening century, copies have entered institutional libraries and permanent collections. Others will inevitably have suffered from humidity, insects, careless handling or inappropriate storage. Some have lost plates. Some may have been broken deliberately because individual reproductions possessed decorative value.

No reliable census of surviving complete copies appears to exist, and it would therefore be inappropriate to suggest a precise number.

It is unnecessary.

The rarity is inherent in the limitation itself.

There were never many copies.

WHY COMPLETENESS MATTERS

For an ordinary book, completeness generally means that all its pages are present.

For a publication such as Masterpieces of Rajput Painting, completeness carries greater significance.

Its constituent pieces are physically and visually attractive in their own right.

A mounted colour reproduction of an important miniature can be removed and framed.

A photogravure can be separated.

Large individual sheets can migrate from one collection to another.

The survival of the ensemble can therefore never be taken for granted.

The present copy is complete.

It retains the text.

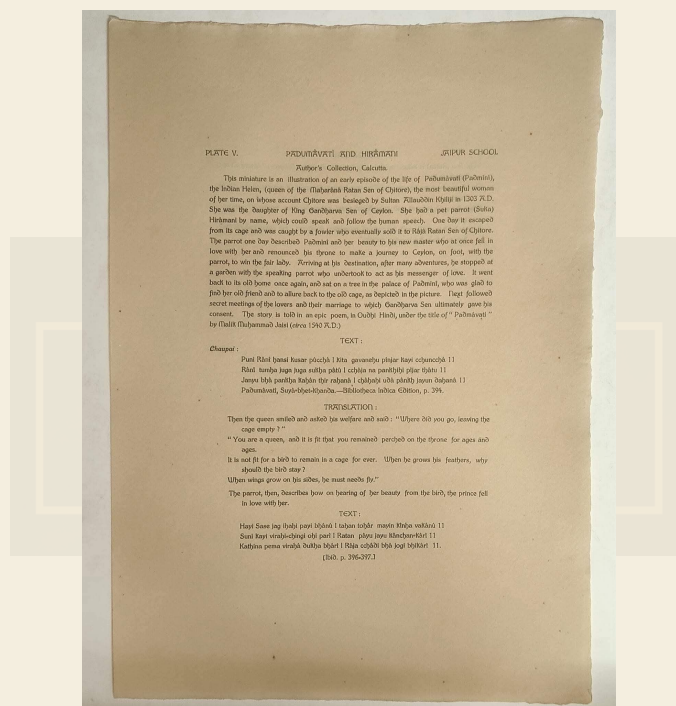
It retains all 28 colour plates.

It retains all 24 hand-made photogravures.

Nearly a century after publication, Gangoly's visual programme therefore survives as he intended it to be encountered.

For the collector, this is among the most important attributes of the present example.

CONDITION



A text leaf from the present copy, showing the generally attractive state of preservation.

For a publication approaching its centenary, the present example survives in notably attractive condition.

The principal leaves remain structurally sound, the reproductions retain strong visual presence and, most importantly, the work remains complete.

As should be expected in a publication of this age and construction, there is natural variation in paper tone, together with occasional spotting and age-related toning. The opening leaf displays somewhat greater tonal change than much of the remainder of the work.

These are visible manifestations of age rather than defects that compromise the integrity or appeal of the publication.

Indeed, there is something desirable about the way this example presents.

It looks old, but cared for.

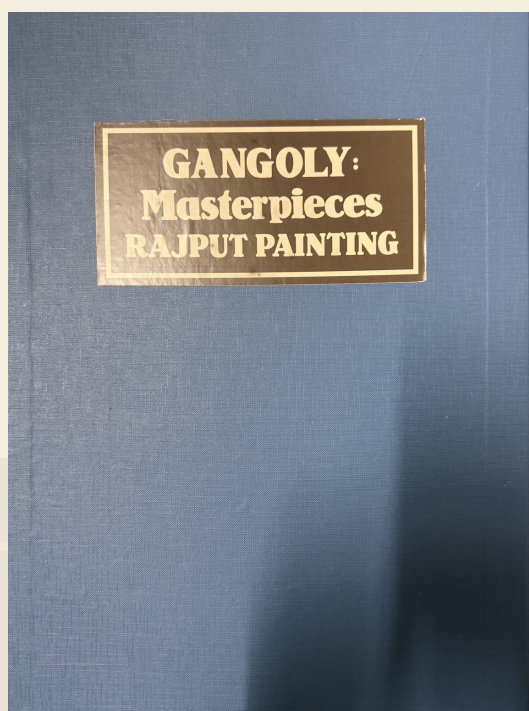
It has not been artificially transformed into an object pretending to have been printed yesterday.

The deckled edges, warm paper, slight variations in tone and tactile surfaces remain part of the physical personality of the publication.

The enormous sheets are particularly impressive.

They retain the scale and spaciousness Gangoly intended.

THE MODERN PROTECTIVE PORTFOLIO



The later custom-made blue protective portfolio.

The blue outer portfolio accompanying the present copy is not original to the 1926 publication.

It is a later purpose-made protective enclosure, constructed to appropriate dimensions specifically to house this unusually large and vulnerable work.

Its blue cloth and inset title panel provide a sympathetic presentation while, more importantly, protecting the contents from handling, abrasion and dust.

For bibliographical purposes the distinction should remain perfectly clear: the case is modern.

For conservation purposes, however, its presence is decidedly advantageous.

A book of this scale is not an object that should repeatedly be dragged upright from an ordinary bookshelf. A fitted enclosure allows the work to be stored horizontally and handled more appropriately as the portfolio object it essentially is.

The modern case should therefore be understood not as an attempted reconstruction of something lost, but as an intelligent act of stewardship.



BETWEEN BOOK AND ARTWORK

The greatest appeal of Masterpieces of Rajput Painting may ultimately lie in the difficulty of deciding exactly what kind of object it is.

It is certainly a book.

It is also a portfolio.

It is an illustrated scholarly monograph.

It is a collection of fine reproductive prints.

It is a history of connoisseurship.

It is an archive of paintings and collections as they existed in the 1920s.

And increasingly, it is itself a collectible object within the history of Indian art.

That multiplicity is unusual.

A collector of miniature painting can use it as a reference.

A collector of fine printing can admire its production.

A historian can study the formation of Indian art history.

A provenance researcher can trace paintings through its captions.

A bibliophile can appreciate the rarity of an edition of 210 copies.

And someone who simply loves beautiful books can open the portfolio and enjoy the extraordinary theatricality of its enormous sheets.

GANGOLY AND COOMARASWAMY

The dedication to Coomaraswamy deserves to be revisited because it encapsulates something profound about the intellectual history of the book.

Today Ananda K. Coomaraswamy is one of the canonical names in the study of Indian art.

In Gangoly's lifetime, however, the very act of asserting that Rajput painting belonged among the great traditions of world art was still comparatively new.

The generation represented by Coomaraswamy and Gangoly participated in a fundamental reconsideration of how Indian art should be understood.

Was it merely archaeological material?

Ethnographic evidence?

Decorative craftsmanship?

A provincial cousin of Persian or Mughal painting?

Or was it a sophisticated aesthetic language capable of expressing theology, poetry, music, eroticism, devotion and metaphysics?

Masterpieces of Rajput Painting announces its answer in its title.

Masterpieces.



The word is deliberate.

Gangoly was claiming for these paintings the same category traditionally applied to the canonical achievements of European art.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Gangoly's approach differs noticeably from much contemporary cataloguing because he was willing to discuss religious meaning without embarrassment.

For him Krishna and the gopis could not be adequately understood by cataloguing textiles, jewellery and stylistic characteristics alone.

The devotional meaning mattered.

This approach sometimes produces prose unmistakably belonging to its period, but it also gives the book warmth.

Gangoly cared about the paintings.

He was not conducting an autopsy upon them.

His descriptions repeatedly attempt to recover the emotional condition embodied by the image: longing, surrender, devotion, separation, expectation and love.

This is particularly appropriate for Rajput and Pahari painting, where rasa—the aesthetic experience or flavour generated in the sensitive viewer—is fundamental.

The best paintings do not simply illustrate events.

They create states of feeling.

Gangoly understood this instinctively.

CALCUTTA AND THE MAKING OF INDIAN ART HISTORY

The place of publication matters almost as much as the date.

Calcutta, 1926.

This was not a European publication about Indian art produced at a metropolitan distance from its subject.

It emerged from Calcutta's extraordinarily fertile intellectual culture.

The Indian Society of Oriental Art had been established there. Abanindranath Tagore and the artists associated with the Bengal School had transformed contemporary artistic debate. Scholars, collectors, artists and critics were reconsidering India's artistic past while simultaneously attempting to create a modern Indian visual identity.

Rupam, under Gangoly's editorship, became an important forum for these discussions.

Masterpieces of Rajput Painting emerged directly from that environment.

Its title page identifies the publisher as the Manager of "Rupam," 6 Old Post Office Street, Calcutta.

The colophon of the present copy records that it was printed by Thacker's Directories, Ltd., 6 Mangoe Lane, Calcutta, and published by A. K. Gangoly, Manager, "Rupam," at No. 6 Old Post Office Street, Calcutta.

These apparently mundane details give the object geographical specificity.



This monumental folio was conceived, edited, printed and published within the intellectual world whose scholarship it represents.

WHY THE BOOK STILL MATTERS

Almost a century after publication, nobody should use Masterpieces of Rajput Painting as the sole authority for attributing an Indian miniature.

That is not the point.

Its significance is deeper.

Modern scholarship stands upon layers of earlier observation.

Gangoly recorded paintings that later moved elsewhere.

He published private collections that were subsequently dispersed.

He reproduced images before colour art publishing became commonplace.

He attempted to reconnect paintings with literary texts.

He participated in the construction of the vocabulary through which Indian miniature painting would subsequently be studied.

And later scholars repeatedly returned to his plates—sometimes to agree with him, sometimes to correct him.

That is what foundational books do.

They remain part of the conversation even after scholarship has moved beyond some of their conclusions.

A CENTURY OF SURVIVAL

There is something particularly satisfying about encountering a complete copy today.

When copy number 116 left the press in Calcutta, the paintings it reproduced belonged to a very different world.

India was still under British rule.

Many of the great private collections of Indian miniatures had not yet been dispersed.

The modern museum canon of Pahari and Rajasthani painting was still taking shape.

Guler had not yet yielded all its secrets.

The great artist families reconstructed through painstaking inscriptional and genealogical research in the later twentieth century remained largely anonymous.

Kishangarh, Basohli, Mewar, Bundi, Kota and Kangra were still being defined and separated through comparative connoisseurship.

Gangoly's reader was witnessing the beginning of a discipline.

Nearly a hundred years later, copy 116 survives with its images still together.

That continuity gives the book an emotional quality beyond bibliography.

FOR THE COLLECTOR OF INDIAN ART

The ideal custodian of Masterpieces of Rajput Painting is not merely someone who wants a rare book.

It belongs naturally in a collection concerned with Indian painting itself.

For the collector of Pahari or Rajasthani miniatures, it offers a tangible connection with the formative scholarship through which those paintings first entered modern art history.

For the collector interested in provenance, its reproductions and collection credits form a valuable historical record.

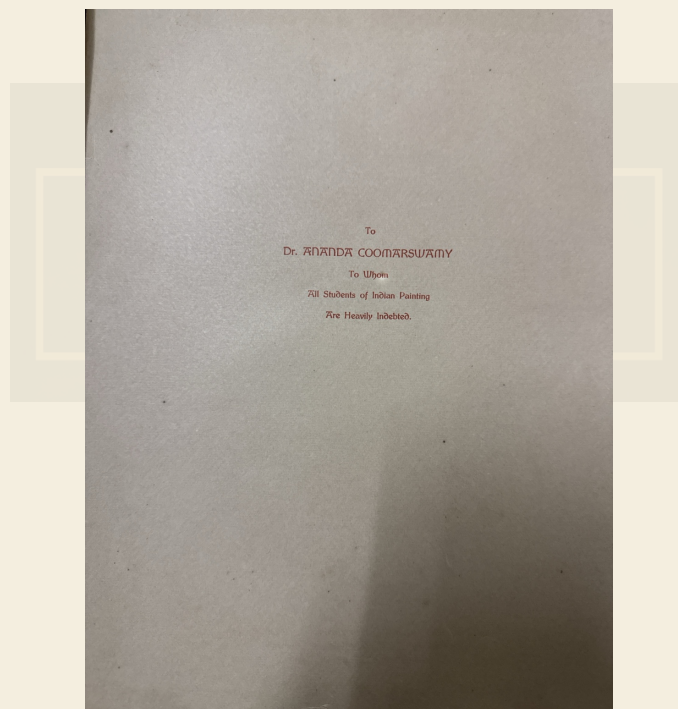
For the bibliophile, the edition of only 210 copies, monumental format, elaborate reproductive techniques and survival of the complete suite of plates place it firmly within the tradition of deluxe twentieth-century art publishing.

For the historian of ideas, it records a moment when Indian scholars were asserting with increasing confidence that their country's pictorial traditions should be judged not as curiosities but as major works of civilisation.

And for the collector who already lives with Indian miniature paintings, there is another pleasure.

The book allows the paintings on the wall and the history of their scholarship to inhabit the same collection.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE



Gangoly's dedication to Ananda Coomaraswamy.

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Calcutta: Manager, "Rupam," 6 Old Post Office Street, 1926.

Monumental folio.

116 pages.



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Edition limited to 210 copies.

The present copy numbered 116.

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Dedicated to Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, "To Whom All Students of Indian Painting Are Heavily Indebted."

The present example is complete, retaining the text and the full complement of 28 colour plates and 24 hand-made photogravures.

Some natural age-related toning and occasional spotting, including somewhat greater tonal change to an opening leaf, but overall preserved in remarkably attractive condition for a publication of this scale and age.

Housed in a later custom-made blue cloth protective portfolio box with inset title label. The enclosure is modern and is supplied for protection rather than represented as part of the original 1926 issue.

COLLECTOR'S NOTE

Among early twentieth-century publications devoted to Indian painting, Masterpieces of Rajput Painting occupies a particularly compelling position.

It combines three forms of rarity.

The first is numerical rarity: only 210 copies were produced.

The second is survival rarity: the elaborate portfolio format, separately mounted illustrations and hand-made photogravures make complete copies inherently vulnerable to loss and dispersal.

The third is intellectual rarity: relatively few books allow the modern collector to stand so close to the formative moment when Rajput and Pahari painting were being recovered for modern art history.

The present copy possesses the qualities one would hope to find in such an object.

It is numbered.

It is complete.

It is well preserved.

Its colour plates remain visually compelling.

Its full complement of photogravures survives.

And its physical scale preserves the grandeur of Gangoly's original conception.

Most importantly, it remains what Gangoly intended it to be: not simply a text to be read, but a portfolio to be opened slowly, plate by plate, and contemplated.

Nearly a century after its publication, that experience has become more rather than less remarkable.

A MONUMENT IN PAPER

Perhaps the finest way to understand Masterpieces of Rajput Painting is to return to the simplicity of its title.

Gangoly did not call his book a survey.



He did not call it a handbook.

He did not call it notes on Indian painting.

He called these works Masterpieces.

That single word contains the ambition of the entire publication.

In 1926, when the canon of Indian painting was still being constructed, Gangoly assembled paintings from collections in India and abroad, reproduced them with unusually lavish means, placed them beside the literature and devotional traditions from which they emerged, and presented them on enormous sheets worthy of sustained contemplation.

The result was more than an illustrated book.

It was an argument.

An argument that Rajput painting deserved serious scholarship.

An argument that an Indian miniature could contain poetry, theology, music and emotion.

An argument that these small paintings belonged among the great artistic achievements of India.

And, implicitly, an argument that Indian scholars and collectors themselves could define the terms upon which that inheritance should be understood.

The scholarship has evolved.

Attributions have changed.

Collections have dispersed.

Some of the paintings reproduced here have travelled across continents and entered museums. Others remain elusive.

But the book survives.

Copy number 116 still holds together the images Gangoly chose a century ago.

Its enormous deckled sheets still turn with the peculiar gravity of a portfolio rather than an ordinary book. Its colour plates still interrupt the surrounding expanse of paper like miniature paintings appearing upon a gallery wall. Its photogravures still preserve the tonal richness that justified their laborious production. Its texts still lead the reader from image to poetry and from poetry back to image.

For the collector of Indian art, this is therefore not merely a rare publication about miniature painting.

It is part of the history of miniature painting itself.

O. C. Gangoly

Masterpieces of Rajput Painting

Calcutta, 1926

Copy No. 116 of 210

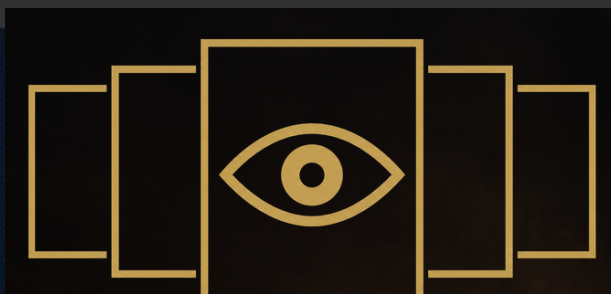
Complete

A landmark of Indian art scholarship, a remarkable achievement of early twentieth-century Indian fine publishing, and—almost one hundred years after it was made—an exceptionally evocative survivor from the formative age of modern Indian connoisseurship.

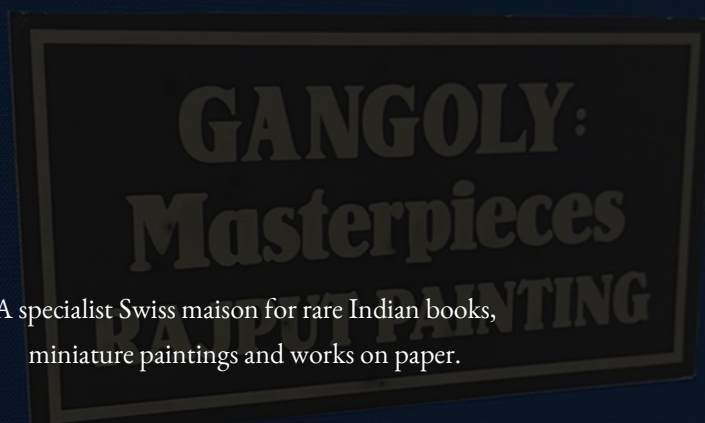


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