

Indian Artists working for European Patrons



A group of nineteen watercolours of South-East Asian fruit and vegetables

Reference: 11219

KAREN TAYLOR

FINE ART

This group of nineteen distinctive depictions of fruit and vegetables from South-East Asia are inscribed with titles in Indian English (possibly in Romanised Hindi) and drawn on European laid paper which is variously watermarked. There are three different numbering systems on the sheets. Many of the fruit and vegetables, such as the durian, are more commonly found in South-East Asia rather than on the Indian subcontinent, suggesting that it is possible that the drawings may have been made for a European patron in South-East Asia. Stylistically the drawings have many of the characteristics of the 'Straits School', a hybrid Indo-Chinese style.

The accumulation of natural history drawings by officials of the British East India Company gave rise to the term 'Company School', now out of favour, which has been used to describe the work of Indian or Chinese artists for British patrons. The distinctive style is a result of a fusion of two artistic traditions, the European with its desire for realism and the Asian taste for a more stylised approach. The work of Chinese artists is rarer than that of Indian artists and tends to be a little later in date.

British patrons commissioned local artists to draw the flora and fauna of India and other areas of South-East Asia. Such work is typically annotated with botanical notes in native script, romanised versions of native descriptions, Latin and with reference to the Linnaean system of classification, created by Carl Linnaeus (1707-78).

The eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw an enormous rise of interest in Europe in the study of natural history by both scientists and amateurs. A knowledge of the subject was considered to be an important part of a liberal education and many people studied 'natural philosophy' and the various branches of natural history. Accurate drawings were vital tools in classification as well as a reminder of the excited reaction to new discoveries being made all over the known world.

The collecting of specimens was the basis of most natural history drawings, plants were pressed and dried and the drawings recorded the specimen in its living shape and colours.

This group of fruit and vegetables are found in various parts of South-East Asia. Some are common others are less well known.

The collection is presented mounted in a hand-made solander box.

Brinjala (Aubergine)

Inscribed l.r.: Brinjala and numbered ninety-five, N106 and 96, watercolour, bodycolour and gum arabic on wove paper

31.7 x 20.5 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 1/8 inches

Aubergine is known as brinjal in South-East Asia.

Mangosteen

Inscribed l.r.: mongostan, numbered ninety-seven. N 97 and 101, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper watermarked

IFD

31.7 x 20.5 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 1/8 inches

Mangosteens grow in South East Asia, particularly in Indonesia. It is a juicy, slightly acidic fruit and it is also used in traditional medicine.

Ratahouli (pepper)

Inscribed l.c.: Ratahouli, numbered ninety-five, N107 and 1010, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper watermarked HIS/GD

33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

Cashew

Inscribed Rajab, numbered ninety-eight, N109 and 1012, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper

33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

The cashew tree is a tropical evergreen tree that produces the cashew seed and the cashew accessory fruit. The nut can be seen growing from the bottom of the fruits in the drawing, both green and then brown once it has ripened.

Jambu Air (Szygium Aqueum)

Inscribed l.c.: jambol, numbered A Hundred, N111 and 1019, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper watermarked HIS

33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

This is a special of the brush cherry tree; its common names include watery rose apple and bell fruit.

Chilli

Inscribed l.r.: fjoli, numbered ninety-one, N100 and 105, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper watermarked with a crest

33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

Pomegranate

Inscribed l.r. ramangh, numbered A hundred and three, N114 and 1019, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper watermarked HIS

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33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

Papaya

Watercolour and gum arabic inscribed l.r. papaya, numere ninety-nine, N100 and 1013, on laid paper watermarked with a crest

32.5 x 23 cm.; 12 ½ x 9 inches

Durian

Inscribed l.r.: doorian, numbered eighty-five, N94 and 96, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper

32.7 x 23 cm.; 12 ¾ x 9 inches

The durian, with its spiny outer shell and moist, pungent flesh can weigh up to seven pounds. These large fruits grow on trees, have a short period of ripeness and their cultivation is difficult.

The durian is famously not allowed on public transport in Singapore on account of its unpleasant smell.

Lobed tropical tomato

Inscribed l.r.: samati, numbered ninety, N100 and 109, watercolour with touches of gum arabic on laid paper

32 x 21 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 ¼ inches

Berlimbing

Inscribed l.r.: blinbingh, numbered A hundred and two, N113 and No 16, on laid paper watermarked HIS

33 x 23 cm.; 12 ¾ x 9 inches

Berlimbing, also known as bling bling or berling berling, is a sour fruit used in curries.

Buah Chiku (Sapodilla, Chikoo, Sapota or Naseberry)

Inscribed l.r.: boa sawa, numbered ninety-three, N104 and 104, watercolour and gum arabic with touches of bodycolour on laid paper partially watermarked with the Strasburg Lily

33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

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This appears to be Buah Sawo or Chiku, but the identification of this plant is open to question.

Ban Branjahr (?)

Inscribed l.r.: Ban Branjarh (?), numbered eight eight, N90 and 102, watercolour, bodycolour and gum arabic on laid paper, watermarked

31.7 x 20.5 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 1/8 inches

This plant has not been identified.

Lotus

Inscribed l.c.: Fratil, numbered ninety-seven, N108 and 1011, watercolour and gum arabic, watermarked with a crest
33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

This drawing shows the lotus head with seeds after it has flowered. It is the seed of plants in the genus Nelumbo and the seeds are used in Asian cooking and traditional medicine.

Melon (probably watermelon)

Inscribed l.r.: patuka, numbered ninety-two N103 and 106, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper
33 x 23 cm.; 13 x 9 inches

Mango

Inscribed l.r.: Manga, numbered A Hundred and one, N112 and 1015, watercolour and gum arabic
31.7 x 20.5 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 1/8 inches

Longan

Inscribed l.r.: froita lanja, numbered eight nine, N99 and 103, watercolour and gum arabic on laid paper watermarked with a crest
32.2 x 21 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 ¼ inches

Rambutan

Inscribed l.r.: frouita kafri, numbered eighty-six, N96 and 100, watercolour and gum arabic
32 x 21 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 ¼ inches

Buah Gowok (Syzgium polycephalum)

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Inscribed l.r.: rambutan and numbered eighty-five, watercolour and gum arabic and pencil on laid paper
31.7 x 20.5 cm.; 12 ½ x 8 1/8 inches