

AMIR MOHTASHEMI



Lady Holding a Flower

Mughal India (Delhi), ca. 1680

Ink, opaque watercolour and gold on paper

13.5cm high, 7.8cm wide

Stock no.: A4171

A woman, painted in profile, holds a single pink rose. She is clearly an important woman of the court, dressed in sumptuous patterned clothing, layers of diaphanous fabric, and heavy jewellery, including necklaces, bracelets, anklets, arm cuffs, earrings, and a headpiece made from gold, pearls, and precious stones. She has henna on the palms of her hands and finger tips. The artist has paid great attention to small details, like the loose strand of hair which tucks over her ear. The woman is painted against a solid mint green background. A thin strip of grass is just enough to situate her in space.

As the Mughal court practiced purdah, it is likely that the woman is an imagined ideal of a woman, or based perhaps modelled on a lower status woman who could be seen by the artist.

The painting has elaborate gilt borders and mounts, suggesting that it was once part of an important a muraqqa' or album. It may have been presented alongside portraits other important members of the court.

The depiction of single figures in portrait against a mint green background, holding a small flower or cup to their face, was common during the Mughal period. Another painting in this format, dated to ca. 1640, featuring a woman dressed very similarly is held in the Freer and Sackler Galleries at the National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D. C. (accession no. [F1940.17](#)). Another, in the Art Institute of Chicago (accession no. [1919.948](#)) is dated to 1640–1660. A folio dated to ca. 1650 in the Royal Collection Trust ([RCIN 1005068.w](#)) also has a similar composition.