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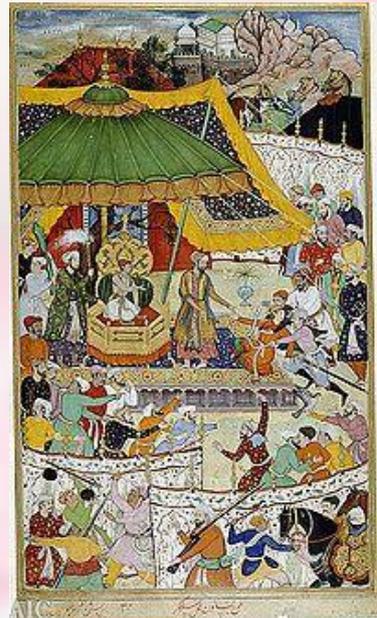
Indian Artists and Painters

Medieval Period

Basawan

What do you know about the medieval paintings of India?

The art in Medieval India flourished like no other. In this period, not many regions had illustrated work except Gujarat and Malwa. Persian practice of miniature painting was introduced in India in this era. An imperial establishment of this practice through the miniature paintings and manuscripts developed during Akbar's reign. This form of art brought together many Hindu and Muslim painters from different regions of India, especially, Gujarat and Malwa. This form of painting first flourished in Northern India, parts of Rajasthan and the Deccan.



The illustration we see on the left side of the double-page composition of Akbarnama is designed by Basawan. Basawan was one of the famous Mughal miniature painters of his times. He was a skilled colourist and observer of human nature. Very little is known about his life, but as his name suggests, he may hail from a cow-herding caste (Ahir) from Uttar Pradesh. He attained the prestigious position of a court painter in Akbar's court. He came under the influence of another famous painter Abd al-Samad. His son, Manohar Das finally succeeded him as a court painter.

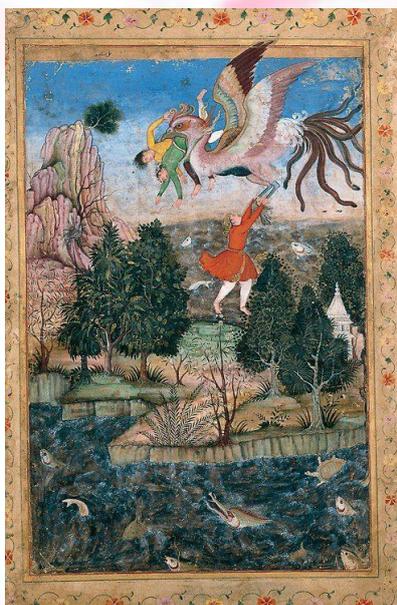
There are about 100 paintings that have been attributed to Basawan. His earliest mention can be found in Tutinama c. 1556-61. His works mostly comprise of illustrations on manuscripts. Most of his work has been conducted by involvement of another artist who supplied colour. Few works that can

definitely be attributed to him are illustrations from: Razamnama, Akbar-nama, Darab-nama, the Bahristan of Jami, and the Timur-nama.

His composition in the Akbarnama has gained popularity over a period of time. This composition depicts a famous incident in the life of the Mughal Emperor Akbar outside the Agra Fort in 1561. According to Abu'l Fazl, Akbar's court historian, the royal elephant Hawaí was reputed as one of the strongest and the most notorious of all the elephants owned by the Emperor. Yet it is said that Akbar mounted him with ease and was successful in pitting him against an equally fierce elephant named Ran Bagha. The illustration depicts this scene from Akbar's life. In the illustration he is seen spursusing



Ran Bagha across the bridge of boats over River Yamuna, while mounted on Hawaí. The bridge collapses under the weight of the elephants and a number of Akbar's servants have jumped into the water for refuge. Akbarnama is an account of Akbar's reign. It was written in Persian by the court historian, Abu'l Fazl between 1590 and 1596 whereas the paintings are said to have been done on Akbarnama between 1590 and 1595.

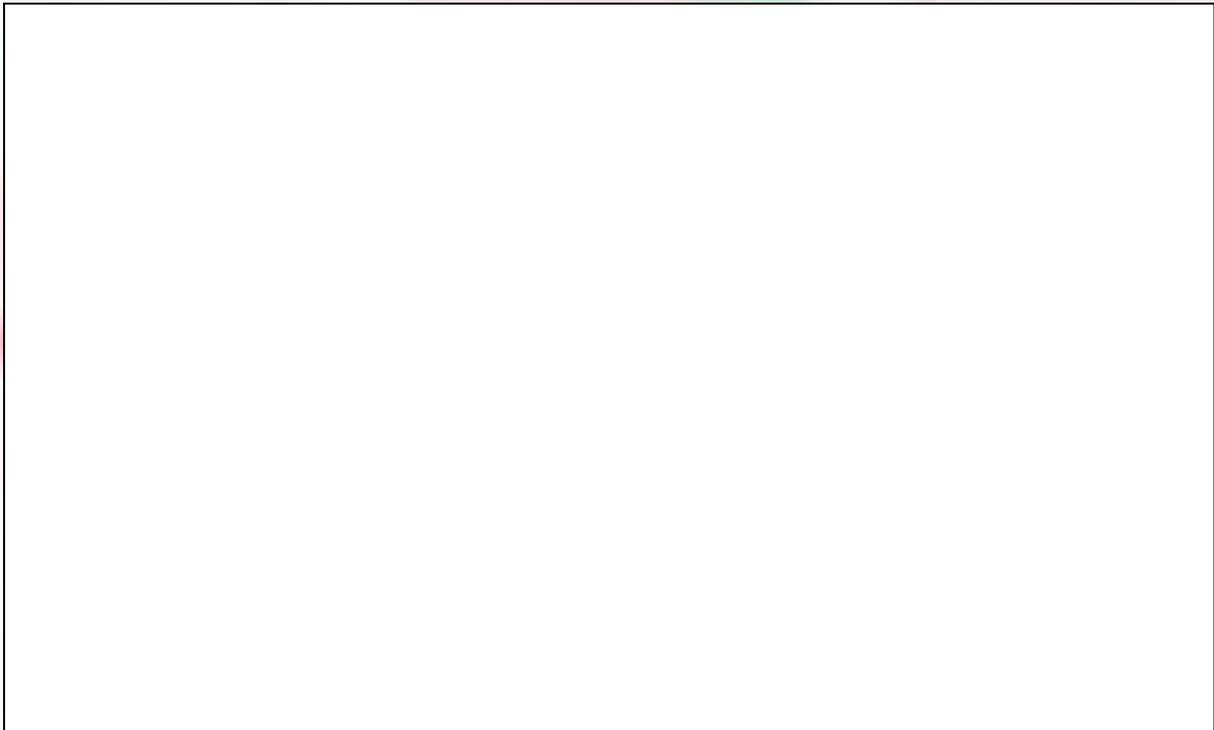


Basawan was one of the first Indian artists to take inspiration from European paintings brought to Akbar's court by the missionaries. He was interested in learning western techniques and it can be seen in his use of strong contrasts of light and shade. The amalgamation is so balanced that one cannot see the western influence prominently in his work. Basawan is also known for his exploration of space, delineation of his backgrounds, the strength of colours, and his strong, moving characterisations of the subjects.

Abu al- Fadi, historiographer of Akbar, famously wrote about Basawan, "In designing and portrait painting and colouring and painting the illusionistic way...he became unrivalled in the world"

Activity: How would you paint a miniature painting?

Paint a monument of your city/ state.



Activity 2: Name a painter that you admire. What are the qualities of his paintings that inspire the painter in you?

Sources: www.indianetzone.com,
collections.vam.ac.uk,