



Kashmiri Papier Mache

Papier mache is a delicate decorative art which shows the artistic zeal of a craftsman. This art was introduced in Kashmir in the 15th Century by a Kashmiri Prince who spent years in prison at Samarkand in Central Asia. The art born in the land of Persia was highly favoured by Mughal Emperors of 15th and 16th Century.

The traditional Kashmiri method of making Papier mache starts with waste paper which is soaked in water for several days until it disintegrates. The excess water is drained and the soaked waste paper, cloth, rice straw and copper sulphate are mixed to form a pulp. This mixture is placed in a mould and left to dry for two to three more days. On the drying of pulp, the shape is cut away from the mould in two halves and then glued again. The surface is coated with the layer of glue and gypsum, rubbed smooth with a stone or baked piece of clay and pasted with layers of tissue paper. A base color is painted on, and a design is added free hand. The object is then sandpapered or burnished and finally it is painted with several coats of lacquer.

The ingenious papier mache artisans of Kashmir transform a variety of utility articles into rare art pieces. The creation of a papier-mache object can be divided into two distinct categories, the sakhtsazi (making the object) and the naqashi (painting the surface). The colours for painting designs on the surface are obtained by grinding and soaking various vegetable mineral dyes in pigment or stone form. The final product is a beautiful art work that cannot be called a creation of one artist. It travels many pairs of talented hands before reaching a table or a mantel. Above all other talents, the aesthetic sensibility and hereditary skills are most essential in these craftsmen.

