ENDURING PERFECTION

Paintings by

DAMODAR LAL GURJAR
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DAMODAR LAL GURJAR

Catalogue of an exhibition
26 April through 31 July 2001

James J. White
and Lugene B. Bruno

with an introduction by
Dr. M. K. Sharma Sumahendra

Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
2001
FRONT COVER:
19 Dahlia, tempera, 2000

BACK COVER:
16 Indian Elephants, tempera, 1999

Composed on Apple MacIntosh
using Microsoft Word and Adobe PageMaker
Set in 10 point and 12 point Adobe Garamond
Printed offset on 80 pound Warren Strobe Dull
and bound by Allen Press Inc., Lawrence, Kansas
Reproduction photography by Frank A. Reynolds
Designed by Eugene B. Bruno

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ISBN 0-913196-71-1
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14 White Rose Bud, tempera, 1998
Having learned about Damodar Lal Gurjar from Mohammed Fazel, a psychology professor in Fort Wayne, Indiana, I arranged to meet Gurjar in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1994. On my subsequent trips we became better acquainted at his home in Jaipur in the desert state of Rajasthan. Sitting before the picturesque Ram Niwas, a former maharaja's palace in Jaipur, Gurjar and I arranged the Hunt's acquisition of two of his most striking paintings—Two Onions and Cannas With Fly. Late in 1997 I wrote that it would be a pleasure to present an exhibition of his originals. He modestly responded that he would look forward to presenting work of his highest standard and would spare no efforts to prepare worthy artworks.

Two of Gurjar's watercolors of pine bonsai were included in the Hunt Institute's 7th International Exhibition of Botanical Art & Illustration in 1992 and in our subsequent travel show. Thirteen additional artworks, including his memorable pair of onions, were featured in our Natural-History Paintings from Rajasthan in 1994/1995, also shown at Wave Hill in New York. Two of the artist's paintings were my selections for the local Concept Art Gallery's 30 Cautors, an exhibition selected by 30 of the region's art professionals early in 2000.

Born in 1958 and educated at the Rajasthan School of Art, Gurjar has made his career as a freelance artist painting numerous private commissions in watercolor, gouache and tempera. One-person exhibitions have been held at the Ranthambore School of Art in Sawai Madhopur (1990) and the Crafts Museum in New Delhi (1994). In 1999 Gurjar received a State Award from the Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy and an All India Award by the Department of Environment. To date only two of his paintings, both of mythological subjects, have been displayed outside of India, and that was at the University of Iowa Museum of Art in 1998.

Gurjar is influenced by the traditional school of painting, but his technique is a blend of the traditional and contemporary. He is skilled in depicting textures in his subjects — whether petals, onion skins, pine needles, ceramic pots, or feathers. He occasionally makes field trips to observe nature, such as to the coast of Gujarat for species of wild birds. Certainly he is one of India's leading artists of natural-history themes.

Commenting on whether his original paintings are from life or photographs, Gurjar states, "Sometimes when it seems that a subject may change with time, we take the help of photography to freeze that subject as such in a particular lighting situation. This is necessary since a painting usually takes a long time to complete." In 1997 he wrote, "Recently I have also started using oil colors as a new medium to make nature study paintings with similar effects of perfection, reality and minute details, which I was able to show in watercolors."

We are grateful to Dr. M. K. Sharma Sumahendra, Principal, Rajasthan School of Art, Jaipur, for his introduction; the individual donors who made this catalogue possible; Joseph H. Kirkbride, Jr., Research Botanist, U.S.D.A., for determination of the painting of Mitragyna; Scarlett Townsend for proofreading; and Frank Reynolds for photography.

—James J. White
3 Red Rose, tempera and watercolor, 1997
INTRODUCTION

The Jaipur-Amber area of the state of Rajasthan has a rich history of contact with other cultures that has influenced its artistic tradition. Jaipur, the Pink City founded by Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II in 1727, is known for its indigenous arts and crafts practiced until 1947 when India gained independence. The concept of Chhattis Karkhana, i.e., thirty-six ateliers, was in practice as designed by the Mughals with whom the city of Amber and later its successor, Jaipur, had very cordial relations as early as the period of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who ruled from 1556 to 1605. We find examples of exquisite miniatures of Ragamala paintings depicting Indian musical modes and mundane subjects painted in Amber in 1700 and 1709. Amber remained a center of art parallel to Jaipur as artist families at both places were almost the same, sometimes working for both cities. Amber and Jaipur flourished simultaneously, but Jaipur gradually became the main center of the state. Today Amber still exists with age-old glory inviting foreign tourists to witness archaeological sites and providing locals a sight-seeing spot close to Jaipur.

Modern education began during the incumbency of Major Ludlow in 1844. Sawai Ram Singh II (ruled 1835–1880), the then Maharaja of Jaipur, did much for educational development of the state. Apart from general and elementary education, higher education included a special Rajput School for instruction of Thakurs and high officials. The Sanskrit College was founded in June 1867.

The Maharaja, by the advice of Sir Charles Trevelyan, opened the School of Art in 1867. The branches taught in the school were plain and ornamental carpentry; carving in wood, bone and ivory; plain and ornamental blacksmithing; pottery (Indian and European style); coach building and upholstery; drawing and bookbinding. In 1875 seven teachers were engaged in teaching 25 students. Earlier named as Madarsa-e-hunari, it was started in Badal Mahal (Palace in clouds), a palace situated to the north of the main Royal City Palace behind Govind Deo Ji temple. Some references establish the School of Art founding in 1857. Maybe in the year 1867 the institution was formalised in the British pattern of teaching when teachers and a principal were brought from the Madras School of Art. The institution was shifted to a Haveli of Pandit Shivdeen, a Minister of Sawai Ram Singh II. Since this building housed a museum, it is commonly called Ajabghar (Museum), a house of curious things even today. The Museum was shifted to Albert Hall, a magnificent building constructed for the purpose in Ram Niwas Bagh, a public garden about half a kilometer southeast of the School of Art in the year 1886. Temporarily the Museum commenced in August 1881 in the School of Art building under the superintendence of Lt. Col. T.H. Hendley, the brigade surgeon, and was formally opened for the public in a new building in February 1887.

Now the School of Art building is situated in Kishnepole Bazar, a main road connecting Chhoti Chaupar (small square) and Ajmeri Gate, one of the nine main gates of the city compound wall that opens to the southwest and is used only by the school. This institution remained under the control of Jaipur state until the period of Maharaja Man Singh II (ruled 1922–1949) and the merger of Jaipur state with free India in 1949. Jaipur became the capital of the state of Rajasthan, which was formed by the merger of the princely states of Rajputana: Jaipur, Jodhpur, Mewar and Kota.
Bundi. In the 1950s the School of Art split into the Art School and Craft School. The Art School remained with the Education Department of Rajasthan. The Craft School perished within a few years under the control of the Department of Industries.

The School of Art was renamed the Rajasthan School of Art and was the successor of the Maharaja's School of Art and Craft, which also commonly was known as the Jaipur School of Art. In 1980 the School of Art was handed over to the Department of Art and Culture with administrative control handled by the Directorate of College Education. In 1987 the bachelor of fine arts (B.F.A.), a professional degree course of four years duration affiliated with the University of Rajasthan, was introduced in all three departments: painting, sculpture and applied art. The diploma course was suspended in the same year, but after one year it was started again with a change of duration from five to four years, raising the entry qualification from secondary to senior secondary and making it on par with the B.F.A. program.

This institution had many Bengali artists as principals during the 1930s to 1950s. It was the period of renaissance in Indian Art. E. B. Hevell, principal of the Calcutta School of Art, was one of the personalities who incited revival of traditional studies in art and fought for Indianness in contemporary Indian art. Bengali artists spread through the country, and a few came to the Maharaja's School of Art and Craft, bringing with them a zeal for Indian art and the technique of wash painting learned from China or Japan. This school produced many talented students and influenced the local art scene.

The revival of traditional miniatures also was being practiced by freelance artists earning their livelihood with this form of art. Demand of the market further attracted youngsters of non-traditional families, and they achieved professional excellence doing good work they learned from their masters. Now, it can be claimed that Jaipur possesses the best painters of the highest skill and traditional marvel trained at the School of Art, gurus, and, equally good, the self-taught painters working freelance like Damodar Lal Gurjar.

Gurjars claim direct descent from Lord Krishna, and most families of this cast were farmers and milkmen until the early 1950s or 1960s. Later due to education and awareness, they entered various other fields proving their worth in the service to the country. Damodar Lal, born in 1958 in Nahira, a small village in the Dausa district of Rajasthan, was brought up in military discipline and farmers regularly. His grandfather, father, uncles, brothers and even brothers-in-law have served or are serving in the military. It is astonishing to his family members and others how this young student has mastered the discipline and achieved perfection unparalleled in his contemporaries. Initially he completed two years of introductory courses at the Rajasthan School of Art and entered in the third year to study sculpture. During these years, he seriously practiced miniature painting and decided his line of work after finding businessmen of this trade and friends practicing art. Painting work finally compelled him to give up regular study in the School of Art and to devote himself completely to practice exquisite miniature painting. His entry to the field of art as a student and practicing artist opened up absolutely new vistas unknown to his family tradition.
Apart from other forms of art, Damodar paints natural and botanical subjects without which no work of art could be imagined. Pure nature study started during the Mughal period in a stylised way, which was followed by many states of Rajasthan and other parts of the country. Painting such subjects in a realistic way developed during British rule, which brought foreign influence to every aspect of the Indian way of life. European oils of such subjects provoked Indian artists to play with natural and physical realism, enjoying three-dimensional effects on a flat surface.

I visited Damodar's studio. He works in a small, cozy, airy room on the first floor, which helps him to obtain better light and dust-free air. Since it is in the interior away from the main road, he does not face much pollution, which is quite dangerous for his type of work. He sits facing north getting natural light from a full door opening to a balcony on his left. To work at night he has fixed one tube light with a paper reflector to provide appropriate light. The best thing I noticed in his studio is the neat and clean atmosphere, which is seldom found in other studios. There is nothing that establishes his studio as a well-equipped atelier like displaying overhead projector, flood lights, easels, too many colours and colour dishes scattered here and there, compressors equipped with air brush, dirt and haphazard appearance. He is working differently. If one does not see the sunmica top table designed to work sitting, which also serves the purpose of palette, one can hardly guess it is a studio of an artist of such masterly hand. Though he has exhibited some of his works in the same room, visitors declare it to be a drawing room rather than a studio. While not working, he keeps incomplete work, colours, and brushes hidden under table top or drawer and removes the water pot, which is a common utensil used in Indian kitchens. When he sits to work, he first brings a small quantity of clean, fresh water, a painting to work upon and just three or four brushes of general sable hair quality and of squirrel's hair. Squirrel-hair brushes are typical and were prepared earlier by artists themselves. Nowadays, due to large demand, such brushes are available ready-made. These brushes are suitable for very fine, fluent lines. Fine finishing with dots and lined textures is done with these brushes. Only his palette is always ready on the table top with very few colours intermixed to suit the tone required for the current painting. One can wonder with such minimum and simple tools and materials how he creates masterpieces of stunning beauty. Subjects of natural history, still-life of fruits and flowers including edibles like onions,
and pleasing portraits with fine details are depicted in his miniature compositions.

Gurjar's entry into the art field is also quite interesting. While studying in the School of Art, he came in contact with business people dealing in curios and crafts. Between the years 1978 and 1982, he mastered the technique of miniature painting. Due to the amount of work commissioned, he gave up the traditional system of using earth and mineral colours and started using poster colours readily available in the art shop. Thus he eliminated long hours grinding and levigating the stone and earth to obtain pure colours. Bulk orders of various natural-history subjects brought him in contact with some foreign dealers who paid him well and sold his works abroad. Two works were exhibited at the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation at Carnegie Mellon University in 1992. Thereafter, Damodar explored his own market absolutely dealer free. Nowadays, he gets direct commissions and source materials.

Damodar never claims that he knows different media of painting like oil and acrylic, but a painting in his studio depicting an interior of Amber Palace is a good example of his handling the oil medium in a different way. Other works are the blend of tempera and watercolour techniques. Mixing of colour is done on his table. The colours used by him are applied with an almost dry brush for general toning over which fine line work is done with his decisive hand holding a squirrel-hair brush. Finally pointing the brush according to the requirement of the work by the fingers of his left hand, he touches the brush immediately on paper with patience and skill. He has to avoid the speed of a fan in order to work longer with the prepared brush. Sometimes he makes the point of the brush flat as required by his work. Damodar has trained his hand to pinpoint his brush at the right place. In fact small forms and intricate details require a controlled hand for perfection. It is again surprising that he does not use spectacles or a magnifying glass, and yet he still surpasses the camera lens in sharpening every detail and maintaining harmony in total effect. His terrific sense of tonal study and remarkably correct drawing make the work of art really appreciable. Though every corner of his work is filled with sincerity and fine details, he maintains the center of interest and makes the eyes of the viewer rotate gently on the work enjoying every detail of the painting. The inchoate background of the painting further strengthens his composition. Though he has not been bequeathed by his ancestors the knowledge of painting, he has surpassed the traditional families working for generations, which puts him in the rank of avant-garde artist. Damodar is an artist not only by his hand and heart but also by his mind.

Once while viewing his original works close at hand, I was stunned to see the perfect study revealing sinat and surat of the subject painted. Sinat means outer likeness, and surat means inner character of the subject. One can smell the odour of onion while viewing the painting of two onions by Damodar. I saw this painting published in a local newspaper with a review and was not impressed. Looking at the original work and enjoying the effect of all the minute details was quite a different experience. One can hardly believe that this is a painting even when knowing that it is not a photograph. The effect he creates in the painting is unbe-
Onions, tempera, 1998

believable for the eyes. This is the difference between the original and a reproduction badly printed in newspapers or magazines. While viewing one of his paintings of a pomegranate, I asked if he is using the air brush for highlights. He refused and said that this effect is obtained by the brush itself. Though personally I do not find any harm in use of the air brush, one has to say kudos to the artist if that effect is obtained by brush. He has some Indian and foreign counterparts, but Damodar’s proficiency without apprenticeship is marvelous and keeps him distinct from others.

Here a question arises regarding the creativity of such works. I am of the opinion that when fine details of German painter Durer bewildered the connoisseurs why should the work of Damodar not be accepted. No doubt he takes the help of photographs but creates his own compositions, which are far better than the original source. After all artists paint landscapes on the spot, portraits from life and compositions by amalgamating their entire knowledge of study. They also have to see the original source by constant watch. He, on the contrary, works with the original source frozen in the form of a photograph, thus simplifying the process. Such painstaking work requires time, and nature cannot permit a longer span of time to an artist. Before cameras artists depended on the natural source. The camera has become inevitable in all fields including fine art. Now it is up to the artist how best to use such sources to create works of art. Damodar’s subjects are not still, and still ones have a limited period of life. He had to make his subject still by way of photography, freezing light and life. Thus his originality is beyond doubt and question.

—Dr. M. K. Sharma
Sumahendra
Principal
Rajasthan School of Art
Jaipur
34 Cannas with Fly, watercolor and tempera, 1996
My inspiration for the painting was the plant’s new soft green leaves which in the early hours impart a sort of glaze to one’s eye. The challenges were obtaining the glaze on the fresh and tender leaves and blending different shades of yellow and orange in such a way that was closest to the natural specimen. The fly was added for the contrast of the darker on the lighter object.
20 Amla (Indian Gooseberry). tempera. 2000
I found the tree quite challenging, and I spent many hours studying it to make a proper composition. Painting the leaves, flower, fruit and even the dry leaves was very challenging. With the help of light and shade, I have tried to show the translucent effect of the leaves.
5  Banana Tree, tempera, 1999
12 Spider on a Pomegranate, tempera, 1998
The main effort was to retain the richness of the fruit. The spider matches the filament of the fruit. I found the subject as I have painted it. The spider was sitting all the time. The shine and freshness of the leaves was possible by “dot mixing.” Light reflection matches the subject. Dry brush was used very patiently to make the background.
24 Kigelia pinnata. tempora. 1999
I have shown all details in this magnificent bird by using dot mixing. To make the subject effective, I have kept the background light. Mixing is soft in the background to show depth of field. The crane is threatened due to new agricultural practices.
1. Well Irrigation, tempera and watercolor, 1998
Traditional irrigation is still practiced in many parts of India. The juxtaposition of a high-tension electric pylon and an old well depict contrasts in the countryside. Acacia nilotica, which grows widely in India, is the focal point of the painting. First I made the background, then the tree. To make the charas (leather bag), which lifts water and old wood, I have used a special technique of dry brush over tempera for a realistic effect. The boulders of the well are in a watercolor, and the rest of the painting is in tempera. Note: I have done the same work that the farmer is shown doing. I come from a farming community although now I am a painter.
32 Yellow Flowers with Honeybee [Cosmos], tempera, 1998
25 Bamboo, tempera, 2000
Often used by Sadhus as a utensil, it is a sacred plant. I found the subject when I visited a shrine where the dry fruits were piled up against a wall. The background, subject and the paper match in colour. In tempera style I have tried to make the texture of stones as effective as possible. I have repeatedly applied colour to make the painting effective.
Lagenaria, tempera. 1999
29 Painted Storks, tempera, 1999
Storks often nest on Acacia nilotica. Their excreta makes the branches white. On the neck dot work is seen. For showing the details of the feathers, I have used dry brush.
I achieved the softness and the depth of colour in the rose by layering vermillion, poster red, scarlet lake, and then finally pink. The background is related to the particular hue one finds underneath the leaves of the rose.
17 Pomegranate (Open), *temperi*, 1999
DAMODAR LAL GURJAR

Born:
2 September 1958, Nahira, Rajasthan

Educated:
Rajasthan School of Art

Career:
Freelance artist

One-person exhibitions:
Ranthambhore School of Art, Sawai Madhopur, 1990
Crafts Museum, Delhi, 1994

Group exhibitions:
7th International Exhibition of Botanical Art & Illustration, Hunt Institute, Pittsburgh, 1992
Natural-History Paintings from Rajasthan, Hunt Institute, Pittsburgh, 1994/95
University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1998
30 Curators, Concept Art Gallery, Pittsburgh, 2000

Awards:
State Award, Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy, 1999
All India Award, Department of Environment, 1999

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Dr. Shirley Sherwood collection
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Commissions:
Numerous private commissions

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<td>Two Pomegranates</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>16.6 x 25 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Ziziphus nummularia</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>19 x 28 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Three Custard Apples</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>19 x 28 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Two Apples</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>19 x 28 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Kinnow [Mandarin]</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>19 x 28 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Peregrine</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>30 x 23 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Bombax malabaricum</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Tempera</td>
<td>19 x 17.5 cm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>