



Grosvenor
Gallery

CHUGHTAI'S ETCHINGS EDITIONS OF A MASTER



Grosvenor
Gallery

CHUGHTAI'S ETCHINGS

Front cover

Mughal Lady (detail)

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

27.5 x 25 cm. (10 3/4 x 9 3/4 in.)

Back cover

Mughal Princess (detail)

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

35 x 25 cm. (13 1/4 x 9 3/4 in.)

Inside cover

To Mecca (detail)

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

33 x 38.1 cm. (13 x 15 in.)

Grosvenor
Gallery

29 October – 14 November 2014

CHUGHTAI'S
ETCHINGS
EDITIONS OF
A MASTER

CHUGHTAI'S ETCHINGS EDITIONS OF A MASTER

Abdur Rahman Chughtai (1897–1975) is one of the most acclaimed and revered South Asian artists of the 20th century, who whilst primarily lauded as a painter, was also a celebrated printmaker.

Chughtai was born during the last years of the 19th century in Lahore, a thriving cultural centre since Mughal times, with a sizeable community of miniature artists. Local traditions were institutionalised by the British with the foundation of the Mayo School of Art (today's National College of Art), where the artist enrolled 1911.

Chughtai's works typically portray famous personalities from Hindu and Islamic history as well as sentimental and poetic scenes in which the characters typically personified places and moods (see *Endless Journey, To Mecca* and *Kashmiri Woodcutter*). During his career he developed a style that combined the precise nature of Mughal and Persian miniatures with the delicacy of Japanese ink paintings.

His work is often compared to that of the Bengal School which flourished between 1905 and 1920, and which was led by the Tagore family, who similarly had synthesised Hindu mythology, Mughal painting and Japanese wash and printing techniques. He was careful however to exclude himself from this group: "I presented my own understanding and style which was different... In these paintings of mine stature and feature, dress, image and architectonics demonstrate my individuality". Although it interested him, Chughtai also distanced himself from European artistic experimentation, rather focussing on his main aim of resuscitating the traditional Mughal style.

Under the Arch, thought to be the first etching produced by the artist in London in 1932.

Courtesy of the Chughtai Museum Trust.



Although there is no documentary evidence to prove either way, it is though that it was whilst attending the Mayo School that the artist was first introduced to the technique of photo-lithography. S.N. Gupta, then Vice Principal of the Mayo School of Art had been exploring the medium of etching in the late 1910s, and could well have influenced the young artist.

It was with the intention of furthering his artistic ambitions that the artist travelled to London in 1932. Here Chughtai continued his studies under the private tutelage of Douglas Ian Smart (1879–1970), a leading English etcher, engraver and water-colourist of the 1920's and 1930's. His studies under Smart yielded little in the way of technical advances, however it was in 1932 that Chughtai produced his first dry-point etching, *Under the Arch*. It is noted by Chughtai's son that the artist's early attempts at print making were not particularly successful. This can be observed in the 1932 edition of *Under the Arch*, which was clearly produced by an artist learning the craft, whereas the later edition (plate 1) displays a much tighter control of line, and more considered composition.

Chughtai returned home in December 1932, however travelled to London again in 1936, where he was taken under the wing of the renowned artist and printmaker Paul Drury. Drury had essentially become Chughtai's personal etching tutor at the recommendation of Arthur Hind and Campbell Dodgson, both of whom were the head of the Prints and Drawings department at the British Museum.

Envelopes addressed to
Paul Drury from Chughtai.

Courtesy of the Estate
of Paul Drury PPRE.



In July 1936 Chughtai was first introduced to Drury, and on August 3rd Chughtai travelled to Wimbledon to work with him in the studio of his father, the celebrated sculptor Alfred Drury RA. Drury's diary entries record that for a period of two months Chughtai would visit the Wimbledon studio three or four times a week, producing early versions of works titled *Stork*, *Girl and Shepherd*, *Man's Head*, *Girl at Shirne*, *Prisoner* and *Woodcutter*. Drury comments in his diary that by mid-September Chughtai had become adept at many aspects of the printmaking process.

At the end of September 1936 Drury took Chughtai to the Central School of Art and Design, where he was introduced to Bill Robbins, regarded by Drury as the best aquatint artist of the period, and where he attended day classes. It was arranged that Chughtai would work there on his larger plates, and could use the School's equipment, better suited to handle the larger works. With both Robbin's and Drury's advice and guidance, Chughtai soon mastered the technique, and produced a number of high quality etchings. Drury recounts in one diary entry that his work was; "Fluent in execution, rich, effective in tones, decorative, yet full of human qualities and sympathy".

Chughtai returned to Lahore soon after the end of November 1936 with a large stock of materials, and upon returning to Pakistan established his own press. Using the knowledge acquired in Europe, Chughtai generated an extensive output of etchings, each exquisitely detailed in their monochromatic depictions, and he rapidly established a reputation as a highly skilled printmaker. He was also an avid collector, and possessed a huge number of

A letter written by Chughtai to Paul Drury, c. 1937

Courtesy of the Estate of Paul Drury PPRE.



Mughal miniatures, Japanese woodcuts, as well as etchings by European masters such as Dürer, Rembrandt and Alphonse Legros amongst others.

Although there are no formal records it is thought that Chughtai created around 250-300 etchings, covering a huge variety of subjects. Very few editions are numbered, however due to the restrictions of the technique, it is thought that a maximum of 50 prints per edition were created at any one time.

In a 1959 exhibition catalogue, art critic Malik Shams attributed Chughtai's success in etching to his mastery of line and versatility in personalising a foreign technique: "His lineal genius and skill finds remarkable expression in his etchings. Etching is a purely graphic art to be executed through line alone. And Chughtai commands a mastery of line..... To the Westerners, whose technique he has borrowed, but made quite his own, he would seem to be a born etcher."

The exhibition will hopefully shed light on an often ignored, but incredibly rich body of work by Chughtai, which has the capacity to evoke a range of emotions from the viewer through evocative depictions of princesses, poets, musicians and labourers alike. It is a field which is worthy of further academic study, which it no doubt will receive in the coming years.



PLATES

[1] *Under the Arch*

Etching on paper
Signed and titled
40 x 25 cm. (15 3/4 x 9 13/16 in.)

In this image Chughtai has depicted an old man with two young boys, situated under the cracking ceiling of a stone archway. It is unclear what the figures are holding, possibly bowls for alms, or a votive offering. This is a later edition of the first work produced by Chughtai in 1932

Another edition of this work is housed in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.

Previous page

Mujahid (detail)

Etching on paper
Signed and titled
47.2 x 29.2 cm.
(18 9/16 x 11 1/2 in.)



Rahman Chughtai

"Under The Arch"

[2] *End of the Journey*

Etching on paper

Signed and tiled

37 x 30 cm. (14 9/16 x 11 13/16 in.)

In her 1984 thesis on the work of Chughtai, Dr. Marcella Bedford Nesom interprets this work as a humorous depiction of the camel and his rider. The heavily laden beast struggles as they reach the crest of a hill, to reveal not rest, but only an expanse of barren desert before them. The camel's knees appear to buckle, and a length of cloth becomes caught underfoot. The exhausted beast appears to be on the verge of collapse, whereas the rider is unaware of the impending upending of himself and his possessions. Other editions have been titled *Endless Horizon*.

Published: Another edition of this work is illustrated in M. Iqbal, *Poet of the East and Chughtai*, Lahore, 1962 (another impression illustrated, unpaginated). The following poem accompanies the image:

Endless Horizon

Silent is the Moonlight

Silent the boughs of trees

Silent are the music marker of the valley

And silent the green robed ones of the hills

And asleep in the arms of the night



Robert Chayler

"End of the Journey!"

[3] *Mujahid*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

47.2 x 29.2 cm. (18 9/16 x 11 1/2 in.)

In one of his most well-known images the artist depicts a man in shackles, being paraded before a crowd. Titled either *Holy Man* or *Mujahid*, this is amongst one of the largest of Chughtai's etchings. Paul Drury recounts that Chughtai produced an early edition of this work in his visit to London in 1936. Other editions have been titled *Holy Man* and *His Own Passion*.

Another edition of this work was published in the *Bombay Star*, April 14, 1946.

Another edition of this work was published in *Nargis*, a Lahore based journal of Art and Literature, c.1946.

Another edition of this work was published in *Amal e Chughtai*, titled *His Own Passion*.

Published: Another edition of this work is illustrated in M. Iqbal, *Poet of the East and Chughtai*, Lahore, 1962 (another impression illustrated, unpaginated). The following poem accompanies the image:

Mujahid

*What is a Momin's Faqr? Conquest of time and space;
It endows a slave with the attributes of the master!
The code of men of courage is truth and fearlessness,
God's lions know not the cunning of a fox*



Pahua Chagla

"Hajab"

[4] *In the Ĵamia Mosque*

Etching on paper

Signed, titled and numbered 10/50

45 x 27.5 cm. (17 11/16 x 10 13/16 in.)

In this etching Chughtai depicts the scene inside a main mosque, with the figures reclining either before or after prayer.

A calm and reflective work, the scene does not possess over embellishment.



[5] *In the Rain*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

16.8 x 19.6 cm. (7 5/8 x 7 3/4 in.)

In this work the artist displays his ability to create a sense of drama and movement. Chughtai has depicted birds in flight against a backdrop of torrential rain and foliage battered by wind, advancing on towards the viewer, typical of monsoons experiences in Pakistan and India.

Collections: Another edition of this work is housed in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.



Rahman Chughtai

'In the Rain'

[6] *Kashmiri Woodcutter*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

47.2 x 29.2 cm. (18 9/16 x 11 1/2 in.)

In one of the artist's most iconic etchings he elegantly depicts a common sight in Kashmir, a woodcutter shown in his traditional robe, sack and axe, his back curving under the weight of his task. Chughtai had great empathy for the peasants of Kashmir, and the delicacy with which he has portrayed this un-enviable task is remarkable. A social commentary on the plight of the poorest is made by Chughtai in this work, which along with *The Carpet Seller* shows the unforgiving living conditions experienced by the masses. Here the main figure fills the composition, with the graceful curve of the sticks leading the eye into the scene, where one can see his colleagues toiling similarly.



Rabimay Chughla

"Kashmiri" woodcut. 1

[7] *The Carpet Seller*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

32.4 x 35.2 cm. (12 3/4 x 14 in.)

Although the eye is first drawn to the highly adorned carpet in the centre of the composition, it soon becomes apparent of a wealth of detail around the edges of the work.



Rajm - Chitra

- The Englishman

[8] *Sacred Stairs*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

25 x 23.3 cm. (9 3/4 x 9 1/8 in.)

Figures disappear into the distance,
climbing the long staircase to the mosque.
In this etching we see the artist's skill in
portraying depth and perspective using a
monochromatic palette.



Kahnian Chughtai

"S. S. S. S."

[9] *Mughal Lady*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

27.5 x 25 cm. (10 3/4 x 9 3/4 in.)

This is a wonderful example of Chughtai's characteristic depiction of a high status Mughal woman. Here the figure is heavily adorned with jewellery, and is depicted with a rose in her hand. Presented like a Mughal portrait in profile, a convention fashionable during the reigns of Jahangir (1605–1637) and Shah Jahan (1628–1658), it is, nevertheless, unlikely that the painting represents a historical person.



Rehman Chughtai

"Nughal Lady"

[10] *Mughal Princess*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

35 x 25 cm. (13 1/4 x 9 3/4 in.)

Like *Mughal Lady*, this work is another example of the delicate portrayal of women in Chughtai's oeuvre. In this composition she is pictured wearing a sari adorned with a *boteh* motif, looking seductively over her shoulder. She carries flowers in her hand, and is set against a backdrop adorned with floral sprays.

A very similar watercolour was used as the cover for the Urdu drama, *Anarkali*, written by Syed Imtiaz Ali Taj.



[11] *The Vase*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

23.7 x 11 cm. (8 3/4 x 4 1/4 in.)

Here a woman's hand gracefully descends into the image to pick up a flower. Although a small work depicting a mundane exercise, it is nevertheless depicted in the artist's typical style, and with a great deal of sensitivity.

Collections: Another edition of this work is housed in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.



Rahman Chughtai "The Vase"

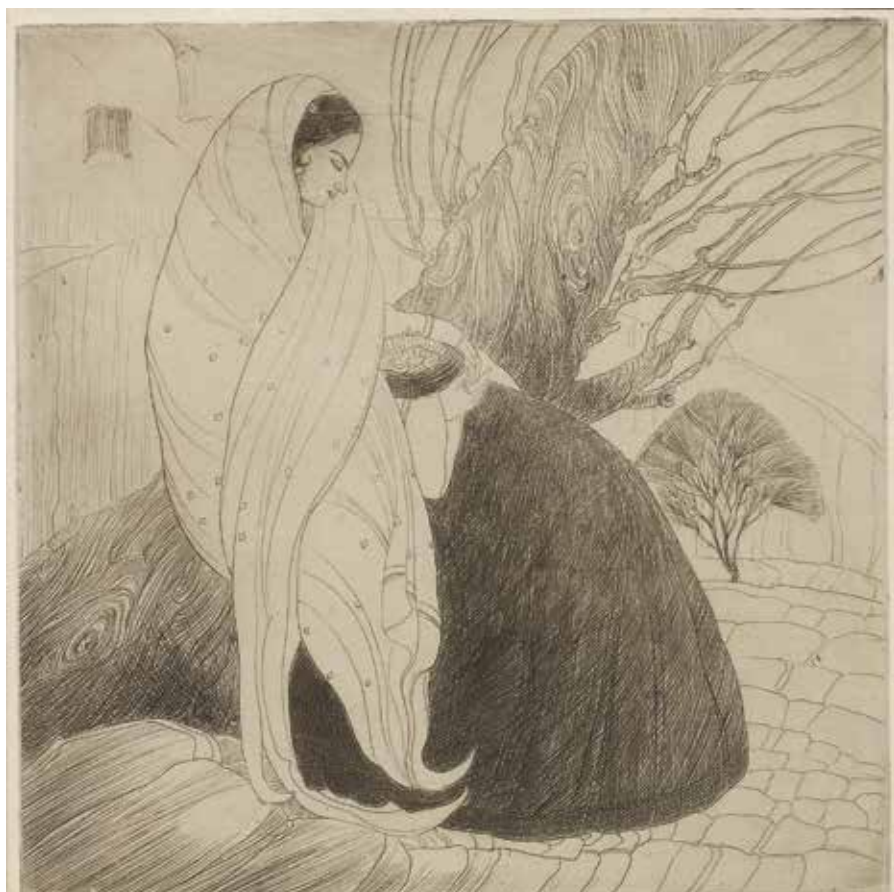
[12] *Village Girl*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

21.2 x 21.4 cm. (8 1/4 x 8 3/8 in.)

Other editions of this image were printed by Chughtai and were titled *Feelings*, perhaps a more fitting title considering the contemplative nature of the piece. Here a woman sits against the base of a tree holding a basket in her lap, her eyes closed in thought. The bark of the tree is highly detailed, and the branches tail away out of view, suggestive of her wandering mind.



Rahman Chughtai

'Village Girl'

[13] *Spinning Wheel*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

39.8 x 37.7 cm. (15 11/16 x 14 13/16 in.)

This work is characterised by the beautiful detailing on the various drapery. The backdrop to the left of the figure displays stunning floral sprays, and the dress of the woman is adorned with floral and zig-zag patterns. Even the spinning wheel is highly decorated, the curves of the wheel echoed in the shape of the fan.



[14] *Old Musician*

Etching on paper
Signed and titled
35.2 x 22.8 cm. (13 7/8 x 9 in.)

Here the musician fills the composition and is pictured holding aloft his *ektara*, a single stringed musical instrument played throughout South Asia and the Middle East. Visually a simple image, the curved neck of the instrument is echoed in the abstract lines in the background.

Collections: Another edition of this work is housed in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco.



Rohman Chughtai

"Old Musician"

[15] *Nude with Feather*

Etching on paper

Signed

30.4 x 26.4 cm. (12 x 10 3/8 in.)

Here a nude figure is depicted in the centre of the composition, seated on a rolling hill. She wears nothing except for a necklace, earrings and a *tilka* mark, and holds a single peacock feather in her left hand. The woman's features are distorted, with breasts seeming to defy gravity, and with a rather exaggerated posterior. It is an attractive image executed in bold flowing lines. Chughtai has used the feature of the feather to create a classical triangular composition.



Robert Chughtai

[16] *Woman with a Parrot*

Etching on paper

Signed

27.6 x 22.5 cm. (10 7/8 x 8 7/8 in.)

In this image a woman sits in the foreground with a parrot swinging from its perch behind her. The drapery in the upper corners and the crenulations behind her give the work a theatrical theme, and although the meaning of the oyster shell and dagger she holds are not apparent, it is an extremely engaging work, as the figure gazes out of the scene.



Ratan Chugh

[17] *Dupatta*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

28.8 x 9.5 cm. (11 5/16 x 3 3/4 in.)

In this work the figure is almost completely covered by her sari, but by pulling back the veil shows the viewer her face in profile.

This is a simple technique which lends the work an air of mystery.



"Oupatha" Rahman Chughtai

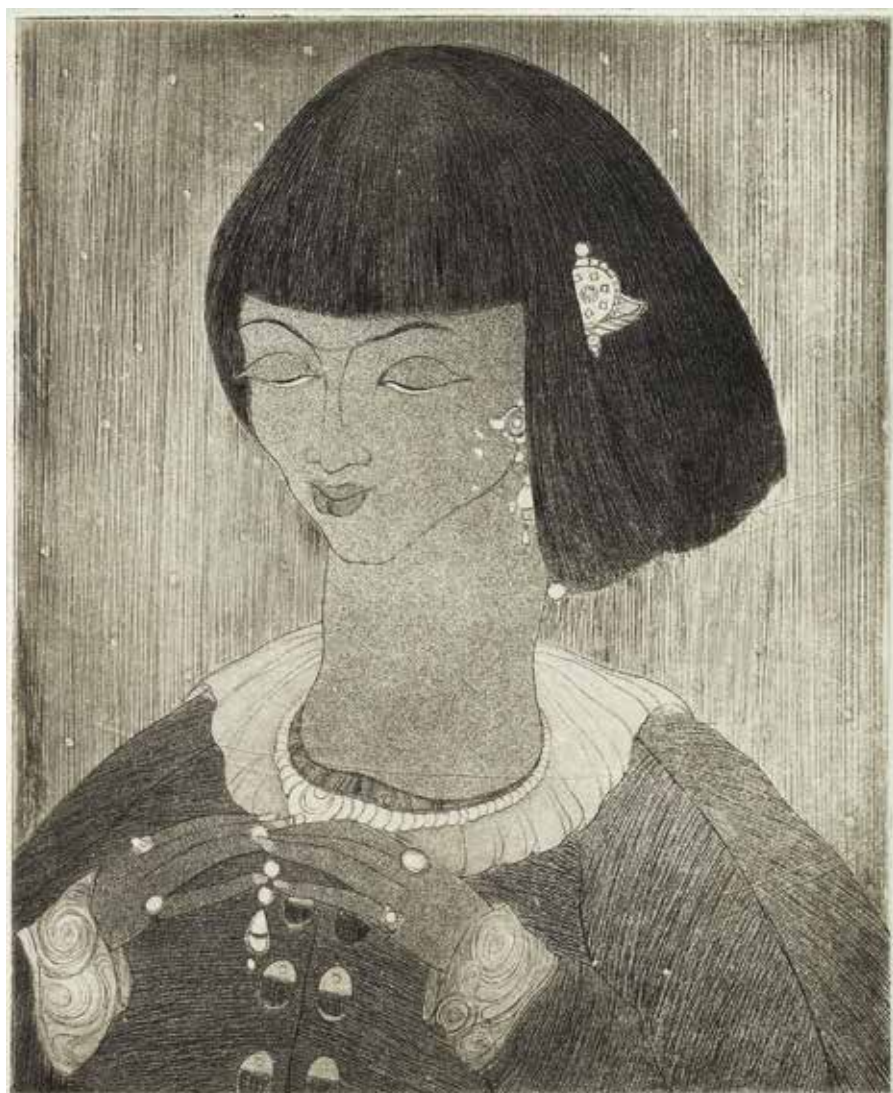
[18] *Chinese Girl*

Etching on paper

Signed and titled

27.7 x 22.5 cm. (10 15/16 x 8 13/16 in.)

Chughtai's early exposure to Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan influenced the artist in terms of his use of Chinese and Japanese techniques such as wash-painting and printing.



Rahman Chughtai

Chitra Tirth

[19] *Young Boy*

Etching on paper
Signed and titled
15.2 x 13.8 cm. (6 x 5 3/8 in.)

Here a young boy stares out of the scene, his
heavily lidded eyes fixed on a point out of view.



Rahman Chughtai

"young Boy"

[20] *To Mecca*

Etching on paper
Signed and titled
33 x 38.1 cm. (13 x 15 in.)

In this rare image we see a heavily burdened camel depicted against an expanse of sand and sky. The tops of pilgrim's tents can be seen in the distance, and the camel's tracks lead the viewer's eye into the scene. It is a peaceful image, and one which illustrates the vast distances and difficulties involved with completing the Hajj.

"What so ever I have done, is a miracle of the internal urge and shall continue working most honestly till my last." A.R. Chughtai, letter to Paul Drury, January 15th, 1948



APPENDIX

A letter from AR Chughtai to
Paul Drury, c. 1946

Reproduced courtesy of
The Estate of Paul Drury PPRE

From,
Khan Bahadur,
M.A. Rahman Chughtai,
Chabuk Sawaran. Lahore. (India.)

Dated.

Dear Drury,

During all these seven long years I have been often thinking of you, but no news from either side could be exchanged. Just after the war, the political phase of life took such a sudden and drastic change, that nobody could feel sure about anything. Now that things are becoming normal again, thoughts fly back to the memories of the past. I hope you will write to me all about yourself and would remember me to your father and other.

I am thinking over coming to Europe once again and it could be managed I shall be leaving India in the coming March. How is Mr. Robinson? Busy with his school perhaps?

with good wishes & kind regards

Sincerely Yours,

M.A. Rahman Chughtai

Paul Drury, Esq;
Lancaster Lodge,
Lancaster Road. Wimbledon.

A letter from AR Chughtai to
Paul Drury, January 15 1948
Reproduced courtesy of
The Estate of Paul Drury PPRE

From, M.A. Rahman Chughtai,
Shish Mahal, Revi Road, Lahore, Pakistan.

Dated Jan, 15th, 46.

Dear Drury,

I was grieve to learn from your letter of the 12th, August, 47, about the death of your father. I can never forget his most charming personality that shall ever live through the refreshing memories he has left behind and the great work ~~art~~ of art Josias Heyland's statue that stand in the ground of the Royal Academy.

It is good that you now married and have a beautiful son. Did you marry the same girl, whose ~~xxxxxx~~etching you gave to me. Remember me to your wife and convey my love and blessing to your child.

I am planning to come over to US, but because of the present uncertain conditions here I cannot decide as to when it could be possible. But whenever I come I shall make it point to contact you and I am sure that this time we will have opportunities to enjoy many more happiest sittings. I wonder if you still remember my brother-in-law Mr. Gulzar. He was in the United States of America on his business, on his way back he stay some time in London and tried to find you but unfortunately he could not ~~xxxxxx~~.

Just a day before the receipt of your letter I was looking up the old files of the Studio and the night of your etching "An old man looking at a map of the 1932" issues remind me of your other etchings and particularly of an old woman, which I think also appeared in the Studio. It was really a great shock to me that during the war you lost most of your valuable copper-plate. War miseries are endless. Like you you I also kept myself very busy during the war, but unfortunately I belong to a country where art is neither a luxury nor a necessity. What so ever I have done, is a miracle of the internal urge and shall continue working most honestly till my last. You will be pleased to know that so far I have made over five hundred paintings and more than ten hundred sketches. Since my last visit I have also made some very interesting etchings, the prints of which I shall not forget to send you next month. Ever since the partition of India, the other community has tempered the otherwise very plain atmosphere of the sub-continent with not vile and communal malice and at present we think of any thing cultural or intellectual, save providing comfort to thousands of your prosperity and happiness, shall always be service of great delight to me.

Sincerely Yours,

M.A. Rahman Chughtai

P.S. It is true copy of my letter which sent you on Sept, 11th I think of that you are not received other wise you would have replied.

Please note change of address, above.

RAHMAN CHUGHTAI

JULY - AUGUST 1936

Having received a letter (feared lost in War) from his brother (or brother-in-law?) Rahman Chughtai began a series of visits to me at Wimbledon, where he worked with me, having chosen me as his technical tutor. (I seem to remember on the advice of Arthur R. Hind, of the Prints and Drawings, British Museum, at a time when Campbell Dodgson was still working and advising there.) ^{† the previous Raghbir Singh.}

Entries in an engagement diary of 1936 give these factual extracts (not descriptive of works.) ^{Other entries referring to activities have not been included here.}

July 29th Chughtai 'phoned me to arrange a meeting.

July 30th Chughtai and 2 Indians (Moslems) arrived at Lancaster Lodge, 11 a.m. Lovely sunny day.

Aug 1st (Saturday). Finding larger heater, paper and zinc. Met him at Wimbledon Station, 11 a.m. Lesson until 6 p.m. He needed a plate on which ~~to work~~ I had laid a good hard ground (not a big one - about 5 x 8 inches.) I bit it for him during the afternoon in Nitric (on open single line) with a few clothed dark areas of no great size. Then we cleaned off ground and I took a trial print for him. All had gone well. R.Ch keen to do more.

Aug 4th R.Ch bit and printed 'Stork' (?) plate 11 - 1.30 p.m.

Aug 6th R.Ch telephoned, unable to come - fever.

Aug 8th R.Ch here. Ran 4 tracings through press onto plates (Paid £4 fees). 11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Aug 9th I was away on painting holiday at Trout Hall. Graham and Kathleen Sutherland came from Monday to Wednesday. Told them about R.Ch.

Aug 19th (Wednesday) Chughtai here all day. Bit and printed 'Girl and Shepherd' 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. (Long Day!)

Aug 20th R.Ch here all day. 11 a.m. - 7.30 p.m. Bit and printed large plate in my biggest dish.

Aug 24th R.Ch here. Bit and printed 'Girl at Shrine' laid ground on small plate for 2nd state. 11 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Aug 27th R.Ch here. 11 a.m. - 4.30 p.m. 2nd State. Man's Head and burnishing.

Aug 29th Self unwell, in bed till afternoon. Took prints of 2 of R.Ch's plates.

Sep 7th R.Ch 'phoned - not coming.

Sep 8th R.Ch here. 11 a.m. - 1.30 p.m. (ground laid and tracings transferred thereon.)

Sep 14th R.Ch here. 10.15 a.m. Filed plates and went away.

Sep 15th R.Ch here 10.30 a.m. - 1.30 p.m. Laying ground etc and tracings. He can now do all this very well.

Sep 19th R.Ch here with old prints he had bought, (including Legros) and larger plates. ^{in London} See additional notes on past conversation re aquatint.

Sep 21st R.Ch here 11 a.m. - 7 p.m. Biting 2 plates, 'Prisoner' and 'Woodcutter'.

Sep 28th Printing etc. for Chughtai. 2.30 - 7 p.m.

Sep 29th (Tuesday). (Teaching Day). To Central Schools with Chughtai to introduce him (to go to day class) to Bill Robbings and others.

It was arranged that Chughtai could work there on plates of bigger size and aquatinting on them with all the Central's larger equipment.

Robbings helped him and Chughtai soon mastered these techniques. He did some splendid work. Fluent in execution, rich, effective in tones, decorative yet full of human qualities and sympathy.

Met Chughtai 7.45 p.m. and took him to Campbell Dodgson's lecture. Introduced him to many people. He has a genial presence and has much enthusiasm. English so well spoken. Will soon be going back to Lahore with stocks of materials and tools. We all wished him further success.

*At first a quiet
quiet of the hand
he had worked on
help in the Central
equipment. I was
a while. It was
a very happy
Robbings was
helpful in
with plates of
I was
met
but the
could be more done*

REFERENCES

Chughtai Arif, *Nations in Action*, Lahore, 2011

Drury, Jolyon, *Revelation to Revolution*, London, 2006

Mitter, Partha, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*,
Cambridge University Press, 1994

Naqvi, Akbar, *Image and Identity: Painting and Sculpture
in Pakistan*, Karachi, 1998

Nesom, Dr. Marcella Bedford, Abdur Rahman *Chughtai:
A Modern South Asian Artist*, Ohio State University, 1984

Shams, Malik, *The Art of Chughtai*, Karachi, August 1959

The Chughtai Museum Trust, Lahore

Excerpts from the diaries of Paul Drury reproduced
courtesy of The Estate of Paul Drury PPRE

**Design
CHK Design**

**Print
The Five Castles Press**

**Photography
Matt Pia**

**Text and Research
Charles Moore**

**Grosvenor Gallery
21 Ryder Street
London SW1Y 6PX**

**T +44 (0) 20 7484 7979
F +44 (0) 20 7484 7980
E art@grosvenorgallery.com
grosvenorgallery.com**

