

# AMIR MOHTASHEMI



## **Company School Painting Depicting Male Asian Emerald Dove, *Chalcophaps indica***

India, c. 1800

Watercolour on W Elgar paper

45cm high, 34cm wide

Stock no.: A5489

*"I think it the most beautiful of all the dove-kind I have hitherto seen"*

-George Edwards, 1743.

With an air of intelligence and grace, a male Asian Emerald Dove perches on a branch. This exceptionally attractive bird inhabits the forests of Southeast Asia and the Indian Subcontinent.

The bird's beak is a vivid coral and the keen eyes a rich chestnut. The feathers on the crown are white, interspersed with blue flecks. The breast is a rich mauve, suffused with oranges, browns and purple tones. The wings and back plumage form a sublime tapestry of emerald greens with hints of citrine, evoking the myriad shades of the bird's forest habitat. A small cluster of white feathers appears on the ridge of the wing, while the secondary wing feathers are olive and bronze. The elegant tail feathers are greyish white, tipped black, and the legs and feet are a dusky mauve.

The eighteenth-century English naturalist George Edwards was particularly taken by this species, which he referred to as the "Green Wing'd Dove" in *A Natural History of Uncommon Birds*, 1743. He remarked that as the bird's wings caught the light, he witnessed a "splendid Copper Colour, or a Colour more inclining to Gold." Edwards had sketched an emerald dove at the house of John Warner, a merchant in Rotherhithe. He was also fortunate to have seen another live bird, kept by the naturalist Sir Hans Sloane, 1st Baronet PRS (1660-1753). Sloane's extraordinary collection of 71,000 items was donated to the Natural History Museum, British Museum and British Library in London, forming the foundations of

these important archives.

Displaying such an exquisite array of sublime colours, it is likely Lord Valentia would have delighted in including this bird in his ornithological collection.

For additional ornithological studies made for Lord Valentia, see Sotheby's Sven Gahlin Collection Lot 36 a drawing of a bustard, and Lot 37 a watercolour of a crow-pheasant, both made for Lord Valentia; Sotheby's, London, 31 May 2011, The Stuart Cary Welch Collection, Part Two, lot 115; see also Welch 1976, no.26; Welch 1978-I, nos.18a-c.and Leach 1995, no.7.96, pp.760-2. For two bird studies donated by Viscount Valentia to Lord Wellesley, see British Library in London (Wellesley Collection, NHD 29, vol.iv, f.21,27)

#### Literature

Bikram Grewal et al. 2016. Birds of India - A Pictorial Field Guide. Om Books International.

George Edwards. 1743. A Natural History of Uncommon Birds. The College of Physicians, London.