



Chinese painting of a Myna bird (*Gracula Religiosa*)

China

19th century

32cm high, 42cm wide (no frame) - 44cm high, 55cm wide (with frame)

gouache

Stock no.: A5328

This charming study portrays the Common Hill Myna, (*Gracula religiosa*), perching on a woody branch amongst the fruit and foliage of a grape vine. The bird has jet-black feathers with dashes of white on the wings, the beak is a brilliant sunset shade of orange and red and these magnificent colours are repeated on the wattles of the nape and side of the face. These vibrant and distinctive markings vary, depending on the species and subspecies. In the case of the common hill myna, they extend from the eye across the cheek to the nape, where they join.

Hill mynas may be found in South and Southeast Asia, favouring humid forests and jungles on elevated terrain. A member of the Starling family, they congregate in small groups and are predominantly arboreal. Unlike other mynas, they hop sideways along branches, as they seek out insects and fruit. Renown for their intelligence and ability to imitate speech, hill mynas have been popular domestic birds for centuries.

By the early nineteenth century, Chinese artists were extremely well versed in a historic tradition of painting birds and botanical subjects. Their artist prowess appeared in delicate lines, soft textures and a rhythmical fluidity. Imbued with these attributes, the present work is a fine example of Chinese painting from the period. The artist has overlaid blacks over washes of grey, marking individual feathers with exceptionally fine brushwork and achieving a tangible sense volume. The bird's open beak, as it

appears to chirp and sing in delight, imparts a wonderfully vital quality to the composition. The artist has further demonstrated their creativity by arranging the foliage around the bird, gently directing the view's gaze inward and achieving a fine sense of balance and harmony within the overall composition.

Two comparable works depicting Hill Mynas feature in 'Drawings of Birds from Malacca', c.1805-1818, in the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society, London. See

Hill Myna, or Burung Tiung (*Gracula religiosa*) ASC138341 and ASC138377.

A further work in the collection also bears comparison in the depiction of the bird and its perch, see *Gracula religiosa indica*, plate 12, a watercolour from the John Reeves Collection of Zoological Drawings from Canton, China, NHM1449629.

Literature

Craig Clunas, 1984. *Chinese Export Watercolours*. London, Victoria & Albert Museum.

Kai Wang. 1992. *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, Princeton University Press.

Rosalien van der Poel. 2016. *Made for Trade Made for China, Chinese Export Paintings in Dutch Collections*. Leiden University.