

Krishna Narada and Arjuna

An illustration from the Harivamsa



Attributed to Purkhu (active circa 1780–1820)

Kangra, Punjab Hills, India, circa 1800–1820 (proposed dating)

A Harivamsa folio from Kangra

Price upon request

The riverbank, resplendent

Details from the painting



Crowns and turbans rise among folds of saffron, rose, and lavender. Along the green bank, clothing becomes a landscape of its own.

A world in conversation

Details from the painting



Profiles turn, hands answer, and the gathering is held together by small exchanges. Against the pale water, an answering hand and a listening face give the exchange its own intimate scale.



A world gathered in water

A Harivamsa folio from Kangra

Kapoor Galleries presents an expansive *Harivamsa* folio, *Krishna, Narada and Arjuna converse while their companions look on*, attributed to Purkhu of Kangra and provisionally dated circa 1800–1820. Its orchestration of a crowded river gathering, its delicate observation of human exchange, and its association with the Royal Library of Mandi make it a compelling subject for curatorial consideration.

Across the pale, luminous breadth of the Yamuna, the painter unfolds a world of shared pleasure. Bathing women gather in animated clusters; faces turn, hands rise, and conversation seems to pass from one group to another. Above them, garments and jeweled crowns lie in sumptuous heaps along the green bank, their saffron, rose, and lavender answering the subdued radiance of the water. At the right, Krishna, Arjuna, and the sage Narada form a quieter constellation. The abundance of the gathering resolves into the intimacy of attentive speech.

The painting can be considered alongside works in the Minneapolis Institute of Art's collection. *The Cosmic Form of Krishna* (2020.40.1) presents Krishna and Arjuna through a revelation of divine immensity; this folio offers another register of their relationship, expressed through companionship and dialogue. Alongside *Krishna and Radha Sheltering from the Rain* (2020.40.2), it invites reflection on the ways Pahari painters make landscape responsive to the emotional life of sacred narrative. The distinction between an intimate encounter and an expansive communal scene sustains a thoughtful visual comparison.

The folio also speaks directly to *Worlds Within*, our 2026 digital catalogue, which explores the capacity of an artwork to hold an entire realm of experience. Here, Purkhu's narrative world opens through the smallest exchanges: a listening face, an answering hand, the soft convergence of figures in water. Sacred presence acquires the warmth of shared life.

For further information or to arrange an examination, please contact Kapoor Galleries. The catalogue discussion brings together the published object record and its artistic context. **Price upon request.**

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The Harivamsa at Kangra

The river as a gathering place

The Harivamsa, a supplement to the Mahabharata, extends the narrative world of Krishna through accounts of his lineage and exploits. This folio belongs to a dispersed illustrated series. Sotheby's identifies its subject as a gathering in the Yamuna, with Krishna in conversation with Arjuna and the bard Narada while companions and consorts look on.¹ The painting gives that literary episode an unusually expansive social presence: the river holds a company of distinct, closely observed participants.

A dense assembly occupies the left half of the composition, while the three principal interlocutors stand apart at the lower right. The broad interval of water between them establishes a measured change of pace. Within the gathering, overlapping profiles and answering gestures create small centers of attention; across the open river, the eye reaches the more concentrated exchange with Narada, recognizable by his long-necked stringed instrument. Tiny fish and isolated swimmers punctuate the pale surface, carrying the gaze between the two groups.

The bank above is a passage of remarkable chromatic invention. Turbans, crowns, and folded garments form undulating accumulations of coral, ochre, lavender, and deep green. Their intricate abundance answers the softly rounded hills behind them. Set against this richly patterned upper register, the river becomes a field of breathing space, its quiet tonality giving particular clarity to jewelry, translucent drapery, and the finely articulated movements of hands. The effect is one of festivity held in suspension, as though the painter had gathered the murmuring life of the company into a single extended moment.

Purkhu and the art of narrative

The attribution places the folio within the world of Kangra painting cultivated during the reign of Maharaja Sansar Chand (1775–1823). The National Museum of Asian Art describes Purkhu as the head of a large workshop whose output included court portraiture and narrative cycles on oversize folios, among them the Harivamsa.²

The offered folio's scale and organization make that context especially pertinent. Its breadth accommodates a populous episode without sacrificing the legibility of individual exchanges. The landscape supplies continuity, while variations in spacing establish a hierarchy of attention. These are qualities that invite comparison with the ambitious storytelling associated with Purkhu and his workshop. The attribution remains a connoisseurial judgment; the painting's assured arrangement of a large company provides a substantial subject for that discussion.

The work extends a conversation about the many pictorial lives of Krishna. At the Minneapolis Institute of Art, *Krishna Kills the Crane Demon*, attributed to the Master of the Court of Mankot, treats a childhood exploit through concentrated dramatic action.³ The cosmic revelation and rain-shelter paintings offer further registers of divine encounter.^{4–5} Here, the emphasis falls on sociability, listening, and the pleasures of shared space. Considered together, these works reveal the variety with which painters of the Himalayan kingdoms gave visible form to sacred presence.

Catalogue record

An Illustration from the Harivamsa

Krishna, Narada and Arjuna converse while their companions look on

Attributed to Purkhu (active circa 1780–1820)

Kangra, Punjab Hills, India, circa 1800–1820 (proposed dating)

Opaque watercolor heightened with gold on paper

Image 13¾ × 17½ in. (35 × 44.5 cm)

Folio 15¼ × 19 in. (38.8 × 48.2 cm)

Provenance

Acquired from the Royal Library of Mandi in 1969, as recorded in Sotheby's 2008 catalogue.

Sotheby's, New York, *Indian & Southeast Asian Works of Art*, 19 September 2008, lot 206.

A connection to Worlds Within

The folio offers a natural thematic companion to the *Painted Worlds* section of *Worlds Within*, Kapoor Galleries' 2026 digital catalogue. That section explores gods, lovers, and the imaginative life of the painted page. In the *Harivamsa* scene, an expansive gathering is made legible through intimate gestures; the vastness of sacred narrative takes on the scale of human attention. The conversation at the right and the animated company at the left give the catalogue's movement between intimacy and spectacle a particularly eloquent visual expression. Within this wider inquiry, the painting offers a rich case study in the relationship between sacred storytelling and the visual language of courtly sociability.

Selected references

1. Sotheby's, *Indian & Southeast Asian Works of Art*, New York, 19 September 2008, sale N08499, lot 206. Primary published record for the title, subject, medium, dimensions, and 1969 provenance statement. [Sotheby's object record](#).
2. National Museum of Asian Art, *Jarasandha's army advances toward Krishna and Balarama*, S2018.1.17, attributed to Purkhu, Kangra, circa 1800–1815. Collection label on Purkhu's workshop and large narrative series. [Smithsonian collection record](#).
3. Minneapolis Institute of Art, *Krishna Kills the Crane Demon*, circa 1720, Master of the Court of Mankot (possibly Meju), accession 2020.5. [Mia collection record](#).
4. Minneapolis Institute of Art, *The Cosmic Form of Krishna*, circa 1750–75, accession 2020.40.1. [Mia collection record](#).
5. Minneapolis Institute of Art, *Krishna and Radha Sheltering from the Rain*, Nurpur workshop, circa 1760, accession 2020.40.2. [Mia collection record](#).

Online collection and auction records consulted 14 September 2026.