



Attributed to Kesu Das (North India, Mughal)
A Man Holding a Coconut, late 16th century
opaque watercolor on paper, heightened with gold
9 13/16 x 5 7/8 in.
Museum purchase, Karl E. Weston Memorial Fund
81.44

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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In late 16th century northern India, there was a general shift away from using small paintings (“miniatures”) as book illustrations toward incorporating single works without text into treasured albums, or “exquisite scrap-books.”

Akbar was one of the Mughal Empire’s legendary rulers as well as a great patron of the arts. He favored portrait studies and was interested in subjects from both high and low social classes. This self-portrait by the Mughal painter Kesu Das may have been included in one of Akbar’s albums. The artist, using the techniques of the Persian style, depicts himself as a humble supplicant holding an offering of a coconut.



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Chester Harding (American, 1792–1866)
Portrait of Amos Lawrence, Benefactor, 1846
oil on canvas
81 15/16 x 52 3/8 in.
Commissioned by the Trustees of Williams College
1846.1

DISCUSS

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This self-portrait, attributed to Mughal painter Kesu Das, may have been created for an album dedicated to the famous Emperor Akbar, a great patron of the arts and one of the rulers of the legendary Mughal Empire. In a portrait, the subject's pose, gestures, facial expression, and gaze can tell us about their personality, attitudes, and state of mind.

Roll your cursor over the image to magnify. What do you see?

- How would you describe the man's pose? What is he doing?
- What is he holding? Why do you think the artist chose to include this object?
- Where is he looking? How would you describe his facial features?
- What does the painting suggest about his attitude toward others?
- What types of lines and colors has the artist used?
- How does this artwork make you feel?
- What does this artwork say about the artist?

For more information about art and architecture in the Mughal Empire, visit the following websites:

Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History:

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mugh/hd_mugh.htm

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mugh_2/hd_mugh_2.htm

Indian Art:

www.indianart.ru/eng/mughal/index.php

Now compare *A Man Holding a Coconut* with another portrait in the museum's collection, Chester Harding's portrait of Amos Lawrence, a generous donor who funded the construction of the Lawrence Hall Rotunda. How does the portrait of Amos Lawrence compare with Kesu Das's self-portrait?



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CREATE

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Now it's your turn to create a self-portrait. How would you like to present yourself?

Create your image using markers, colored pencils, colored paper, or whatever other art supplies you might have. Take a moment to think about how you would like to be portrayed. Would you like to be seen in profile (face to the side) or would you like to look straight out at the viewer? What emotion would you like to express? What might a specific color, pattern, or setting say about you?

For more activities and information on self-portraits, visit: www.nga.gov/education/classroom/self_portraits/