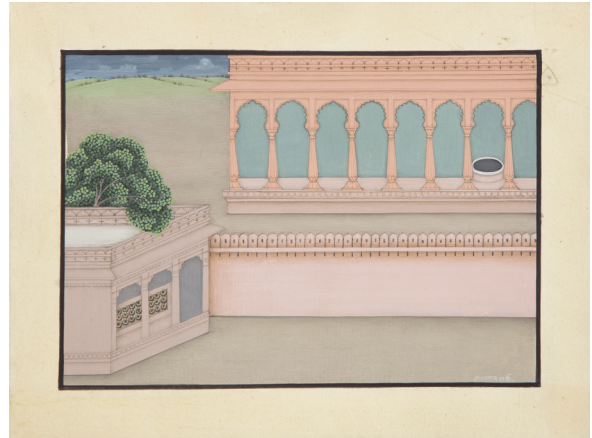


## RAJA RAM SHARMA

Contemporary Paintings from Rajasthan



*Study I*, 2011, hand ground mineral pigments with gum arabic on paper, 6 x 8 1/8 in



*Contemplation*, 2011, hand ground mineral pigments with gum arabic on paper, 6 1/4 x 8 1/4 in

On view September 7 to October 29, 2012, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present two exhibitions: **Jennifer Bartlett** *Homan-ji*, a show of mineral paintings on Japanese rice paper inspired by her commission in 1992 to paint a ceiling for a temple in Japan, and **Raja Ram Sharma** *Contemporary Paintings from Rajasthan*.

Trained in the Nathdwara School that was founded in 17<sup>th</sup> century Rajasthan, **Raja Ram Sharma** is a master miniature and temple painter living in Udaipur, India. In contemporary culture in Rajasthan this means that his daily work is devoted to painting pichwai, the cloth paintings hung as offerings behind the image of the deity in Hindu temples. In his own time, away from his pichwai workshop, Sharma creates his own art: miniature paintings about the land, and the spirit and art of Rajasthan.

Sharma's quiet miniatures of the landscape, the architecture and the gardens of Rajasthan recall the exquisite illustrated manuscripts painted in the imperial Mughal ateliers where Hindu and Islamic traditions were fused with the influence of Persian court painting. However, rather than depicting courtly life and conquests, Mr. Sharma gives delicate form to his concerns about the fragile water supply in Rajasthan and the loss of connection between humanity and history. The absence of the figure is the most haunting aspect of these paintings. Considering the strong narrative tradition in which he was trained to copy the military and romantic escapades of the Mughal court, Sharma's paintings are a unique voice addressing a contemporary universal response to the natural world and to cultural history.

Measuring 6 x 8 inches, Sharma's works are painted on recycled rag paper with one-hair brushes he makes of rabbit and squirrel hairs. His medium is a traditional water based 'body color' or gouache, which he achieves by pulverizing stone pigments in a mortar and mixing them with gum arabic and water. Observing his centuries old process, one sees the inherited knowledge of color and brush stroke passed along a lineage of painters from 1600 to the present.

However traditional his practice, Mr. Sharma's images address urgent local and global issues. Living as he does in an arid climate that suffers extreme droughts annually, Mr. Sharma's parched landscapes cry out for rain, while in other works monsoons pour down from the sky. The water table is precarious year round. In still others, the rolling pink hills of Rajasthan look abundantly planted and verdant, an oasis. In some of his more abstract aerial views, Sharma peeks over walls into lush courtyard gardens designed on a grid of rills. The precise variation among the leaves of each tree is a marvel.

Another subject Sharma turns his tiny brush to is the wonder of Rajasthani palace architecture. He reinvents the layout of his local 16<sup>th</sup> century palace museum in Udaipur with moats and mazes of white turrets and loggias overlooking the lakes with elephant boats floating by. Most obvious in these intricate contemporary miniature paintings is the absence of figures within the walls of the historical monuments.

In other works, Sharma takes a passage in a famous painting from the Udaipur Palace Museum collection and gives it a new, abstracted context. Recently inspired by paintings of the horses of the Mughal armies, Sharma paints the horses in traditional costume frolicking across the land or wading in a line across the river. In another “appropriation” he composes an abstract image repeating three painted borders from miniatures he knows well. Broken up and realigned, Sharma creates a dazzling geometric composition from the bands of painted flowers, derived from European herbals which influenced imperial Mughal painters and architects in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

In contrast to the overcrowded conditions of life in his hometown of Udaipur and India at large, Mr. Sharma protects for himself and his viewers an experience of India that is no longer. He paints the stillness of abandoned court architecture and the graceful solace of the landscape as it suffers the drought and is replenished by the rains. Sharma’s small intense miniature paintings are a voice of silence and beauty – of preeminence of the environment and the waning memories of religious ritual. With tiny brushstrokes, Mr. Sharma’s delicate paintings of well tended Mughal gardens amidst verdant or parched hills and meandering rivers remind us that the earth was sacred in many cultures. His medium is perfect for his message.

**Please note new gallery hours: Monday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10-6; Sunday 11-5**

For further information and reproduction quality images, please contact Janet Goleas at 631.324.5016 or [info@drawingroom-gallery.com](mailto:info@drawingroom-gallery.com).