

# AMIR MOHTASHEMI



## Canton Enamel Box for the Indian Market

Guangzhou (Canton), China, 18th century (Qianlong reign)

Copper painted with enamel

33 cm diameter, 11.5 cm high

Stock no.: A5915

Provenance: Belgian private collection.

This octagonal box of beaten copper is covered in white enamel and painted with delicate floral designs in blue, pink, green, yellow, and black. The colours and motifs are typical of so-called 'Canton enamels', named after its centre of production in South China. The technique is thought to have been

introduced to China by Jesuit missionaries, having emerged in Italy and France in the 16th century.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it is known in Chinese as 'foreign porcelain' (*yangci* / 洋瓷).<sup>2</sup> It was almost exclusively used as an export ware, and examples made for the European market are held in several museums. The intended market of a piece of Canton enamel can often be identified by the form. Those in European collections often take the form of coffers (see, for example, accession no. [1971.180.82](#) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), teapots (see accession no. [FE.50-1970](#) in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London), or jugs (see accession no. [ЛИ-852](#) in the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg).

This example takes the form of a *bajot*, a low table designed to raise deities or offerings from the floor of a shrine in the Hindu tradition. A silver example was displayed in the 1987 exhibition *Mughal Silver Magnificence*<sup>3</sup> and a wooden example is in the South Asia Collection, Norwich.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore one of

the much rarer group of Canton enamels made for the Indian market. Other examples for the Indian market are held in the Art Museum at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (a ewer [2016.0015](#) and a betel set 2019.0022).

The box contains a single tray the diameter of the box, which is removed by pulling the lotus-shaped handle. It is decorated in white enamel with a simple cartouche of blue vines.

[1] Norris, D., Braekmans, D., and Shortland, S. 'Technological connections in the development of 18th and 19th century Chinese painted enamels', *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 42 (2022). pp. 1–9; p. 2.

[2] 'Canton enamel', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, retrieved online via <https://www.britannica.com/art/Chinese-pottery> on 31/03/2025.

[3] Terlinden, Christiane et al. *Mughal Silver Magnificence (XVI-XIXth C)*. Geneva: Antalga for the Museum of Art and History of Geneva, 1987, p. 176, cat. 274.

[4] View online at [https://collection.thesouthasiacollection.com/collections/getrecord/NWHSA\\_IN93](https://collection.thesouthasiacollection.com/collections/getrecord/NWHSA_IN93)