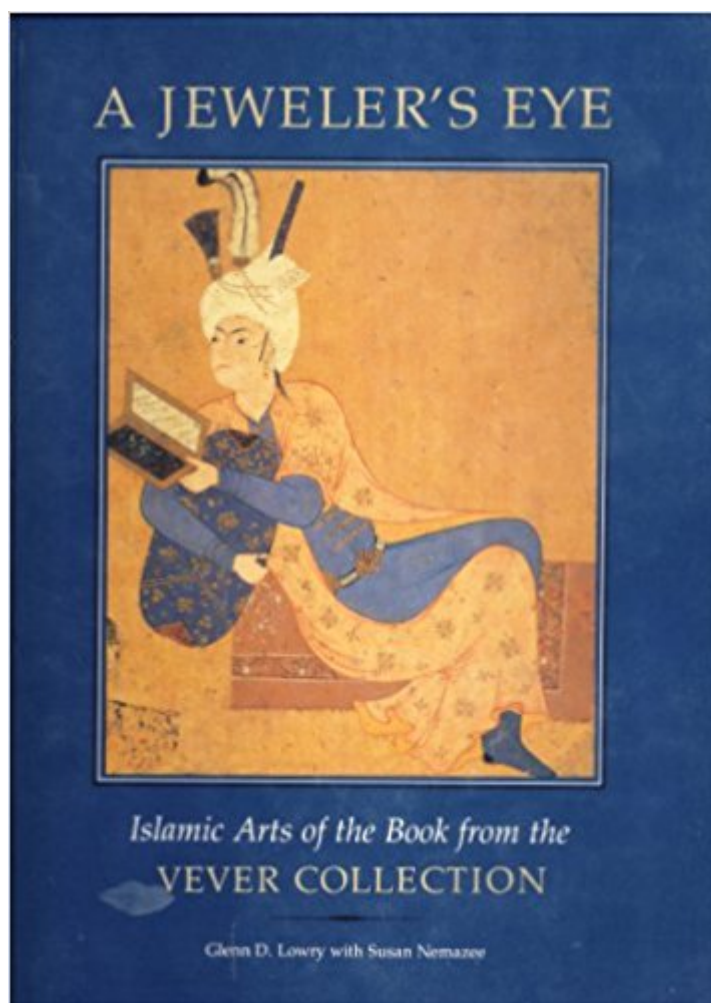


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A Jeweler's Eye: Islamic Arts Of The Book From The Vever Collection



Synopsis

The calligraphy, illustrations, and decorations that embellish the great books of the Islamic world comprise one of the finest artistic traditions of humankind. Elegance, expressive intimacy, and technical brilliance are basic characteristics of the works. For these reasons they appealed deeply to Henri Vever, well known to the artistic world of Paris in the early twentieth century as a jeweler, collector, and painter. Vever amassed some five hundred Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Indian manuscripts, paintings, albums, bookbindings, and examples of calligraphy as well as small groups of lithographs, printed books, textiles, nineteenth-century Burmese and Indonesian works, and Armenian paintings. This material now comprises the Vever Collection in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. Vever was so perceptive and thorough a collector and connoisseur that the unexpected, intact reappearance of the collection he amassed is not only a breakthrough in the study of Persian and Indian art but also greatly expands our understanding of French taste and culture.

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Customer Reviews

The calligraphy, illustrations, and decorations that embellish the great books of the Islamic world comprise one of the finest artistic traditions of humankind. Elegance, expressive intimacy, and technical brilliance are basic characteristics of the works. For these reasons they appealed deeply to Henri Vever, well known to the artistic world of Paris in the early twentieth century as a jeweler, collector, and painter. Vever amassed some five hundred Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Indian manuscripts, paintings, albums, bookbindings, and examples of calligraphy as well as small groups of lithographs, printed books, textiles, nineteenth-century Burmese and Indonesian works, and

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I am no expert on the Art of the Islamic Book. I am trying to read through the books on my shelf on this subject and review some that have no review or very brief reviews. There are two books on the Vever Collection of Islamic books. One is a full scale academic catalogue of some 450 pages. It is expensive. "An Annotated and Illustrated Checklist of the Vever Collection, A Jeweller's Eye Islamic Arts of the Book from the Vever Collection." Glenn D Lowry 448 pages. 1988. For most of us the Exhibition Catalogue will have to do. "A Jeweller Eye. Islamic Arts of the Book, from the Vever Collection. "Henri Vever 1854--1941. Jeanne Louise his future wife 1861--1939. Henri was from a dynasty of Jeweller's. He was third generation and the business ran for 4 generations. The family business was at the top of the French Jewellery trade. They won a number of major prizes, and held important posts in the French Jewellery organisations-- they helped plan several of France's displays at International Expositions. Henri also wrote the standard 3 volume text on 19th century French Jewellery. His firm got the signal honour of making "The Sword of Honour " for Marshal Foch -- Supreme Allied Commander at the end of WWI (Sword's of Honour were basically display swords and would be worn when Foch was in full military dress. If you see the British Royal Family on State Occasions they are in full military dress-- none however have Swords of honour) General Eisenhower was similar to Foch in being Supreme Allied Commander. Eye. Eye is used in several contexts but it mainly points to A Connoisseur's Eye. When Henri Vever was alive there was a strong interest in Connoisseurship (Nowdays many think it is overrated, but in it's best exponents it is a powerful skill. An able connoisseur can distinguish the best from the merely good or great. Some have major ground breaking skills-- ie they recognise the truly beautiful long before others start to. Henri Vever was around in the early days when Japanese Prints became all the rage. He built a very good collection of these. He donated some to the Louvre. Jack Hillier wrote the catalogue of his collection. The Japanese Prints were sold at Sotheby's in the 1990's I think (Hillier was self taught, from memory he got to know the Japanese Prints in the British Museum inside out. His approach to studying prints had major effects on the next generation of scholars. Hillier was another connoisseur in my view. Henri Vever the Connoisseur. The quickest way to see the wide range of his interests and connoisseurship is to do an search "Vever Collection " there were 6 full pages on -- yes some titles were repeated but never the less, Henri Vever had both the money to allow him to

collect and he was around at the right time -- when Japanese objects just started to become collected in Europe and when very high quality Islamic objects started to flood the market. With many high quality items on the market people like Vever could get a wide experience of what was available, what was rare and also spot interesting items. Prices paid are occasionally mentioned.

REVIEW Henri Vever and his wife visited Pre-Revolutionary Russia-- partly on Jewellery business. They travelled widely and visited some major Islamic sites. In 1908 the Revolution in Persia brought a number of High Quality objects onto the European market. Henri Vever recognised these exceptional objects and started to buy them. (this shows his connoisseurship. As a Jeweller he would be passionate about the beautiful) The exhibition The Arthur M Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution wisely purchased this excellent collection of Islamic Art. This exhibition catalogue is devoted to the book arts-- mainly books and a few book bindings. There is a good introduction to Henri Vever at the front and a very helpful chronology at the back that helps you keep the various members of his family clearly in your head. There are several excellent appendices-- mainly of interest to those interested in his art sales and also of his collecting. There is also an introduction to Persian and Indian Painting. The catalogue contains 76 items-- almost all are books with a few bookbindings at the end. Dates are western dates -- AD -- but if an Islamic date is mentioned it is mentioned first.. The items are arranged by category: Manuscripts, Albums, Individual Paintings and Drawings, and Bookbinding. Format 2 or more page spread. Text on one side, illustration on the other-- some items have more than one illustration. The text is very user friendly-- it gives a simple and clear explanation of what one is looking at. --See example below. I have various exhibitions like this one, if you don't know a lot about the field -- you tend to get overwhelmed by the information.

Example of catalogue item. Abbreviated. Catalogue number with Title. "Timir feasts at the Occasion of the Marriages of his Grandsons". Item 39. Author-- my chance of getting his name down correctly is low- author names are long and between that and the iPad autocorrector things become hard. In about 10 lines the author of the catalogue explains who wrote the work, what its content was-- pre-Islamic History and Islamic History up to the founding of the Safavid dynasty. The illustration of Timir (known in the west as Timurlane) He is seated, and 2 of his grandsons greet him. Tears come to his eyes as he remembers his favourite grandson who died prematurely --this is the moment shown. He and his 2 grandsons take up much of the picture, but in the lower part there are royal princes, nobles, foreign ambassadors etc. It is a very moving picture. It is a relatively simple page design with a simple framing element, with text that covers the length of the page both above and below the picture (It is a copy of an Islamic text and has an Islamic date first (date copied) then the western date. Media opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper. Dimensions

)Page set out.Many texts illustrated in this exhibition have both text and illustrationSome have fairly elaborate framing elementsItem 1 is a Koran It is from Egypt and is of the 14th centuryThere is a complex set of framing events.The central feature is the text of the Koran. (I use the spelling in the catalogue -- others would have Qur'an)It has a upper , middle portion and lower portionThe upper and lower portion have the text in large letters.The middle portion the letters are smaller.As with most Islamic calligraphy , the lines are beautifully balanced, and there is a rhythmic flow to the calligraphy.There are complex framing events about the various portions of text, then around those framing elements.Beyond these there is a beautiful arrangement of simple gold decoration.All in all a stunning page.One could mention many more excellent examples.Page set outSome text are Tales or History etcThey often have the text in 4--6 columns at the top and the illustration , but there are other patternsI will briefly mention a few books .

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