

One Object Open Call 2025

One Object in Question

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The fellowship programme is one of the central components of the GBF initiative and addresses international art historians, students, and researchers

For the Fall 2025 program, GBF offers grants for research projects that invite art historians to critically examine and explore the intricate layers of a single selected painting. The program aims to foster innovative research approaches and interventions in the study of Indian paintings, focusing on the broader context of Indian painters and their workshops. Fellows will collaborate with Museum Rietberg curators and staff to generate fresh insights and methodologies in the field. Key objectives include opening new avenues for studying Indian paintings and painters, as well as gaining hands-on experience with the various departments of the museum. This GBF Fellowship especially supports early-career academics—Master's, Doctoral, and Post-Doctoral candidates—seeking to refine their critical perspectives in the study of Indian art.

The selected proposal, focusing on *one* painting from a primary selection of four, will allow for an in-depth exploration of this work, examining every facet of its creation. The aim is to investigate closely and extract as much information as possible. Who might have produced this painting? Was it part of a series or set? Who was its intended audience? Was it produced under state patronage or for a single patron? What insights do the inscriptions offer, and do they enhance the artwork's value or meaning? Does the painting reflect the ideologies of the court or religion it represents? Were these works used by their creators or patrons as statements of power within religious or socio-political contexts? Are they complete works of art in their own right? What has been written and concluded about these paintings? Furthermore, how did these objects come to be part of the Rietberg collection? At a fundamental level, what do we know about the painters and workshops behind them?

*Primary selection of objects attached in the end.*

#### PRESENTING THE RESEARCH RESULTS TO THE PUBLIC AND TO EXPERTS

This fellowship provides a rare opportunity to curate the research outputs, in addition to a final written report and presentation, at the Museum Rietberg.

The outcomes of this collaborative research project may be shared in various formats, such as a public talk, a specialist lecture, a research publication, or even a focused one-room display. This short-term display could include a series of concise

texts and comparative materials presented alongside the original artworks. Where relevant, limited multimedia elements—such as a screen showcasing key findings—can also be incorporated. The final format and presentation details will be collaboratively determined at the conclusion of the research, based on the findings and available support materials.

#### WHO CAN APPLY

This fellowship encourages students and early career fellows perusing their master's degree, Doctoral or Post Doctoral program. Applicants, all over the world, of any nationality, must be studying relevant aspects on India paintings and painters

#### HOW CAN YOU APPLY

*Abstract:* Submit a proposal on *one* of the above-mentioned objects, up to 1000 words, including a brief methodology

(Submit your Abstract and updated CV [here](#))

*Last date of submission:* 15<sup>th</sup> March 2025

*Duration:* September till November 2025, no extensions

*Process:* Shortlisted candidates will be asked for an online interview

*Grant announcement date:* 15th of April 2025

*What does the Fellowship provide:*

- a. Honorarium: 5,000 CHF
- b. Residency in Zürich for the duration of three months
- c. Flying to and from Zürich (including public transport in Zürich)
- d. Resources, supportive and healthy work environment at the Museum Rietberg
- e. A one room-display as part of the final presentation, open to public

*Expectations from the Select Participants:*

- a. Full and active participation in the research and study for three months
- b. Research Development: To actively demonstrate the progress and share it with the GBF team
- c. Final Presentation: A one-room display of the research, public talk, and/or publication to be determined in the last month of your research
- d. Respectful Conduct: Foster inclusivity and professionalism. Discrimination, racism, or violence in any form will not be tolerated



Master of the first generation after Nainsukh of Guler  
**The House of the Pandavas is Set on Fire**  
Folio from the "large Guler-Basohli Bhagavata Purana" series  
Guler-Basohli, c. 1775 CE  
Museum Rietberg, REF 50  
Long term loan from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer

We selected this striking composition, one of its kind, in which flames engulf not only the palace but also the artist's imaginative rendering of a mythological fire, consuming nearly the entire scene except for a star-lit sky and glimpses of the charring structure. Attributed to the large Guler-Basohli *Bhagavata Purana* series, this folio is dated as 1760-65 and 1775 CE. Within the radiant flames and layers of soot, the composition offers insights into both the painter-workshop connections and the technical mastery underlying the folio. We invite abstracts that engage with the ongoing debate regarding the artist and/or workshop responsible for this work. Further inquiries might explore artworks that influenced the

depiction of the flames, as well as digital reconstructions to contextualize the painting's placement within the series. A technical study of the flames, soot, and pigment layering would enhance our understanding of stylistic patterns across workshops.





Master of the first generation after Nainsukh of Guler  
**Durga Mahishasuramardini**  
 Guler, c. 1790  
 Museum Rietberg, RVI 1867  
 Purchased with funds from the City of Zürich

Who determined the extent of a finished painting in traditional Indian painting practice, and at what stage were such decisions made? Were there established criteria to differentiate between a sketch, a tinted drawing, and a fully finished painting? Did the artists themselves define the concept of a “finished” work and did it change with time and space? Furthermore, was there a tradition of producing seemingly unfinished yet complete compositions? To investigate these underexplored aspects of Indian painting, we selected an important folio from the Rietberg collection: a *Mahishasuramardini* scene depicting the climactic battle between the demon Mahisha and the goddess Durga. This folio exemplifies an intriguing

juxtaposition of different phases of painting, from the preparatory drawing to areas with colour filling, shading, and meticulously rendered “finished” sections with final outlines and detailing. We invite abstracts that engage with the question of the artist and/or workshop’s decision-making processes. What might have led the painter to leave such a magnificent composition unfinished? A comprehensive stylistic and technical analysis, especially of the exposed lines, could uncover the dynamics between the completed and incomplete elements, shedding light on the collaborative and creative practices within traditional Indian workshops.



Master at the court of Maharana Sangram Singh II

**The Goddess on the Jewel Island**

Folio possibly from a large formal series

Udaipur, 1720-1730 CE

Museum Rietberg, RVI 939

Purchased with funds from Eberhard and Barbara Fischer

A painting from the royal court of Udaipur holds great significance for both its subject matter and stylistic representation. Scholars have linked this work to both Tantra and Mantra in their attempts to contextualize its deeper meanings. Affiliated to the court of Maharana Sangram Singh II of Udaipur and dated between 1720–1730 CE, this painting raises important yet unresolved questions, particularly regarding the built structures, depiction of various strata of people gathered around the goddess. For an abstract, further areas of inquiry on this composition could include the reception of its intricate mythological, *tantric*, and spiritual connections by the patron, the role of state religion, and the relationship between the painters

and the royal court. Did the courtly painters serve as visual propagators of state religion through their artworks? Most crucially, what do we see in the painting? Why are there multiple skylines and diverse landforms? Why does Shiva appear in three distinct forms and complexions, seemingly engaging with his other manifestations? What insights can be gained about the painter or his workshop from this enigmatic composition and use of symbolism?





Ascribed to Dhanu, Bhawani, Dharam Das, Makra  
**Khusrau and Shirin by Nezami**

29 text folios including four illustrations, bound together with two other unrelated manuscripts  
Imperial Atelier, c. 1590 CE  
Museum Rietberg, RVI 979a-d,  
Gift of Balthasar and Nanni Reinhart

The Rietberg Museum's early Mughal collection includes a fascinating 29-page manuscript of *Khusrau and Shirin* by Nezami. This fragmentary manuscript, featuring four illustrations, is stylistically linked to the workshop of Emperor Akbar, circa 1590. Notably, the manuscript is attributed, by the scribe of the manuscript, to four painters: Dhanu, Dharam Das, Bhavani, and Makra, each associated with a specific illustration. Dhanu is credited with *Khusrau and Shirin Playing Polo*, Dharam Das with *Farhat Introducing Himself in Shirin's House*, Bhavani with *Farhad Showing Shirin His Water Pipe*, and Makra with *Shirin Visiting Farhad on Mount Bisitun*. These painters' names also appear in significant early Mughal works, such as

the *Baburnama*, *Darabnama*, *Timurnama*, and *Akbarnama*.

An abstract for further research might explore questions such as: For whom was this manuscript commissioned? Do the stylistic attributes of the illustrations align with the respective painters' known works? What are the defining characteristics of each painter's style? Where else do we find their contributions? What motivated their collaboration on this manuscript? Finally, can we trace earlier models or visual inspirations that influenced these images?