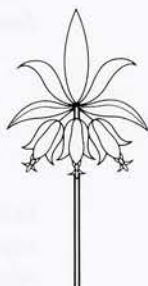


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Some botanical paintings in the National Museum, New Delhi

James J. White

A search of at least 50 file drawers of index cards and thumbnail-sized negatives in the Department of Paintings, National Museum, New Delhi, India, revealed a number of watercolors on paper with plant themes. References to floral borders and decorative paintings were ignored. Since I could not inspect each painting, I requested photographs of those which seemed to reflect the strongest plant portraits. Four photos were obtained and are reproduced here.

Two artworks, one depicting a *Tradescantia*

or spiderwort (Commelinaceae family) and the other an unidentified member of the Convolvulaceae or morning-glory family, can be termed Company paintings, ca. 1825. They doubtless were executed by Indian artists working under British patronage. A third painting depicts *Mirabilis jalapa* L. (Nyctaginaceae family), called marvel of Peru and four-o'clock, a fragrant commonly cultivated plant with flowers opening in the evening and at night. A fourth painting is 18th-century Rajsthani and probably depicts *Gaillardia* or



Figure 1. *Tradescantia*. Courtesy of the National Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 2. Morning glory. Courtesy of the National Museum, New Delhi.



Figure 3. *Mirabilis jalapa* L. Courtesy of the National Museum, New Delhi.

blanket flower in the Compositae family. *Gaillardia* grows in the southern United States, Mexico and South America.

Acquired by the museum in the 1940s and 1950s, none of these has been exhibited. The sizes of the works in centimeters are: *Tradescantia*, 20.5 × 28.8; morning glory, 28.4 × 18.3; *Mirabilis jalapa*, 12 × 10; and *Gaillardia*?, 22 × 15.2. Possibly additional paintings of botanical interest would be revealed by a more thorough search of the collection.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the National Museum, New Delhi, and especially to Dr. Daljeet, curator of paintings; Dr.



Figure 4. *Gaillardia*? Courtesy of the National Museum, New Delhi.

Vijay Kumar Mathur, curatorial associate; and Mr. U. Das, keeper (public relations). For assistance in identifications of the subjects I thank Drs. Dan H. Nicolson and Robert Faden of the Department of Botany, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. My appreciation also is extended to the Smithsonian Special Foreign Currency Program for two grants and to the American Institute of Indian Studies in New Delhi for special courtesies.

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