

INDIAN ARTISTS AND PAINTERS
MEDIEVAL PERIOD
USTAD MANSUR



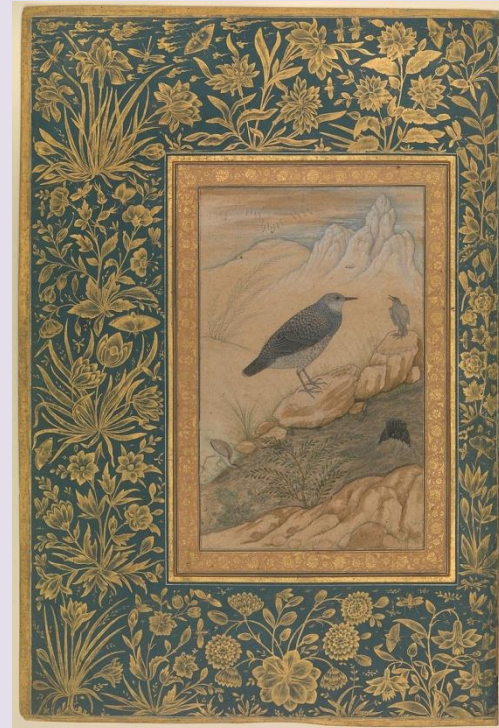
Ustad Mansur was a famous Mughal painter at the court of Mughal Emperor Jahangir in the 17th century. He got much acclaim during his reign. Ustad Mansur was deft at painting of natural landscape especially the flora and fauna. The title of 'Ustad' literally meaning Master was bestowed on Mansur during the reign of Emperor Akbar. During the reign of Jahangir, his masterpieces earned him the title of Nādir-al-'Asr literally meaning 'Unequaled of the Age'. Mansur was primarily known for his paintings of natural life forms but he has also made life portraits of the royalty and other nobility in some of the manuscripts belonging to medieval period.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ustad Mansur was one of the earliest painters in Medieval India to have painted the Siberian Crane.

LIFE SKETCH

The exact birth year of Ustad Mansur is not known. He was referred to Naqqash literally meaning an artist, painter or a carver. It somewhat signifies that he belonged to a family of artists. Even though he gained prominence at the court of Jahangir, yet we find his mention in one miniature painting of 'Babur's meeting with his sister' (folio 8, National Museum, Delhi). But it is surprising that he finds no place in Babur's, memoirs- *The Baburnama*. Ustad Mansur is often compared to his contemporaries like Nanha, Miskina and Basawan. During the reign of Emperor Akbar, Mansur was utilised as a colorist for his biography- *Akbarnama*. Unfortunately here too he finds no mention in the manuscript penned down by Abu Fazl among the list of artists. But Akbar being a just ruler decreed that the artist's name had to be included along with the artist's work. In fact, the copy of *Akbarnama* at the British Museum includes some folios where Ustad Mansur's name was mentioned.



HIS WORKS

Ustad Mansur made natural landscapes and portraits initially in his painting career. His notable work includes *Veena Player* (circa 1595 CE) and Emperor Jahangir's portrait of his coronation (circa 1605 CE). In year 1612, Jahangir received a turkey cock bird as a gift from Goa; Ustad Mansur beautifully illustrated it on canvas. In year 1619, Jahangir was gifted a Barbary falcon from the Persian ruler, Shah Abbas. The bird was such a rare beauty that he ordered Mansur to make a similar portrait of the



bird. In 1620, Mansur painted a brown dipper when Jahangir travelled to Kashmir. It is mentioned in his memoirs, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*.

Excerpts from *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*...

"... In this stream I saw a bird like a saj. It dives and remains for a long time underneath and then comes up from a different place. I ordered them to catch and bring two or three of these birds, that I might ascertain whether they were waterfowl and were web-footed, or had open feet like land birds. They caught two... One died immediately and the other lived for a day. Its feet were not webbed like a duck's. I ordered Nadirul-asr Ustad Mansur to draw its likeness."

Ustad Mansur is said to have painted more than 100 flowers of the Kashmir Valley during Jahangir's reign. A painting of a red Tulip is one of his finest paintings. Mansur's last miniature was a painting of a Zebra that was a gift to Jahangir. His illustrious career ended with his patron ruler in year 1627.

LEGACY

His paintings of Siberian Crane and the Bengal Florican are installed at the Indian Museum in Kolkata. Some of his other notable works are at exhibited at the National Museum in Delhi, the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum in Jaipur and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Vastu Sangrahalaya in Mumbai. Not all of Mansur's works were inspired from the nature. He took efforts in adding effects on them. He drew many imaginary birds like his contemporaries like *Miskina* and *Ikhlas*. Mansur's painting mainly emphasised on painting the bird as the main subject. He often added plants, insects in the backdrop with floral borders that became a characteristic feature of



Mughal art work. Mansur was also a capable artist in making life portraits. For instance the portrait of musician Naubat Khan at the court of Emperor Akbar is a classic example.

ACTIVITY

1. Describe Ustad Mansur's nature of paintings in your own words.

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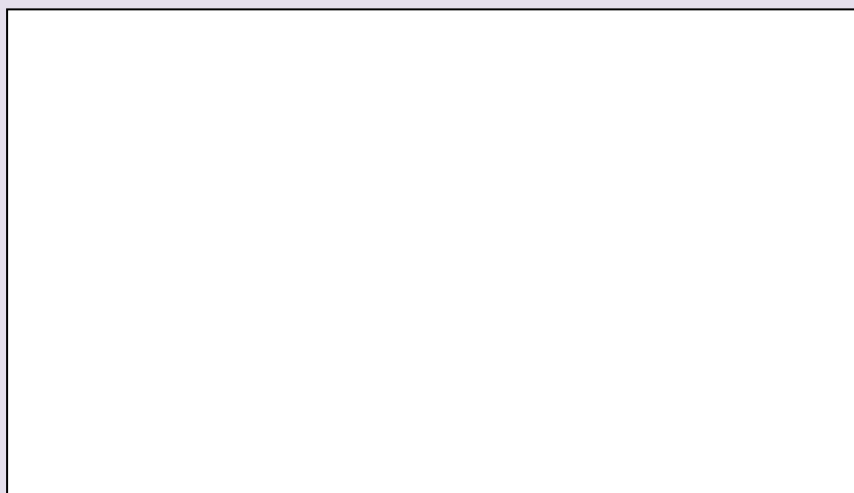
2. Mention some of Ustad Mansur's famous work. Which one do you like the most?

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3. What was Ustad Mansur's preferred theme for his paintings?

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4. Make a sketch or a portrait of any Mughal artist of your choice.



Credit

<https://madhulikaidde.com/2013/04/17/jahangir-ustad-mansur-and-the-art-of-fauna-and-flora/>