



August OOM

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Garden Scene with Princes and Attendants

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Artist Unknown (Iran or Turkey)

15th Century, Timurid or Ottoman dynasty

Painting/ ink, colors, and gold on paper

Garden Scene Gallery Label:

A beautiful arrangement of forms and richly orchestrated colors, rather than the illustration of a specific narrative, distinguishes this lovely miniature. The romantic fairyland world it depicts is drawn from the work of the well-known Persian author Sa'di. The mystical-didactic writings of Sufi poet-scholars Sa'di (13th century) and Tamu (d. 1492) were immensely popular. Accordingly, miniature paintings based on their verse often served as visual metaphors for a

spiritual union with the divine by representing the physical union of two lovers – in this case, the two princes.

Questions:

(Use a flashlight and ask audience to stand close to painting. A suggested prop is an enlarged photo of this scene, which can be passed around for closer examination.)

- Look carefully at this miniature painting. What do you think is happening in this scene? What makes you say that?
- Try to imagine that you are in this fairy-tale world, within this garden. What emotions might you experience in this setting?
- Describe what you would paint in your own Garden of Paradise?

Art Historical Background:

Islamic miniatures are small paintings on paper, used as either book illustrations or to be kept in an album known as a muraqqa. They can be compared to the techniques used in the tradition of illustrated manuscripts in Western art. Human figures could not be depicted in religious works, such as the Koran, but could be used in the miniature because it's a private form shown only to those whom the owner chooses. In addition to the figures, there is ornamental decoration found in the borders and panels in the pages and this is referred to as "illumination" in Islamic art.

One of the most striking features of the miniature is its bright and pure coloring. Faces are normally seen in $\frac{3}{4}$ profile showing typical Central Asian features. There is no evidence of shadows or chiaroscuro. (Strong contrasts between light and dark.) Many figures are usually depicted and depth is indicated by placing more distant figures higher up in the space. Fabrics are carefully shown and landscape is given much attention. Animals often appear, especially horses.

Artists were exclusively male and work was divided between the main painter and the less senior painters who colored in the drawing. Scribes or calligraphers were different people and regarded as of a higher status than the artists.

About the Work:

Sufism, or Muslim mysticism, began as a reaction to the materialism of Islamic leaders during the 8th century. One of the caliphs (leaders) at this time had an extensive harem (house or section of a house reserved for women members of a Muslim household; wives, servants, concubines, femal relatives, and servants occupying it), lavish lifestyle, and numerous slaves that contrasted sharply to the simplicity of Mohammed’s life. All Muslims believe that they can become close to God in paradise but Sufis believe that it is possible to draw closer to God and to fully embrace him in this life. Another cornerstone of Sufism is that true knowledge of God is achieved directly and not through any intermediary like a prophet, saint or priest. (This is obviously just a thumbnail sketch of Sufism as a religion or philosophy.)

Sa’di, the Sufi poet whose work is the inspiration for this miniature, was one of the major Persian poets of the medieval period. Born in Shiraz, he experienced a youth of poverty and hardship and traveled to Baghdad at a young age to study Arabic literature and theology. He also excelled in the sciences and law. He traveled extensively, including trips to Mecca and Medina, traveling during the period of Mongol invasions, living in refugee camps and exchanging views with survivors of the war-torn silk trade routes. After more than 30 years of travel, including 7 years of capture by the Crusaders which he spent as a slave digging trenches, he returned to Shiraz . He spent his elder years as a highly respected scholar and enjoyed relative tranquility .

**“Human beings are the parts of a body,
They are from the same species,
When one of these parties is reached and suffering,
Others can not find neither peace nor tranquility,
If the misery of others leaves you indifferent,
And without any trouble! Then:
It is unthinkable to call yourself a human being.”**

- Sa’di

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- The symbolism of the Islamic garden has two elements of importance: water and shade. To those brought up in a hot desert climate the popular idea of a garden as paradise is easy to understand. The word paradise is from the ancient Persian word pairidaeza – the Persians being one of the earliest peoples to cultivate gardens, parks and hunting grounds. By the time the prophet Muhammad came along, the concept of Gardens of Eden had been passed down from early Jewish and Christian traditions. The Muslim idea of a paradise garden on earth is that it is a private place, hidden away from the world, a place for prayer and contemplation. It serves as a reminder of the impermanence of life and the transcendence of God. We have to remember the stark contrast between the harsh and arid landscape in most parts of the Islamic world and the gentle cool given by trees and foliage in the garden. Flowers and their bright colors are a vital element in Islamic art, such as in tiles, textiles and our miniature. I think that the gateway to the right of the scene in our garden is associated with the mihrab, or arched niche located in the wall of a mosque.

- **Tour Suggestions:**

○ **Cityscapes, Landscapes, Escapes**

○ **Come to Your Senses**

○ **People and Places**

- **Sources:**

○ **Art Beyond the West by Michael Kampen O’Riley**

○ **The Story of Art by E.H. Gombrich**

○ **A History of Art by Sir Lawrence Gowing**

○ **“Islamica Magazine”: The Symbolism of the Islamic Garden**

○ **www.uga.edu/islam/Sufism.htmlSufism, Sufism, Sufis, and Sufi Orders**

