

# Remounting a Pahari painting

**Mal Reynolds GCF(APF) Adv** explains how he used his Valiani CMC and a traditional Indian gilding technique to create a fitting new mount for a piece of Pahari art

**P**AHARI PAINTING is an all-encompassing term used for a form of Indian painting originating from the Himalayan hill kingdoms and royal courts of Northern India.

The rulers of these courts were descendants from Hindu dynasties and had taken refuge in the hills after the Muslim invasions of 1193.

The Pahari school developed and flourished during the 17th to 19th centuries, with each area creating its own style. Before this, painting generally illustrated traditional Hindu texts in highly stylised and non-naturalistic ways, against abstract landscapes and architecture.

In the 18th century, Mughal

power was in decline and artists sought new sources of patronage. Some travelled to the courts in the hills, and as a result this movement began to develop the style of Pahari painting, assimilating the more naturalistic elements of Mughal painting. The development of Pahari painting initiated a new approach to Indian painting which was patronised mostly by the Rajput kings who ruled many parts of the region<sup>1,3</sup>.

The print in Figure 1 is taken from an original in the 'Royal Collection' Windsor and can be found in the publication *Eastern Encounters* by Emily Hannam, entitled *The Musical Mode*, circa 1810.



Images of a woman playing an instrument became a popular genre in Rajasthani painting

I chose this painting because it complements a Pahari painting I purchased in Chang Mi, Thailand some years ago. Both depict a typical idealised woman of the region, characterised by a tall, slender figure, smooth porcelain skin, elongated eyes and long curving eyebrows. The musical mode is often represented as a beautiful heroine separated from her lover, who thinks of him as she wanders the forest. She plays a stringed instrument and her enchanting music causes the animals to awaken<sup>4</sup>.

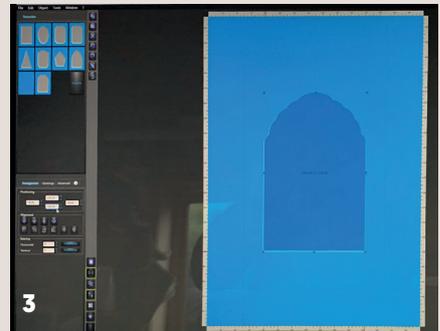
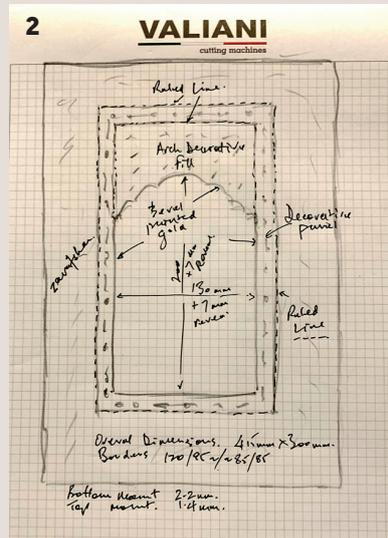
Images of a woman playing an instrument became a popular genre in Rajasthani painting during the first half of the 18th century.

## STEP BY STEP

1



2



1: Print of *The Musical Mode*, circa 1810

2: Preliminary sketch of mount design

3: Chosen arched mount shape imported into Valiani CMC software

**SYNTHESIS OF STYLES**

In remounting this print, I wanted to include a number of different ideas and techniques, including an Arabesque/Mughal style of mount aperture, decorative panels and ruled lines, and a technique called zarafshan – ‘scattering gold’.

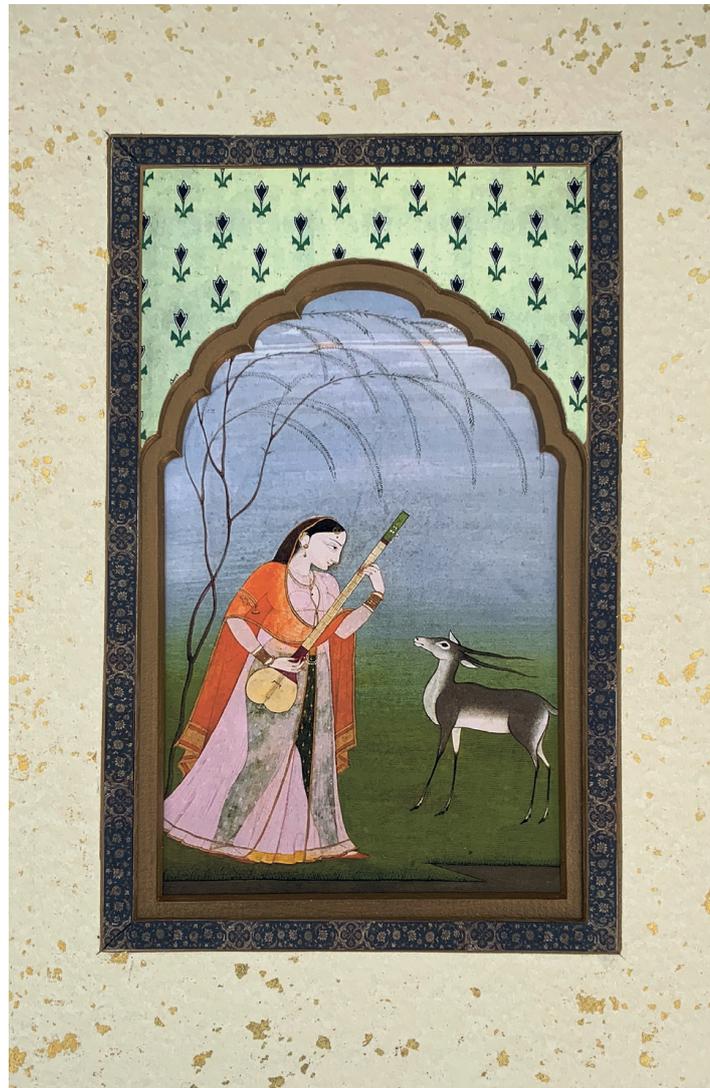
A rough sketch was made of my ideas and the mount dimensions calculated (Figure 2).

A double window mount was to be used; the bottom mount 2.2mm thick with the bevel and reveal coloured with ‘Regency gold’ liquid metal acylyc paint and the top mount 1.4mm thick. The bevel was painted in the same gold and the face of the mount decorated as described above.

The mount dimensions were: outside dimensions 415mm x 300mm; aperture 200mm x 130mm; borders top/bottom 120/95mm; sides 85/85mm; reveal 7mm. The ratio to the top and bottom borders, taking into consideration the decorative panels, was approximately equivalent to the ‘Golden Ratio’, ie 1:1.62.

**THE MOUNT APERTURE**

There are a plethora of Arabesque and Mughal style apertures and the chosen one had to fulfil the criteria of being subtle, having no sharp edges or corners and with a number of smooth contours. Several were considered before I chose the final design. The dimensions of the curves were calculated, fed into



I wanted to include a number of ideas and techniques, including an Arabesque/Mughal style of mount aperture, decorative panels and ruled lines, and a technique called zarafshan – ‘scattering gold’

**Pictured left: the completed work**

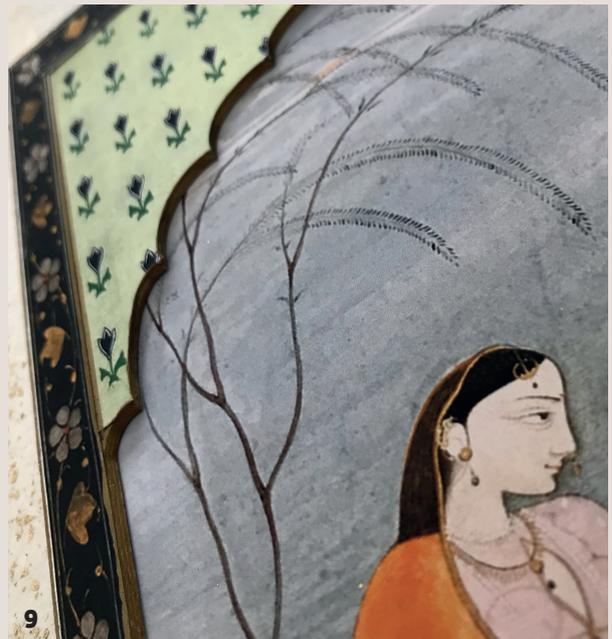
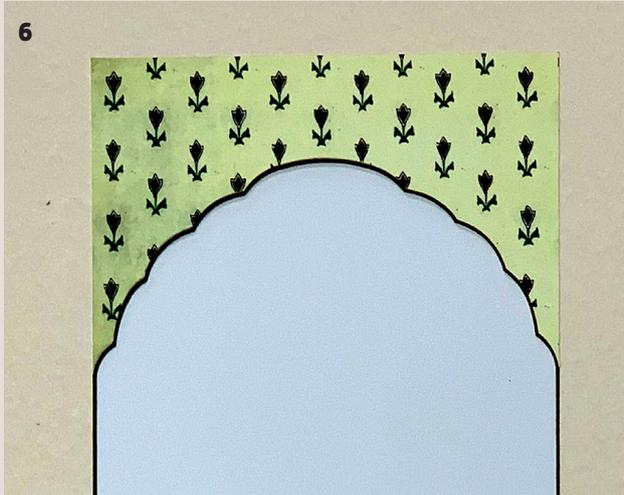


**4: Reveal decorated with Regency gold metallic paint**



**5: Decorative panels scanned from books on Pahari and Mughal art**

STEP BY STEP



6: Fitting the arch panel

7: Gluing with M218 adhesive

8: Mitring the corners

9: Lines were ruled tight to the decorative panels in Regency gold metallic paint

10: Materials and tools used to create a border using the zarafshan technique



## STEP BY STEP



**11:** In the first attempt, gold leaf was brushed through a sieve

**12:** Gold flakes produced a more satisfactory result



the Valiani software and merged (Figure 3). A trial cut was made and small adjustments completed. The bottom mount was cut, and the bevel and reveal were painted using Roberson's Regency gold liquid metal acrylic paint.

The top mount with a reveal of 7mm was then cut, first using some scrap board. The result was positioned on a new blank mount and the aperture marked, taped with removable tape and cut. The bevel was then painted using the same gold and the tape removed (Figure 4).

### DECORATIVE PANELS

I chose several decorative panels, including the panel used on the original picture, from books on Pahari and Mughal style artwork in my collection (Figure 5). These panels were scanned, then uploaded into Adobe Photoshop CS6. The dimensions were altered to the size required, a number of faults removed and the panels printed.

The panel positions were marked on the mount in pencil; the panel sides were to run tight up to the top of the aperture's bevel edge and extend beyond to a position calculated using the golden ratio between the top and bottom borders. This left a space

of 32mm at the narrowest point ie the distance between the top of the bevel and the decorative panel, the arch panel.

Once the artwork for the arch panel was selected, the next step was to cut this to the size and shape of the top bevelled edge (Figure 6). This was achieved by placing a piece of the artwork between two sheets of mountboard and using the Valiani CMC with the 90° head to cut the aperture shape through both the top board and artwork. This was then trimmed to remove the extended side pieces and adhered in place, using M218 adhesive.

The panels were cut to size, attempting to achieve a seamless join at the corners. M218 adhesive was brushed onto the panel, leaving a dry area of around 20mm at each end to allow for the corner mitres (Figure 7). Once all four panels were in place the corners were mitred, the fall out removed and the corners adhered in place (Figure 8).

Following the positioning of these panels, one gold line was ruled tight up to the edge of the panel and a second on the inside, which essentially followed the bevel around the panel (Figure 9).

When ruling lines there are a number of general principles

in the arrangement of form and colour applicable to decorative panels. In this project, decorative panels of any colour may be separated from the background of any other colour by ruled lines of white, gold or black. The same Regency gold I used on the mount bevels was once again used here<sup>5</sup>.

### APPLYING ZARAFSHAN

I have for some time noted that some Persian, Indian and Mughal borders have been scattered with gold flakes, a technique of illumination called zarafshan ('scattering gold')<sup>6</sup>. The technique involves brushing paste onto the surface of the mount, placing gold leaf into a sieve and breaking it down with a brush. The resulting flakes fall onto the mount surface. When the paste is close to drying, the gold flakes are firmed by rubbing the surface with an artists' bone through silicon release paper. I assume that in the early 19th century a variety of starch paste would have been used.

I made two modifications to the above technique. Firstly, I used methyl cellulose as the adhesive rather than starch paste as starch paste is organic and can be metabolised by moulds and other pests, while methyl cellulose is inert and does not attract mould or pests (Figure 10).

Secondly, I unsuccessfully tried the sieve method, which resulted in the gold being too fine and not giving a sufficiently comparable result to the original (Figure 11). I discovered that using gold flakes gave a much more accurate result. Zarafshan was then applied to all four borders (Figure 12).

*Mal Reynolds GCF(APF) ADV is the owner of Harlequin Frames. mal@harlequin-frames.co.uk*

“  
The zarafshan technique involves brushing paste onto the surface of the mount, placing gold leaf into a sieve and breaking it down with a brush

### Footnotes

- 1 Wikipedia.
- 2 *Indian Court Painting*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 3 *Bagri Foundation, The Language of Guler/Kangra Painting*.
- 4 *Eastern Encounters*, Hannam p167.
- 5 *The Grammar of Ornament*, Jones, proposition 23.
- 6 *Islamic Art of Illumination*, Onat, p96

