

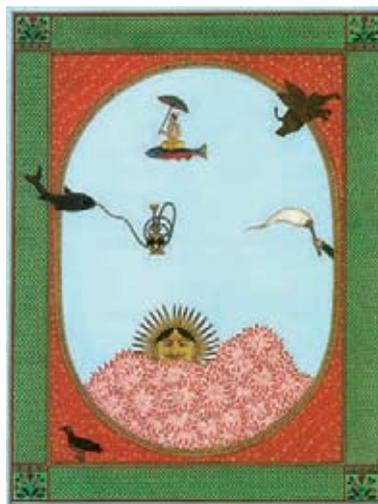


Alexander Gorlizki

The New York artist and his far-off collaborator refresh the traditional Indian miniature by deconstructing its elements and recombining them with Monty Python flair. By Laura Eden

Alexander Gorlizki says he considers himself “a farmer of patterns.” A glance through the sheaves of delicate paper in the British-born artist’s studio in Manhattan’s East Village reveals what he harvests—plump maharajahs, stylized flowers, butterflies.

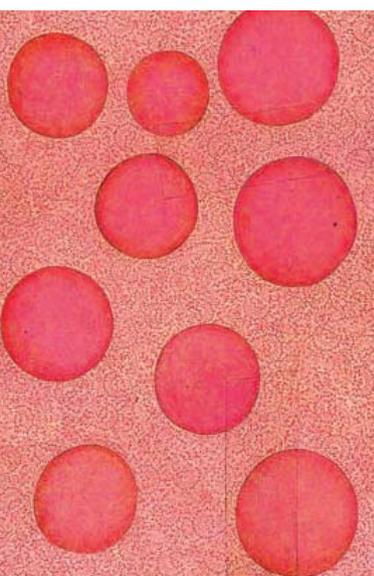
These delicately rendered motifs and others are incorporated into Indian-miniature-style watercolors that Gorlizki and Jaipur-based painter Riyaz Uddin have tweaked into surreal whimsies that recall Terry Gilliam’s animation for *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*. In one, a nobleman sails through the air on the back of what seems to be a rainbow trout as a second fish puffs on a water pipe and a disembodied hand waves a fly switch. Another features an elephant sprouting a cloud of greenery from its trunk rather than a spray of water. Elegantly comical, Gorlizki and Uddin’s works are unlike standard-issue Moghul-style miniatures, which often depict courtly or pastoral scenes reminiscent of the 16th century, when the genre was born. Says Gorlizki, a longtime collector of Indian folk drawings, “Those just feed the tourist market.”



Clockwise from top left: *Gloria*, 2006, opaque watercolor on digital print. Gorlizki in his New York studio. *The Brown Duck*, 2004, opaque watercolor and gold on paper. See Resources.



Six Butterflies, 2006, opaque watercolor and gold on paper.



Nine Pink Planets, 2006, opaque watercolor and gold on paper.



Pink Lotus, 2006, opaque watercolor on paper. See Resources.

The pair's collaborative process is straightforward. Gorlizki dreams verses its execution. In his studio, Uddin works with students and local artists, each of whom is responsible for a different part of the painting: One may work on the borders while another may paint only the birds. The finished miniatures combine disparate elements gathered from a variety of sources—Central Asian textiles, Victorian wallpaper, even a Vivienne Westwood shoe—and are rendered with single-hair brushes and hand-ground pigments, then highlighted with gold leaf.

The works may be small (many are no larger than a sheet of copy paper) but their fans are legion, including ethnic-pattern textile guru John Robshaw and interior designer Michael S. Smith, who recently ordered a selection for a client. The watercolors have “an amazing sense of humor,” says decorator Sara Bengur, who collects antique miniatures and has become a fan of Gorlizki and Uddin's contemporary ones, which will be shown at Daniel Weinberg Gallery in Los Angeles in February and the International Asian Art Fair in New York City in March.

The works also have moved beyond paper. Gorlizki has magnified certain motifs into carpet patterns; he even has a tableware collection in development. And he and Uddin have begun daubing patterns on photographs of cultural icons like Grace Kelly and Chuck Close or taking one detail, say a pachyderm's leg, and stretching it out into Brice Marden-style squiggles. “It can all become a bit odd. But I like the lateral process,” Gorlizki says. “It can go in so many directions.” ■

Blackspots, 2006, ink on paper.

