



Unknown (North India, Mughal)  
*Portrait of the Emperor Shah Jahan in Old Age*, late 17th century  
opaque watercolor on paper, heightened with gold  
13 1/2 x 8 5/8 in  
Gift of Mrs. Horace W. Frost  
83.26.5

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Unknown (North India, Mughal)

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Under the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan, the opulent court witnessed its greatest splendor, particularly in architecture. Shah Jahan's predecessors Akbar and Jahangir promoted naturalism in depictions of personalities and events of the Mughal court. Shah Jahan, however, favored a style that added royal and iconic authority to imperial portraits. Here he is depicted in his old age, wizened but recognizable in his static and formal pose. The portrait was probably completed after the emperor's death: the pigments and motif of a dagger tucked into the waist do not appear in paintings until the reign of Shah Jahan's son Aurangzeb.



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Frans Pourbus the Younger (Flemish, 1569–1622)  
*Portrait of Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia*, 1599–1600  
oil on canvas  
51 x 41 5/8 in.  
Gift of Prentis Cobb Hale, Jr.  
64.31

## DISCUSS

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In this portrait, the Emperor Shah Jahan is shown standing in a pose against a nebulous background.

- How would you describe this pose?
- What do you think the pose communicates about the Emperor?
- What other details do you notice about the figure?

Famous as the Mughal emperor who ordered the construction of the Taj Mahal, the Emperor Shah Jahan favored an artistic style that emphasized royal and iconic authority in imperial portraiture. This small and detailed painting was designed for close, intimate viewing, perhaps in an album or book format.

Now compare this portrait of the Emperor with another portrait of royalty from WCMA's collection (below left):

Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, daughter of King Phillip II of Spain, and her husband Albert, Archduke of Austria ruled the Netherlands on behalf of Spain in the early 17th century.

Compare her portrait with Shah Jahan's. What similarities do you see? What differences?

Some points of comparison to consider:

- What size are these paintings?
- What type of paint did each artist use? How does the effect of watercolor compare with the effect of oil paint?
- What are the royal figures wearing?
- How are the royal figures posed?
- How would you describe the background?
- In what direction are the figures looking? What is their relationship to the viewer?
- What does each portrait say about its subject and their qualities as rulers?
- Do these rulers seem powerful? Inspiring? Generous? Strict? Why or why not?
- What details indicate their royal status?

Shah Jahan's portrait was meant to be seen up close in an album, while the portrait of the Infanta was probably hung in a large royal court building where many could have viewed it from afar. Do you think these considerations influenced the artists? How so?



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## CREATE

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Shah Jahan's predecessors favored naturalism in depictions of Mughal court life. Shah Jahan, on the other hand, liked styles that emphasized imperial authority.

It's your turn to go down in history as royalty! Strike a pose and make an imperial portrait to show to your adoring public.

As you design your imperial portrait, think about:

- How would you like to be remembered?
- What image do you want to portray to your kingdom?
- Are you a ruthless tyrant or a benevolent leader?

Have fun adding details to your drawing while thinking about your facial expression, pose, costume, setting, props, and ornaments that can help convey your message to your people.