

Portraits of Devotion

Popular *Manorath* Paintings from Nathdwara
in the Collection of Anil Relia

Isabella Nardi



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- For the first time in book form, the popular images of devotion and worship, commissioned by ordinary devotees of Pushti Marg, have been explored for their artistic virtues
- Featuring an extensive collection of popular manorath paintings

Art collector Anil Relia had always admired the miniature paintings of the Nathdwara school, which grew out of the religious devotion of the Pushti Marg ('Path of Grace'). On one of his trips to this pilgrimage town, he encountered manorath paintings, whose unusual visual elements attracted his attention immediately. Originally part of the Pushti Marg popular culture, manorath paintings were often commissioned by devout followers as an indelible record of a pilgrimage trip to Nathdwara.

Manorath ('mind's vehicle') paintings are a visual representation of the pilgrim's wish to enter into mutual communication with a divine Pushti Marg icon. The popular manoraths in this collection, which employ mixed media and photo-realism techniques, illustrate worshippers in the presence of Shrinathji. These images had a deep emotional resonance for worshippers because they embodied both the corporeal pilgrimage to Nathdwara as well as the inner devotional experience.

As author Isabella Nardi demonstrates, the paintings in this collection are not merely souvenirs of a pilgrimage trip; they represent the worshipper's journey to Nathdwara for a darshan with their beloved and revered deity. With pilgrims as patrons, these manoraths are truly portraits of devotion.

Published in association with Archer Art Gallery, Ahmedabad.

Contents: Collector's note; Introduction and Acknowledgements; Nathdwara Painting and the Anil Relia Collection; Defining the Manorath Genre; Painting the Experience; The Catalogue; Glossary; List of Artists and Studios; Cited Works.

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Isabella Nardi (PhD, SOAS, University of London) specializes in South Asian painting and visual culture from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries with particular reference to northern India. Her current research reassesses devotional painting and photography from the pilgrimage town of Nathdwara as well as the historic, cultural and artistic inter-connections between the Krishnaite sect of Pushti Marg and the Rajput courts of Rajasthan. In the past, she has investigated Sanskrit technical treatises on the theory of painting and their relation to the practice of Indian traditional arts. Formerly, she was Research Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, and Visiting Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, the University of Oregon, and Cleveland State University.

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