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FINE ART AUCTIONEERS



Beaker, Silver, Kutch (Bhuj), Gujarat, ca. 1880-1900.

The silver beaker, with its tapering cylindrical body that gently widens toward the rim, presents a graceful silhouette anchored by a plain, narrower base that ensures balance. Produced in Kutch during the nineteenth century, it exemplifies the region's celebrated silver craftsmanship, where repoussé and chasing were combined to create bold reliefs enriched with intricate surface details. Objects such as this were not merely functional vessels but embodied the flourishing artistic traditions of the period, blending aesthetic refinement with cultural expression under the colonial gaze.



Fig. 11.11

The central frieze features a vivid hunting scene, one of the most enduring and popular motifs in Kutch silverwork. Hunters, shown both on horseback and on foot, pursue animals such as lions and wild boars, their figures animated with dynamic energy that conveys the thrill of the chase. The animals are also preying on each other. The interplay of hunters, prey, and swirling vegetation transforms the surface into a lively, almost theatrical narrative. Workshop sketches from Bhuj suggest that such hunting scenes

were carefully composed in drawings before being transposed onto silver vessels, highlighting the degree of planning involved in their production. (For reference, an image has been attached.)[1]

Encircling this narrative is a dense tapestry of scrolling foliage and floral arabesques that fills the negative space with rich ornament. Delicately chased blossoms emerge from curling tendrils, forming what has been described as the "flowering scroll" design—sinuous vines that coil and wind in endless, undulating patterns. This ornamental vocabulary, one of the hallmarks of Bhuj workmanship,[2] softens the intensity of the hunt and weaves human and animal figures into a harmonious natural setting. (For reference, an image has been attached.)[3]



At the rim and base, a rhythmic border of stylised leaf motifs provides visual balance. These motifs, reminiscent of palmette leaves with a central almond-shaped vein, are arranged in a repeating scalloped sequence that echoes the organic themes of the decoration. Together, they frame the beaker's surface and anchor the composition.



The beaker thus demonstrates the silversmiths' ability to harmonise narrative, animal life, and vegetal ornament into a single unified design. Comparable examples of a couple of beakers catalogued by Vidya Dehejia attest to the consistency of motifs and figures within the Kutch repertoire. (For reference, an image has been attached.)[4]

[1]Stephen Markel, *Mughal and Early Modern Metalware from South Asia at LACMA: An Online Scholarly Catalogue* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2020).
[2]Stephen Markel, "Kutch Silver: A Study of Stylistic Sources," *Across the South of Asia: A Volume in Honor of Robert L. Brown* (2020), Academia.edu, accessed September 16, 2025, https://www.academia.edu/44937343/Kutch_Silver_A_Study_of_Stylistic_Sources.
[3]Stephen Markel, *Mughal and Early Modern Metalware from South Asia at LACMA: An Online Scholarly Catalogue*.
[4]Vidya Dehejia, *Delight in Design: Indian Silver for the Raj* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2008).

The exceptional craftsmanship of such works has been closely associated with the famed Bhuj master Oomersi Mawji (O.M. Bhuj) and his workshop, active between 1860 and 1890. Patronised by rulers such as the Gaekwads and Maharao Khengarji III of Kutch, their creations gained international recognition at regional and world exhibitions.[5] This beaker, in its intricate design and technical finesse, embodies the refinement and global reputation of nineteenth-century Kutch silver.

[5]Stephen Markel, "Kutch Silver: A Study of Stylistic Sources," *Across the South of Asia: A Volume in Honor of Robert L. Brown* (2020), Academia.edu, accessed September 15, 2025, https://www.academia.edu/44937343/Kutch_Silver_A_Study_of_Stylistic_Sources.