

EXQUISITE INDIAN MINIATURE ART GRACES USED RAJASTHANI POSTAL STATIONERY

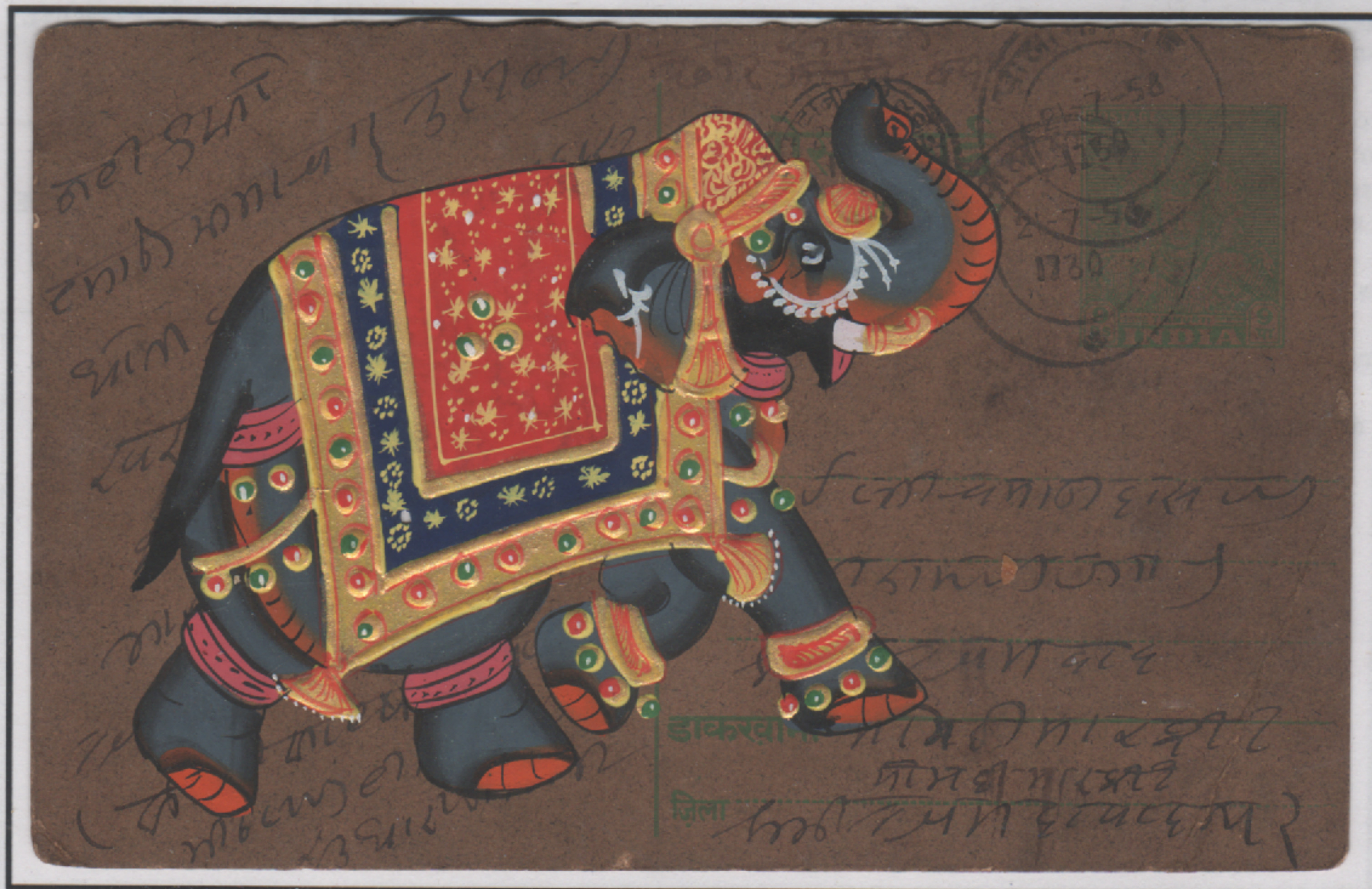
Alexandra Glashan: com.canada@hotmail.com

There is a second life for Indian postal stationery after going through the postal system: an art canvas. This exhibit includes a stamp of a revered miniature painting of a royal chained elephant and a real miniature painting on top of a used postal card. For centuries, every Indian royal court whether Muslim or Hindu, had a bevy of local court painters including some from foreign lands including Persia, China and Europe. Originally without paper to paint on (before 14C), artists produced small paintings of astonishing detail on palm leaves of about 7.6cm X 25.4cm (3inX10 in) suitable for an album. Like the Illuminated manuscripts of Europe, these tiny paintings told stories from the royal court, daily life and great literature. 15.25 cm X 22.8cm (6 X 9 inch) paper, wood, silk, even marble and ivory became canvases. Using a single tail hair from a squirrel for the brush, grinding semi-precious gems like malachite green or blue lapis lazuli for days into fine powders for ink while paying homage to diverse cultural traditions with vibrant jewel colours, the artist ensures each tiny canvas becomes a unique work of art.

On May 5 1973, India Post issued this photogravure self adhesive commemorative 2 rupees **Chained Elephant** stamp. Persian miniature art master Zain-Al-Abidin (16C), was a court painter of the Jahangir period of Mughal miniature art including delicate trees and birds. It depicts a ceremonial chained elephant with a red saddle-cloth being tamed by a Raj or prince holding a goad. The intricate image is surrounded by several decorative frames.



Artists in Rajasthan recycle used postal reply cards into art works of notable beauty. This elaborately clad elephant with 9 borders on his red-saddle cloth is part of a festive procession. Bikaner, Rajasthan, source of this postal card, was founded in 1486 as an oasis town on the Silk Road and it boasts a school of miniature art to this day.



This 1951 domestic use (9 paisa) India postal card of unbleached paper, cancelled on 27-7-1958, has a faded green **Elephanta Trimurti** indicia (imprinted stamp) built into the paper. The artist applied bright colours directly on top of the address defacing it and the writing on the front of the postal card. The result transforms the old card into a charming work of folk art.