BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EASTERN MINIATURE ART AND ITS INFLUENCE ON WORLD FINE ART

Abdulazizova Mubina Bo‘ri qizi
Third-year student, Easel Painting program
Faculty of Arts and Social Work, Termez State University
Termez, Uzbekistan
doi:https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.24125546

Abstract. This article traces the historical development of Eastern miniature art from its early roots to the present day and analyses its influence on world fine art. On the basis of museum, scholarly and academic publications, six stages are distinguished: the early sources in Central Asian wall painting and in the illustrated manuscripts of the early Islamic world; the Arab school of Baghdad in the thirteenth century; the Mongol and Ilkhanid synthesis with Chinese art; the classical Timurid and Bukhara schools; the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century flowering of the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal schools; and the transformation of the tradition in the nineteenth century and its revival in the twentieth. The second part of the article examines four lines of influence on world art: cultural exchange with Europe, the discovery of Islamic painting by modernism, recognition as cultural heritage, and reinterpretation by contemporary artists. The article concludes that the history of the Eastern miniature is a history of continuous exchange and renewal, and that its legacy remains a living resource for modern painting, including in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Eastern miniature, historical development, Afrasiab, Timurid school, Behzod, Mughal painting, world art, modernism

1. Introduction

The art of the Eastern miniature has a history of more than a thousand years, during which it passed through several different phases and absorbed influences from many cultures. It is usually associated with the illustrated manuscript, a form in which painting, calligraphy and ornament were combined, and with the courts that commissioned such books. UNESCO describes the miniature of the Behzad tradition as a detailed and symbolic form of painting scenes from history and literature.[1] Understanding its development is necessary both for the history of art and for contemporary painters who turn to this heritage.

Two questions guide this article. The first concerns the historical development of the miniature: where it came from, how its main schools followed one another, and how it changed in the modern period. The second concerns its influence: in what ways did the Eastern miniature affect the art of other regions, above all Europe, and what is its role in the art of today? For Uzbekistan, whose territory was the home of the Sogdian painting of Samarkand and of the Timurid and Bukhara traditions, both questions have a direct national significance.[2]

The article is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology, Section 3 presents the results in two parts, the stages of historical development and the lines of influence on world art, Section 4 discusses them, and Section 5 gives the conclusions.

[1]UNESCO, Behzad’s style of miniature art (No. 02267).

[2]Smithsonian Institution, Afrasiab mural paintings.

Methodology

The study is based on a historical and comparative method. It uses museum essays and timelines of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, entries of the Encyclopaedia Iranica, scholarly and academic articles and reviews, articles from the journal Sanat on the Uzbek miniature, and institutional descriptions of exhibitions, education and heritage inscription. All of these sources are listed in the reference section and were actually consulted in preparing the article.

The material was arranged chronologically, and for each period the analysis considered the centres of production, the patrons, the main subjects, the external influences and the leading masters named in the sources. The second part of the analysis identified, from the same sources, the main forms in which the miniature affected art outside its own tradition.

The study has limitations. It relies on published descriptions and reproductions and not on the examination of original manuscripts. The division into stages is conventional, because the periods overlap and artists moved between centres. The article is a general survey and does not aim at a detailed analysis of individual manuscripts.

Results

3.1. Early sources: wall painting and the illustrated book

The roots of the art of painting in Central Asia are older than the Islamic miniature. The wall paintings of the Hall of the Ambassadors at Afrasiab, in ancient Samarkand, date from the middle of the seventh century and are among the most remarkable examples of Sogdian painting.[3] They were found in the ruins of a residence, and they show processions of figures from different lands, which is understood as a representation of the wide contacts and intercultural influences of this Silk Road city.[4] Although they are not miniatures, they demonstrate the existence of a developed narrative painting in the region before the Islamic period.

The illustrated book of the Islamic world developed from the eighth century onward. One of the main early texts was Kalila wa Dimna, a collection of fables of Indian origin that was translated into Middle Persian in the sixth century and from Persian into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffa in the middle of the eighth century.[5] The surviving illustrated Arabic copies belong mainly to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and they show how the relationship between text and image began to be explored in the book.[6]

3.2. The Arab school of Baghdad

In the thirteenth century the Arab school of Baghdad produced one of the best-known manuscripts of the early tradition, a copy of al-Hariri's Maqamat written and illustrated in 1237 by Yahya ibn Mahmud al-Wasiti, now in the Bibliothèque nationale de France.[7] Its pictures show scenes of everyday life, such as discussions near a village, and thereby preserve a visual record of the period.

3.3. The Mongol and Ilkhanid synthesis

The next stage was connected with the Mongol conquests. In the capitals of the Ilkhanid state, Tabriz and Baghdad, book production reached unparalleled levels, and the rulers chose the Shahnama as a kind of official dynastic history. Local artists absorbed Chinese influences brought by scrolls and drawings and created an eclectic style, which culminated in Rashid al-Din's Jami' al-

[3]Smithsonian Institution, Afrasiab mural paintings.

[4]UNESCO Silk Roads Programme, The Afrasiab paintings.

[5]IFAO, review of Kalīla and Dimna: Fables in the Literature and Arts of the Islamic World.

[6]Contadini (2022), Intertextual animals.

[7]Roxburgh, In pursuit of shadows.

tavarikh and the Great Mongol Shahnama.[8] In the following period a quieter and more refined style appeared, and the Jalayirid rulers provided a bridge between the Ilkhanids and Timur, whose dynasty considered itself the successor of the Mongols.

3.4. The classical age: Timurid and Bukhara schools

The fifteenth century is regarded as the classical age of the Eastern miniature. The Metropolitan Museum states that the Herat school is often considered the apogee of Persian painting and that Herat, the capital of the Timurids, became the focal point of culture in the eastern Islamic world.[9] Its greatest master was Kamoliddin Behzod, active in Herat during the reign of Husayn Bayqara (1470–1506), whose compositions are noted for balance, clarity of spatial definition and precision of drawing.[10]

The tradition did not end with the Timurids. When the Shaibanids took control of Transoxiana in the sixteenth century they employed many Timurid artists, and the legacy of Herat continued in the work of Bukharan painters. Behzod himself moved to Tabriz, and his pupil Mahmud Muzahhib is recorded in Uzbek sources.[11] The Timurid heritage thus passed into the artistic culture of Central Asia and of Iran.

3.5. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal schools

In the sixteenth century the Timurid inheritance was developed in three great empires. In Iran, after the Safavids unified the country, artists from the Qara Quyunlu, Aq Quyunlu and Timurid studios were brought together to form a new Safavid style, and single-page paintings and drawings became popular alongside the manuscript.[12] In the Ottoman Empire, Matrakçı Nasuh developed topographic painting in the period of Süleyman I, and Nakkaş Osman created an Ottoman iconography that became dominant, including a model for portraits of sultans.[13]

In India the Mughal atelier formed under Akbar as a synthesis of Indian and imported Persian influences. The Hamzanama, commissioned in 1562, was the first major work of this workshop and was supervised by the Persian masters Mir Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd al-Samad, who came from the court of Shah Tahmasp; it fused Persian, Indian, Central Asian and even European sources. 'Abd al-Samad recruited artists from across India, and the resulting fusion of styles became the beginning of the Mughal style.[14] This period therefore shows the miniature at its widest geographical range and with its greatest capacity for synthesis.

3.6. Transformation in the nineteenth century

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the position of the miniature changed. In Qajar Iran the production of illustrated manuscripts became limited as oil painting grew in popularity, and one of the last manuscripts made in the royal workshops was a copy of the Thousand and One Nights for Nasir al-Din Shah. At the same time artists showed a revived interest in the painting and drawing of the Safavid period. Research on Qajar art notes that the best miniature painting of this period is often found not in manuscript illustration but in the decoration of lacquered papier-mâché

[8]Carboni & Adamjee, The art of the book in the Ilkhanid period.

[9]Metropolitan Museum of Art, The art of the Timurid period.

[10]Encyclopaedia Iranica, Behzād, Kāmal-al-Dīn.

[11]Sanat (2012), Behzad portrayed in painting and sculpture of Uzbekistan.

[12]Metropolitan Museum of Art, West Asia, 1400–1600 A.D.

[13]Türkiye'nin Ustaları, Art of miniature.

[14]Metropolitan Museum of Art, 'Abd al-Samad.

objects, and that photography influenced the visual language of such works.[15] The miniature thus survived by moving into new media and by adapting to the new European-influenced taste.

3.7. Revival in the twentieth century

In the twentieth century the miniature was consciously revived. In Uzbekistan the revival is associated with masters such as Shomahmud Muhammadjanov and Niyozali Kholmatov, with the Musavvir research and production centre in Tashkent and with the Behzad memorial garden museum, which gathered works by modern miniaturists and by winners of the Behzad Award. The National Institute named after Kamoliddin Behzod, established in 1997, has a faculty of fine arts with departments of easel painting and of miniature and book graphics, which brings the education in both fields into one institution.[16] Some contemporary masters have transferred the miniature manner to large canvases in tempera and oil, and Uzbek miniature has been presented to international audiences, for example in Berlin. In 2025 the style of Behzad was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the nomination stating that the art is transmitted formally and informally and that many students choose to study it each year.

3.8. Influence on world fine art

The first line of influence concerns exchange with Europe. At the Mughal courts European art stimulated awareness of chiaroscuro and spatial depth, and the emperor Jahangir collected Flemish and German engravings that were made available to his atelier. The exchange also went in the opposite direction: in the late 1650s Rembrandt made twenty-three surviving drawings closely based on portraits by artists working in Mughal India, the only time, according to the Getty Museum, when he engaged with the art of a dramatically foreign culture.[17]

The second line is the discovery of Islamic painting by modernism. The Munich exhibition of 1910 presented almost 3,600 exhibits and was the largest display of art from the Islamic cultural sphere ever shown. Mong its visitors were Henri Matisse, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc and August Macke.[18] Research on Kandinsky argues that he developed one of his main strategies in response to the way Persian painters placed forms in a picture so that the viewer discovers them gradually. The Reina Sofía Museum notes that the exhibition made a profound impression on Matisse and that Persian miniatures inspired some of his work.

The third line is recognition as heritage, as shown by the UNESCO inscription of Behzad's style and by the exhibitions of the Uzbek miniature abroad. The fourth line is contemporary reinterpretation. Shahzia Sikander studied the techniques of central and South Asian painted manuscripts at the National College of Arts in Lahore, and her thesis The Scroll began a neo-miniature movement of artists reinterpreting this legacy.

Discussion

The historical survey shows that the Eastern miniature did not develop as an isolated or static tradition. At each stage its renewal came from contact with other cultures: Central Asian and Persian painting with the Arabic book, Chinese painting with the Ilkhanid school, Persian masters with Indian artists in the Mughal atelier, and European art with Mughal and Qajar painting. The

[15] Negareh Journal, The impact of photography on the visual evolution of lacquer works in Qajar period.

[16] National Institute named after Kamoliddin Behzod, Faculty of Fine Arts.

[17] J. Paul Getty Museum, Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India.

[18] Christensen (2021), Kandinsky at the exhibition Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst.

movement of artists and the patronage of courts created the channels of this exchange, and the examples of Behzod's move to Tabriz and of the Persian masters at Akbar's court are typical.

The nineteenth-century transformation is important for an understanding of the modern fate of the tradition. The decline of manuscript illustration did not mean the disappearance of the miniature but its transfer to other media and its coexistence with oil painting and photography. This explains why the twentieth-century revival could take different forms, from the strict continuation of the traditional discipline to its reinterpretation on large canvases and in contemporary art.

With regard to influence on world art, the sources suggest that it should be understood as an exchange and not as a one-way transmission. Europe both learned from and taught the miniature, as the examples of Rembrandt and of the Mughal artists show. Modernism approached Islamic art as a source of new ideas about the picture, and the case of Kandinsky indicates that what he took was a strategy of composition rather than a set of motifs.

For Uzbekistan, the historical perspective is particularly valuable. The country's territory contains the sites of Sogdian painting and the centres of the Timurid and Bukhara traditions, and its modern institutions maintain the revived miniature. For young painters the study of this history is a way of understanding that their own artistic culture belongs to a long and open tradition. At the same time, the survey is based on published sources, and further research in the original collections would refine the periodisation proposed here.

Conclusion

This article has traced the historical development of the Eastern miniature through six stages, from the early wall painting of Central Asia and the early illustrated books, through the Arab, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Bukhara schools and the Safavid, Ottoman and Mughal flowering, to the transformation of the nineteenth century and the revival of the twentieth. It has shown that the tradition developed through continuous exchange between cultures and through the patronage of courts.

The influence of the Eastern miniature on world art took four main forms: exchange with Europe, the discovery of Islamic painting by modernism, recognition as heritage, and contemporary reinterpretation. These forms demonstrate that the miniature is not a closed historical phenomenon but a living resource that continues to inspire artists. For the artists of Uzbekistan, it is at the same time a national inheritance and an invitation to creative dialogue with the world.

References

1. Carboni, S., & Adamjee, Q. (2003). The art of the book in the Ilkhanid period. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/the-art-of-the-book-in-the-ilkhanid-period
2. Christensen, E. (2021). Wassily Kandinsky at the exhibition Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst in Munich, 1910: A modernist artist's interpretation of Persian art. Manazir Journal, 3, 165–173. Retrieved from https://bop.unibe.ch/manazir/article/download/8391/11353/35979
3. Contadini, A. (2022). Intertextual animals: Illustrated Kalila wa-Dimna manuscripts in context [Abstract]. SOAS Research Online. Retrieved from https://eprints.soas.ac.uk/37102
4. Douglass, S. (n.d.). Maqamat al-Hariri, rural scenes by al-Wasiti [Painting]. Children and Youth in History, Item 241. Retrieved from https://www.chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/primary-sources/241
5. Ekhtiar, M., & Sardar, M. (2004). Nineteenth-century Iran: Continuity and revivalism. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/nineteenth-century-iran-continuity-and-revivalism

6. Encyclopaedia Iranica. (n.d.). Afrāsiāb wall paintings. Retrieved from https://www.iranicaonline.org/?p=1507
7. Encyclopaedia Iranica. (n.d.). Behzād, Kāmal-al-Dīn. Retrieved from https://www.iranicaonline.org/?p=6942
8. Haus der Kunst. (2010). The Future of Tradition – The Tradition of the Future: 100 years after the exhibition "Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art" in Munich. Retrieved from https://www.hausderkunst.de/en/eintauchen/zukunft-der-tradition-tradition-der-zukunft-100-jahre-nach-der-ausstellung-meisterwerke-muhammedanischer-kunst-in-muenchen?lang=en
9. ICCU. (n.d.). The exhibition "A legacy linking the centuries: Uzbek miniature art" was organized in Berlin [News]. Retrieved from https://iccu.uz/en/news/1250
10. Institut français d'archéologie orientale. (n.d.). Review of Kalīla and Dimna: Fables in the Literature and Arts of the Islamic World (Paris–Leiden: BnF Éditions, Brill, 2022). Bulletin critique des annales islamologiques, 38. Retrieved from https://www.ifao.egnet.net/bcai/38/35
11. Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. (2025). Decision 20.COM 7.B.3. UNESCO. Retrieved from https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/20.COM/7.B.3
12. J. Paul Getty Museum. (2018). Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India [Exhibition press release, 13 March – 24 June 2018]. Retrieved from https://arthistorynewsreport.blogspot.com/2018/03/rembrandt-and-inspiration-of-india_8.html
13. Madraimov, A. (n.d.). The study of the miniature painting of Uzbekistan. Sanat. Retrieved from https://sanat.orexca.com/2015/2012-2-2015/the-study-of-the-miniature-painting-of-uzbekistan/
14. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). 'Abd al-Samad [Artist biography]. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/76017
15. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). Central and North Asia, 1400–1600 A.D. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/08/nc.html
16. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). Folio from a Hamzanama (The Adventures of Hamza) [Collection record]. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/447050
17. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). Keshav Das [Artist biography]. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/75996
18. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). South and Southeast Asia, 1400–1600 A.D. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/08/ssa
19. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). The art of the Timurid period (ca. 1370–1507). In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/en/essays/the-art-of-the-timurid-period-ca-1370-1507
20. Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). West Asia, 1400–1600 A.D. In Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History. Retrieved from https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/ht/08/wai