Mughal Miniature Paintings: Natural Beauty

Grades: 2nd-7th
Visual Arts
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Lesson Description:
Mughal miniature painting originated during the 16th century in the Mughal Empire which spanned what are now India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan. This art form is marked by careful attention of small detail, lush jewel tones, epic subject matter, and miniature scale.

All of the Miniature artists that are participating in the Contemporary Arts Center’s exhibition Realms of Intimacy have studied at the National College of Arts (NCA) in Lahore, Pakistan. The NCA is renowned for its program dedicated to the centuries-old tradition of Mughal miniature painting which flourished from 1526 to 1857. The extremely selective school takes only a dozen of its accepted students to pursue the intensive major of miniature painting. This major at the NCA mimics a traditional eight year apprenticeship in two years of schooling. The meticulous technique begins with the posture of the students. The students are required to be seated on the floor for hours a day, hold their papers close to their eyes and brace their painting arms against their body. Their posture is essential to mastering the tiny brushstrokes needed to create pieces with such fine details. They spend their first year and a half copying historical works and learning to make their own tools. Only in the final half year are they allowed to explore their own creative devices.

There is an extreme mental discipline that goes along with every aspect of being a miniature painter. The style is based on old traditions. One brush is still composed of a single squirrel hair. Mussel shells are used as mixing bowls for their organic paints. These natural paints are made from raw materials like vegetables, fruits, oil, soil, lime, indigo and lapis lazuli and on occasion eggs, gold powder, and silver foil. Through this program students must master ultra-fine figure drawing and brushwork, tea staining of page borders and burnishing of paper surfaces; all essential to practices that were used centuries ago.

For this project, students will explore natural materials that can be used to dye paper and make paints then use their homemade materials to make their own versions of Mughal miniature paintings.

Objectives:
• Use problem solving to figure out natural materials they can use and combine to make paints and also dye paper
• Learn about the process that Mughal miniature painters go through when creating a piece
• Create their own composition based on Mughal miniature paintings

Materials and Resources:
Watercolor paper
Tea, coffee, and cranberry juice
Lard, Butter, Solid and liquid vegetable oil
Spices, mustard, dirt, grass, fruits and vegetables, and other natural materials that can stain
Paint brushes
Small containers with lids (paint storage)
Aprons/paint shirts

Links and Books on natural paint mixing and Mughal Miniatures:
• http://www.hyoomik.com/images/egg.html
• http://www.sairawasim.com/
• http://www.ambreenbutt.com/web/home.php
Critical Questions:
- How are cultural practices and traditions passed down and continued over time? Why are they important?
- Is process important in relation to product? What if miniaturist painters used synthetic materials? Would it change the look of the work? The Emotion?

Activities:
Preliminary Discussion:
Discuss process with students; how artists begin a piece as opposed to showing them the finished product first. Then look through some images of contemporary Mughal Miniaturist paintings by Ambreen Butt and Saira Wasim whom still use tea staining and hand mixed pigments from natural materials. Discuss briefly the imagery and subject used in the works and the meanings behind them. With older students you may be able to get them to discuss some of the political satire seen in Saira Wasim’s work.

Art Activity:
- Start the project by dying paper. Using tea, coffee, or even fruit juice; have students dip a piece of watercolor paper into a large container full of the liquid of their choosing. Leave the paper in the liquid for at least 15 minutes and check on how well the liquid is dying the paper (don’t leave the paper in for too long because it will start disintegrating). Once the paper has a nice color all around, take it out and leave it to dry for about 24 hours.
- Next, have students mix their paints. Find some things either outside or maybe in the refrigerator that can stain. Things like grass, dirt, berries, flowers, mustard, and spices would work well. Have students use lard, solid or liquid vegetable oil, or butter to grind and mix their natural materials together making a thick paint. Have each student make at least three different color paints. They may share paints when it’s time to use them.
- Have students use a paint brush with their homemade paints to create their own miniature painting on their dyed paper. This project is more about process and understanding materials so the composition can be very simple especially with younger students. You might suggest they do a composition showcasing the natural materials they use to make their materials like flowers, fruit, etc.

Assessment:
- Students have dyed a piece of paper using tea, coffee, or fruit juice
- Students have mixed their own paints using fat and natural materials
- Students have used their paints and dyed paper to create their own miniature paintings

National Standards:
Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes
K-4.1 Students know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes
K-4.3 Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories
K-4.4 Students use art materials and tools in a safe and responsible manner
5-8.2 Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas

**Using knowledge of structures and functions**

K-4.1 Students know the differences among visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas

5-8.1 Students generalize about the effects of visual structures and functions and reflect upon these effects in their own work

**Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures**

K-1.1 Students know that the visual arts have both a history and specific relationships to various cultures
K-2.1 Students identify specific works of art as belonging to particular cultures, times, and places
K-3.1 Students demonstrate how history, culture, and the visual arts can influence each other in making and studying works of art

5-8.1 Students know and compare the characteristics of artworks in various eras and cultures
5-8.3 Students analyze, describe, and demonstrate how factors of time and place (such as climate, resources, ideas, and technology) influence visual characteristics that give meaning and value to a work of art

**Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others**

K-4.2 Students describe how people’s experiences influence the development of specific artworks

5-8.2 Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry

**Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines**

K-4.2 Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum
5-8.1 Students compare the characteristics of works in two or more art forms that share similar subject matter, historical periods, or cultural context
Other Works the feature natural paints

Ancient Mughal Miniature Paintings
Cave Paintings