

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Opening Saturday September 18 and on view through Monday October 25, 2004 The Drawing Room will present *Fishes of India: Calcutta School 1804-1810*, zoological paintings on paper of fish from the Bengal and the Ganges Rivers as they were documented in the early nineteenth century by Muslim artists trained in the miniature technique characteristic of the Mughal court. These Company School drawings were commissioned by British and French trading company officials during the colonial period in India. The European opportunists settling in India were passionate to record the beauty and curiosity of their new territories leading to a fascinating cross-cultural collaboration between the colonists and the well trained, native artists in India. The artful evidence was brought back to universities, libraries and drawing rooms at home.

The exhibition presents fish from two collections: *The Fishes of India* and *Bengal River Fish*. *The Fishes of India* comprises 20 watercolor and gouache paintings of small fish recorded with breathtaking beauty and detail on large sheets of European watercolor paper. Tiny iridescent minnows, transparent pink eels and grumpy bottom fish are singled out and drawn in flat profile in the center of each page. Each fish appears to be in its element, swimming from left to right across the white paper. These images are of special interest for their fresh beauty and the modesty of their powerful technique.

The second collection -- *Bengal River Fish* -- was commissioned by Marquis Wellesley who was the Governor General of India from 1798 to 1805. Three larger sheets from this group will be on view; two others that previously accompanied these three are now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Filling the whole sheet, these compositions of two and three species per page, look as though they were just taken from the water. The translucence of the scales is captured with layers of watercolor and iridescent powders. Alongside the drawings of the fish are faint graphite sketches where the artist practiced a small patch of the intricate patterning of the scales. The drama of their life size representation and the magnificent skill with which they are painted indicates a unique sensibility, the resilient product of a declining Mughal aesthetic.

Trained in the Mughal court tradition of layered and burnished gouache miniature painting, these artists were already masters of nature and portraiture. Their skills of observation and technical ingenuity made them valuable to the profiteers forging the British Empire. Ultimately, these rare fish tell the story of a refined Indo-Persian artistic tradition appropriated by the taste of a colonial society. Aside from their rarity and historical interest, these 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.