
Title of Object

Relief with a Floral Decoration

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown artist

Culture: Mughal, Indian

Date of Object: circa 1700

Country: India

Accession Number: 2000.65

File Created: 10/1/2016

Material/Medium: Mottled red sandstone

Author of File: Mark Catron

Department: Chinese, South and Southeast
Asian Art

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Last Updated/Reviewed: 2/1/2017

Tour Topics

Group 1, Fashion/Trends, Highlights 1600-1850, Architecture; Cultural encounters/exchanges; Nature/Flowers; Islam, Muslim, Islamic art, Symbolism

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

Take a close look: see anything that looks familiar? Can you identify any of the flowers or plants in this panel? (You may have one of these in your flower garden, though definitely not all of them.)

Is this depiction of plants realistic or imaginative? What do you see that makes you say one or the other?

Why join together banana, acanthus, and iris?

Does this speak to the modern viewer?

How do you suppose this object was created?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

Carved (reductive) sandstone panel that would have adorned a public or sacred structure. Comparisons for historical context (see first two prop photos).

Three distinct plants are represented: iris, banana leaves, acanthus leaves.

Stone wall panels ornamented with natural motifs decorated the walls of many Mughal architectural monuments. The mottled red sandstone is typical of the Mathura, Sikri, and Chunar regions of north India. (label information)

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

The Mughals (Turco-Mongols claiming direct descent from both Ghengis Khan and Timur) entered northern India from Central Asia early in the 16th century, and eventually, under their great third emperor, Akbar, consolidated an empire including a unified northern India, extending to Afghanistan. Artistically and architecturally the Mughals synthesized Indo (Vedic), Islamic, Persian and Central Asian traditions, building especially on established traditional Indian virtuosity in stone carving. They generated a vigorous, organic and naturalistic aesthetic in both stone and paint.

Three distinct plants represented: iris, banana leaves, acanthus leaves, each with its own cultural connections, symbolism and significance. Iris is a plant native to temperate climates, named for the Greek goddess of the rainbow/messenger of love; one of the most highly cultivated, hybridized and prized garden flowers in the world.

The acanthus is a plant native to warm, temperate regions, especially around the Mediterranean. Symbolizing enduring life, it had many medicinal uses. It defined the capital of the Corinthian column, and was carried forward artistically and architecturally in Byzantine churches and both Gothic and Romanesque portals and archways.

The banana is native to Indomalaya and Australia, but first domesticated in Papua New Guinea. It has a long symbolic history in the Indian subcontinent, Indian mystics meditate beneath banana plants; the banana is the incarnation of Lakshmi in some traditions. For some Arab scholars, they consider the banana the “tree of paradise.”

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

Stone wall panels ornamented with natural motifs decorated the walls of many Mughal architectural monuments. The Mughals delighted in observing nature, which resulted in the representation of flora and fauna in many different mediums. This panel, which has a pendant panel at the Louvre, was made in the late Mughal period, and thus eschews the symmetry of previous designs. It instead displays a fanciful representation of irises blooming out of wind-tossed banana leaves, which in turn spring from a triple corolla of acanthus leaves. The mottled red sandstone is typical of the Mathura, Sikri, and Chunar regions of north India.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Sources:

Stokstad, Art History, pp. 776-782

britannica.com

Wikipedia re: Mughal empire; floral sandstone panels; Taj Mahal (various pages)

Mausoleum of Humayun, Delhi, British Library:

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/addorimss/m/019addor0001809u00000000.html>

UNESCO site, Mausoleum of Humayun (similar red sandstone used in construction):

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/232/>

History of the Iris, University of Missouri : <https://ipm.missouri.edu/MEG/2014/6/Iris-A-Brief-History/>

Acanthus ornament, Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acanthus_\(ornament\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acanthus_(ornament))

History of the banana, University of California:

<http://cwh.ucsc.edu/bananas/Site/Early%20History%20of%20the%20Banana.html>

Banana, page 72, Encyclopedia of Cultivated Plants: From Acacia to Zinnia.

Essay, Vegetal Patterns in Islamic Art, from Met museum:

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/vege/hd_vege.htm

Taj Mahal, UNESCO World Heritage site: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/252>

Taj Mahal, Smarthistory.org: <https://smarthistory.org/the-taj-mahal/>

The Taj Mahal, history, from the Indian government of Uttar Pradesh:

<http://www.tajmahal.gov.in/creation.html>

PROPS:



Earlier red sandstone floral panel, from the great mausoleum to Humayun, which was built by Akbar in the 1560's.



Floral panel from Taj Mahal 1631-48.



Corinthian capital based on acanthus leaves.