





# Editorial

This issue of the Rijksmuseum Bulletin showcases current research into Asian art, with a focus on art from the Deccan region of central India. It is the Rijksmuseum's aim to highlight objects of non-Western origin and to re-examine the historiography of such works today preserved in the Netherlands, especially those in the museum itself. Numerous objects from the East with diverse provenances are housed in the Asian Pavilion and the museum's depots. Some of these were acquired through trading as early as the sixteenth century, others belong to the more recent collection of the Royal Asian Art Society in the Netherlands.

In the early twentieth century, remnants of ancient civilizations in the Dutch colonies in Asia were largely exhibited in ethnographic museums. The founding of the Asian Art Society in 1918 signalled a change. At this time, the notion was adopted that important artworks were produced in Asia, both old and contemporary, capable of eliciting an aesthetic experience similar to that arising from European modern art. This traditional approach was firmly embedded in the colonial community, with emphasis placed on the European appreciation for an object to the disadvantage of the Asian culture it represented. Jan van Campen explains how Herman Visser, in his role as curator of the society in its nascent years, sought to broaden the understanding of these works by situating them in their original environment.

In the course of the twentieth century, the founding of professorial chairs in Leiden and Amsterdam brought the institutionalization of the study of Asian art and culture. Specialization led to a fragmentation in expertise per Asian cultural region, with objects studied according to regional contexts of production and usage, increasingly in collaboration with Asian connoisseurs. Today, art history is also seen as part of global history, with greater attention given to the broader socio-economic and cultural ties, along with criticism of the Western interpretation and cultural appropriation of Asian art.

A series of historical books published in association with Vantilt Publishers in the twenty tens reflects the Rijksmuseum's effort to contribute to this development, re-envisioning relations between the Netherlands and select nations around the globe. Jos Gommans's *The Unseen World* addresses the colonial history between the Netherlands and India from 1550 onwards. For both countries, the seventeenth century was a golden age of unprecedented economic and cultural activity, with an exchange of knowledge, images and objects giving rise to a truly unique artistic dialogue between the two countries. The hegemony of the European perspective has now been replaced by a joint vision of hybrid culture formation and shared heritage.

The art of the Deccan, in particular, can be characterized as hybrid. Many powers fought for control over this highly coveted region, a situation manifest in the many influences in Deccani style and imagery. In the present Bulletin, Jos Gommans describes a seventeenth-century Indian miniature painting in the Rijksmuseum: a prince shown in conjunction with a mirror, accompanied by a verse from the Quran written in mirror image, and on the painting's reverse, a likely contemporary, Dutch-language inscription conveying the image's content. The occult intent of the artist remains unclear. The prince's elusive identification – either as a Mughal emperor or a sultan of Bijapur – echoes the region's turbulent history.

In the same context, Roselyne Hurel discusses a set of miniature paintings containing fantastical creatures, among them the painting of a multi-coloured bird in the collection of the Rijksmuseum. These depictions – with inscriptions in nastaliq script on the reverse – once formed part of a larger series. Hurel shows that the series is attributable to the diverse Indo-Persian literary tradition and stylistically linked to the eighteenth-century Mughal courts of Aurangabad and later Hyderabad. For those previously unfamiliar with Deccani art, her findings are sure to evoke a sense of wonder.

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