

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From August 18 through September 26, 2005, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present two concurrent exhibitions Jack Youngerman: *Recent Drawings and The Menagerie: Indian Paintings 1790-1842*, collected by East India Company Patrons.

The Menagerie presents natural history paintings in gouache by painters from Lucknow and Calcutta trained in the Mughal Indo-Persian court tradition of miniature painting. This genre is called "company pictures," because they were commissioned by British and French trading company officials who were passionate to record the wildlife in their new territory, India. In their menageries, aviaries or zoos the officers collected specimens for the artists to document. The intercultural exchange of ideas, techniques and subjects between native Indian artists, and their European patrons during the height of British colonialism is the subtext of this exhibition of birds and horses.

From the collections of natural historians in the service of the Governor General of India, the Asian white stork and red-headed antigone are the epitome of Indo Persian draughtmanship and art at the end of the 18th century. The birds are ingeniously positioned so that the contours of their bodies are silhouetted against the white sky of the paper. Each feather is delineated with the astonishing precision only a miniaturist could capture. The modesty of their powerful technique invites a closer look.

The other birds in this exhibition are from the Lucknow Menagerie, a collection of natural history paintings commissioned by Claude Martin (1735-1800), an enlightened Frenchman who settled in Lucknow in 1751 to become a powerful European liaison with Indian businesses as a banker, architect, soldier and botanist. Tree nesting birds such as bulbuls (nightingales), starlings and pigeons were painted life size poised on branches of leaves of mulberry and fruit trees. Shore nesting birds such as the stilt are captured in magnificent detail towering over the sand with the naïvely juxtaposed landscape of water and wetland grasses beyond.

In addition to works from the Martin collection, there is a pair of horses painted by Shekh Mohamed Ameer from Calcutta who made sets of drawings featuring houses, horses and servants of British patrons. Signed and dated in 1842, these portraits of racehorses and their trainers describe every muscle and tendon of the champion horses symbols of an exotic culture. Another earlier pair of horses was painted by Coopakangah around 1790. A stately silver-grey stallion held by a Sa'ise is inscribed as having been the "favorite horse belonging to Colonel Stuart," a Major-General in the British expeditionary force against the Dutch in Colombo, Ceylon. Along with documenting Colonel Stuart's prize stallion, the landscape in the background documents a view of Tanjore where Stuart lost his leg in a battle.

The painting commissions provided an artistic as well as an economic opportunity for the artists. The Indian artists were exposed to European books as models of what their new patrons wanted. They were given new materials such as watercolor, thicker brushes and larger papers. The sense of space the animals could inhabit on the large sheets of Whatman papers gave life to the zoologically accurate drawings. Western conventions of perspective, foreshortening, modeling and formal illustration are contemplated and interpreted by the native artists who brought their

own extraordinary aesthetic and spiritual goals to the making of an image. Aside from their rarity and historical interest, their precision and poetry on the page, these hybrid paintings surprise us with their modern sensibility.

For further information or reproductions, please contact Susan Papa at 631.324.5016 or info@drawingroom-gallery.com.