Views of Bombay

c.1860

F. Knight



F. Knight



Little is known of the British artist F. Knight, although evidence suggests an association with Bombay during the nineteenth century. The artist is recorded as having produced watercolour portraits in Bombay in connection with the medical research of Dr Bhau Daji (Founder of the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai’s oldest museum, established in 1857, formerly known as the Victoria and Albert Museum, Bombay), whose collection of illustrations was sent to the Royal College of Physicians in London in 1872.

The present paintings, depicting Malabar Hill and Chowpatty Beach, are examples of nineteenth-century topographical views of Bombay. Both locations offer distinctive perspectives on the city's coastal landscape and formed part of the visual record of colonial India. The paintings capture an important period in the city’s development.

The works are believed to have descended to Margaret Hewlett through her brother, Grosvenor Percy Hood, who served with the Central Indian Army and died in Agra in 1904, aged just 21. This family provenance provides a compellingly possible link to the British military presence in India.

View of Bombay (Chowpatty Beach)

c.1860



F. Knight

Watercolour on paper
52 x 92 cm
20 1/2 x 36 1/4 in



View of Bombay from Malabar Hill

c.1860



F. Knight

Watercolour on paper
52 x 92 cm
20 1/2 x 36 1/4 in

Bombay Then and Mumbai Now

This pair of paintings offers a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of Mumbai’s landscape. Both locations remain iconic landmarks of the modern city, yet the years have brought extraordinary change. Once characterised by open shorelines, expansive views, and a lush landscape, these familiar settings have been transformed by Mumbai's growth and development into a vast modern metropolis.

Despite this transformation, Chowpatty Beach and Malabar Hill retain their place in the city's visual identity, making these historic paintings particularly evocative records of a city that is both recognisable and remarkably different from the one we know today.





Present day view of Chowpatty Beach,

Bombay Then and Mumbai Now





Present day view from Malabar Hill

Art and Empire

“Visual arts, in other words, enabled the British to see themselves ruling India.”
— Apurba Chatterjee, An Empire of Images: Visual Culture and the British in India, 1688–1815

It would be wrong to view these works without addressing the context and period in which they were created. These paintings belonged to a wider tradition of colonial landscape and topographical art, through which British artists recorded India's cities, architecture, and natural scenery. Seemingly tranquil interpretations of a city also served as tools for strengthening the Empire.
During the nineteenth century, Bombay's distinctive coastline and topography attracted numerous British artists, who produced picturesque views of the city and its surroundings. Topographical paintings became closely intertwined with the establishment and legitimisation of British imperial power. Visual art helped construct an imperial self-image, enabling the British to see themselves as rulers of India. At the core of all these paintings, British presence was solidified, their authority was reinforced, and possession of the Indian landscape was represented.



Art and Empire

Other examples of British artists depicting views of Bombay during the British Raj -



View of Bombay Harbour (Plate 1 / part of a panorama series Twelve Views of the Island of Bombay and its Vicinity), 1791
James Wales



View of Bombay (From Malabar Hill), 1849
Lady Falkland (Amelia Cary Falkland)



Chowpatty Beach, 2021
Photographed by Akash Gurle



Chowpatty Beach, 2018
Photographed by Sanaya Havaldar



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