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Raja ravi varma ramayana paintings

Sita Bhumi Pravesh is Raja Ravi Varma's first Ramayana-inspired painting. The reverse of the canvas reads "Ravi Varmah Coil Tampuran, 12 November 1880". This was the artist's first entry into the Royal Gaekwad Collection at Baroda, following a suggestion from Maharaja Vishakam Thirunal. However, after the painting's completion, the maharaja considered Varma persona non-grata due to a diplomatic incident. Dewan Madhava Row acquired this painting and presented it to Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III of Baroda, marking the beginning of royal patronage for Varma. Interestingly, Sita in this painting bears resemblance to Ravi Varma's own struggles with rejection, as he too was shunned by the Travancore Court. The dramatic scene depicts Rama questioning Sita's fidelity and chastity, while she implores Mother Earth to take her back. This parallels Raja Ravi Varma's own journey of seeking patronage and acceptance from Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III. Rupika Chawla, author and expert on Ravi Varma's works, explains that his Puranic and classical drama-inspired paintings required capturing the emotions and moods contained within each narrative. The series of paintings tells a story that unfolds as each artwork builds upon the previous one, illustrating the major moments in Rama's life. Raja Ravi Varma's Painting of Ramayana Story Through Three Different Scenes The painting Breaking The Sacred Bow Of Siva Before His Marriage To Sita (1906) depicts a momentous event in the Ramayana story that has far-reaching consequences. The artist, Raja Ravi Varma, was well-versed in the epics and their sub-texts, which he carried with him effortlessly. He painted according to his mood and inspiration, rather than strictly adhering to the narrative of a story. The painting Jatayu Vadh or Ravana Carrying Off Sita And Opposed By Jatayu (1906-08) marks a drastic shift in events from a peaceful forest sojourn to one of high drama. This work symbolizes a love story forever damaged and showcases the pull and push of heroism and violence. The third painting, Rama Threatens The Ocean God Varuna On His Not Making Way For Him (1905), portrays Rama's resolve in the face of adversity. The Release of Ahalya, Sita in Ashoka Grove, The Coronation of Rama and Pregnant Sita Abandoned in the Forest are also part of Ravi Varma's religious paintings that illustrate a certain state of being or present iconic images. The painting depicts Rama's confrontation with Varuna, the ocean god, as he prepares to cross into Lanka. Ravi Varma skillfully portrays Rama's anger through his flared nostrils and flaming eyes, highlighting his invincibility. In another scene, Hanuman tracks down Sita in the Ashoka grove, where she is guarded by a circle of threatening female demons. Despite their ferocity, Sita remains confident that Rama will rescue her. Coronation of Rama: A Celebration of Leisure and Royalty The painting, Coronation of Rama, portrays a serene scene where Rama is being crowned, accompanied by his family. The atmosphere is one of grandeur and luxury, as Sita stands beside him with her hair neatly styled. Unlike previous depictions, this version presents Sita in a more dignified light. Raja Ravi Varma's paintings are renowned for their intricate details and historical significance. "Rani Lakshmi Bayi of Travancore" showcases a woman dressed in an opulent gold skirt with silver details, adorned with traditional jewelry from the Malabar region. The use of red and gold emphasizes her marital status, while the waist belt accentuates her hips, highlighting feminine beauty in southern Indian culture. The painting also demonstrates Varma's blend of European realism and Tanjore painting styles. In "Portrait of a Lady," an unknown Maharashtrian woman is depicted wearing an elaborate nose-ring made of pearls and rubies, symbolizing her marital status. Her black sari with gold polka dots is casually draped over her shoulder, showcasing the unique cultural traditions of different regions in India. "Raja Ravi Varma's daughter, Mahaprabha Thampuratti of Mavelikkara," appears in "There Comes Papa" alongside her son, Marthanda Varma. The painting features a traditional southern Indian sari worn by Mahaprabha without a blouse, highlighting the cultural significance of this style and its introduction by British colonials in pre-independent India. Raja Ravi Varma's paintings are renowned for their emotional depth and attention to detail. One such piece is Jatayu Vadham (The Killing of Jatayu), which captures a pivotal moment from the Sanskrit epic Ramayana. The painting depicts Ravana, the demon king, abducting Sita, while Jatayu, a divine bird, tries to intervene. Varma's masterful brushwork conveys the strength and malevolence of Ravana, who is smiling in triumph despite his brutal actions. In contrast, Sita appears helpless and traumatized. The painting showcases Varma's ability to convey complex emotions through his artwork. Another notable piece by Varma is Droupathi in Virata's Palace, which illustrates a scene from the epic Mahabharata. The painting shows Draupadi being humiliated by Kichaka, a commander in Virata's army, as she seeks justice for her husband Yudhishtira, who is standing in disguise. Varma's use of light and space creates a sense of tension and helplessness among the figures in the scene. The painting also highlights the societal norms that led to Draupadi's humiliation. The artist's love story Damayanti and the Hamsa, created in 1899, tells the tale of Princess Damayanti and King Nala, who are central characters in Sriharsha's epic Nishadha Charita. The painting showcases the beauty of the human experience through a romantic narrative. The artwork of Raja Ravi Varma depicts women from various regions of India, showcasing their unique styles and characteristics. His subjects are often dressed in elegant attire, with attention paid to the intricacies of Indian fashion. For example, Varma's Damayanti is depicted wearing a red sari inspired by the fashionable women of Bombay, where he spent many years studying art. This painting features an idealized setting, complete with marble interiors and a lotus pond. In his portrait of Saraswathi, Varma blends traditional iconography with his own creative flair, adding a crown that was commonly seen in Tanjore paintings. The goddess is surrounded by symbols of her associations, such as the swan and peacock, which represent transcendence and beauty respectively. Varma's travels across India allowed him to capture the likenesses of many anonymous women, showcasing their unique facial features and dignified bearing. His preference for big, bold eyes was a nod to Indian cultural standards of feminine beauty. The subject of Woman Holding a Fruit is an example of Varma's skill in capturing the essence of his models, using oil colors to bring out the vibrant hues of their silk saris. The painting Lady in the Moon Light features Anjanibai Malpekar as its model, who was both a talented singer and Varma's muse. The artwork depicts her sitting by a lake under a full moonlit night, lost in thought and gazing directly at the spectator. This romanticized setting highlights Varma's ability to capture the essence of his subjects, often elevating them to goddess-like status. The painting "Galaxy of Musicians" showcases a group of female singers with traditional instruments, dressed in various regional costumes from India. Commissioned by the Maharaja of Mysore, the artwork features a Muslim woman and a Nair woman playing the veena, as well as an Anglo-Indian woman wearing a fashionable hat. Artist Raja Ravi Varma used chiaroscuro to create strong contrasts between light and dark areas, giving the painting a dramatic feel with individualized expressions for each figure. However, the piece only represents women from upper castes, leaving out those from lower classes and tribes. The artwork was one of the early attempts in India to envision national unity. Varma's innovations extended beyond painting; he also developed oleographs, or colored lithographic prints, which were previously used for mass-produced calendar art and packaging. With the Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press established in 1894, each of his paintings was composed of multiple oleographs, making Hindu gods, goddesses, and epics accessible to the general public. One of Varma's most notable works is "The Birth of Shakuntala," which tells the story of Vishwamitra rejecting Menaka and their daughter Shakuntala. The painting showcases Kathakali dance drama influences in its exaggerated hand movements and eye expressions. Another notable piece, "Menaka The Nymph Tempting The Yogi, Viswamitra," depicts a beautiful celestial woman seducing a sage, resulting in the birth of Shakuntala. Varma's artwork also includes "Mohini or Mohini on a Swing," which features Anjanibai Malpekar as its model. This painting showcases Varma's ability to capture the beauty and elegance of Indian classical dancers. His contributions to Indian art continue to be celebrated, making his work an important part of the country's cultural heritage. Mohini was Vishnu's female avatar, known for her enchanting and carefree nature. Artist Raja Ravi Varma portrayed her in a sheer white sari, with bare arms and loose hair, capturing her seductive essence. In Hinduism, Lakshmi is Vishnu's wife, along with Saraswati and Parvati forming the holy trinity of goddesses known as Tridevi. Her name signifies guiding people towards their goals, which include spiritual enlightenment, abundance, knowledge, and success. Lakshmi's iconography typically depicts her as an elegantly dressed woman showering gold coins, symbolizing the importance of economic activity in sustaining life. She is often shown riding an owl, sitting on a lotus flower, or holding lotus flowers in her hands, representing four essential human goals: dharma (duty), kama (desire), artha (meaning), and moksha (liberation). Her depictions also feature two elephants in the background, signifying work, activity, and strength. Varma's painting of Goddess Lakshmi retains most of her iconography but with slight modifications. The gold coins are absent, there is only one elephant in the background, and she wears a crown seen in Tanjore paintings. For his paintings of Goddess Saraswati and Goddess Lakshmi, Varma used Rajibai Moolgavkar, a Goan lady, as his model. Although he idealized her face to avoid any resemblance, Vishnu is one of the significant deities in Hindu mythology, alongside Brahma and Shiva. He is considered the preserver of the universe and has several avatars, including Rama and Krishna, who destroy evil forces on earth and maintain balance between good and evil. In Varma's oleograph, Vishnu sits on Garuda, a mythical eagle-like bird, accompanied by his two wives: Shri Devi and Bhru Devi, which are actually two forms of Lakshmi. Varma sold his press to Fritz Schleicher in 1903, who retained the copyrights for the prints. The oleographs were later used for advertisements, calendars, postcards, playing cards, and matchbox covers. Although they initially lost their significance as art pieces, Varma considered it a success that his work found its way into ordinary Indian homes. 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