

decidedly awkward and unkempt (nos.109 and 119), remind us of Whistler's extended legacy of etiolation.

From his big figure decorations to the final works, Augustus John is meagrely shown – nine portraits and no drawings to represent the period of c.1915 to 1937 (as against twenty-five paintings and eleven drawings by Gwen from the mid-1910s to c.1925). These were the years of Augustus's flamboyant, international fame as an official portraitist, but from this aspect of his work there is one painting only, that of Lord Norman, Governor of the Bank of England (no.130; 1930–31), an unhappy choice. *Villiers David* (no.128; c.1932) is routine flash; *A Jamaican girl* (no.130; 1937), is distinctly bad (the double-portrait of Jamaican girls in the Walker, Liverpool, is an infinitely better painting). Best of the later works on view are the celebrated *Lady Ottoline Morrell* (no.124; 1919), its success achieved through sheer unflattering panache (but she was not, as the catalogue note says, 'a leading society hostess' – her whole point was her rebellion against so mundane a role), and the portrait of the painter Eve Kirk (no.126; Fig.75). With its suave rhythms and air of sensuous withdrawal, it is perhaps the one work by Augustus that, in spite of its outward modishness, shares something of the inner contemplation and objectivity found in Gwen's later single figures (Fig.76).

The uneven choice of works by Augustus seems almost tailor-made to do him down. Today's knee-jerk reaction in favour of Gwen, reflected in several reviews of this exhibition, might not have been quite so glib if her brother's paintings had been more widely explored and sifted (are his Welsh and French landscapes so bad? Was Tate's own T.E. Lawrence deemed inferior to the head of the same sitter, lent from Yale University Art Gallery, no.25?). In the catalogue, two good texts are devoted to Gwen alone, none to Augustus; and David Fraser Jenkins's fertile introduction on both only just conceals a partiality towards the former. Perhaps, in the end, an idea that began with good intentions fizzled out when faced with the reality of curatorial responsibility.

¹ After its London showing, the exhibition will be at the **National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff**, from 12th February to 15th May. Catalogue: *Gwen John and Augustus John*. Edited by David Fraser Jenkins and Chris Stephens, with contributions by Tim Batchelor, Mary Burstin, Krzysztof Cieszkowski, Cecily Langdale and Lisa Tickner. 224 pp. incl. 163 col. pls. + 35 b. & w. ills. (Tate Publishing, London, 2004), £29.99. ISBN 1-85437-543-1. The extensive checklist of exhibitions and bibliography omits the 1978 centenary exhibition of 128 works by Augustus John held at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (as well as the same Museum's 1976 showing of Peter Harris's bequest of twenty-five works by John).

² Catalogues: *Gwen John*. 48 pp. incl. 40 col. pls. (Browse & Darby, London, 2004), £10. No ISBN. *Augustus John. Master Works from Private Collections 1900–1920 with a special loan from The National Portrait Gallery, London*. 64 pp. incl. 6 col. pls. + 27 b. & w. ills. (Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert, London, 2004), £15. ISBN 0-9547104-2-8.

The meeting of Asia and Europe London

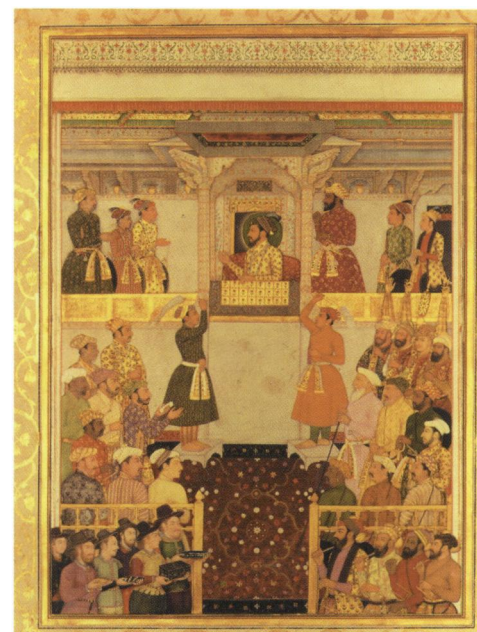
by OLIVER IMPEY

WHEN FIRST MOOTED, the exhilarating exhibition *Encounters: the meeting of Asia and Europe 1500–1800*, currently at the **Victoria and Albert Museum, London** (to 5th December), was entitled 'Exotic Encounters'. Perhaps some notion of political incorrectness obliged the V. & A. to drop the word 'exotic'. This is a pity, and possibly a mistake; half the point of the exhibits marshalled here is to demonstrate that east and west were exotic to each other. This was very much a two-way exchange; more so, because just as Europe here means those several European countries that participated in the east–west trade at one time or another, so does Asia here comprise the Indian subcontinent and beyond within this three hundred years.

The other point is, of course, the objects themselves, with their strange mixtures of materials and ideas, of history and of the misunderstandings that were more than commonplace, even if the results were in so many cases spectacular. The trade was ancient, carried partly overland by the so-called 'Silk Road', partly through ships sailing up the Red Sea, but the amounts traded were relatively small until a direct shipping route could be found. Except for silk – a great but widespread luxury – eastern things in Europe were either edible or a rarity, such as porcelain, which was made of an unknown material. It was the opening of the direct shipment of goods between east and west that made this trade into the major economic and educative feature that it was to become from the sixteenth



77. Nautilus cup. c.1600. Shell from western Pacific; silver and silver-gilt by Nikolaus Schmidt, Nuremberg, 52 cm. high. (Royal collection; exh. Victoria and Albert Museum, London).



78. *Europeans bringing gifts to Shah Jahan*. c.1650. Opaque watercolour on paper, from the *Padshanama* manuscript, Mughal India. 33.8 by 25.7 cm. (Royal collection; exh. Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

century onwards. Europe, in the persons of Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus, reached India and America respectively within a few years of each other at the end of the fifteenth century, in a sense more than doubling the size of the world known to Europe. Things began to reach Europe that were unknown either from the Bible or from Aristotle; and European things and ideas reached Asia.

The results were more far reaching than might have been expected; one thing of great significance was the import of new animals and plants, alive or dead, for this made Europe look at its own fauna and flora with eyes focused on more than just food or the chase. These animals and plants were different, but why? This aspect of east–west interchange is not examined in the exhibition – which is wide enough in scope already – although some of the imports are shown. One glorious case near the entrance contains a group of natural products embellished as rarities in Europe: a sixteenth-century ivory fan (cat. no.3.1), a coconut cup (no.3.2), a rhinoceros horn cup (no.3.6), a Nautilus shell cup (no.3.7; Fig.77) and a rock-crystal spoon (no.3.5), all mounted in Europe with gold or silver or jewels. A seat made of four elephant bones (no.3.13), a gaunt and strange object, is constructed from some of the bones of the Indian elephant presented in 1552 to the Emperor Maximilian II and is engraved with his arms. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly there was no coco-de-mer shell, but the catalogue illustrates a celebrated one from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Rarities did not necessarily have to be richly embellished, but the fact that so many were greatly adds to our enjoyment of them today, as indeed, it did at the time. On the



79. Bureau-cabinet, lacquered wood, Canton, c.1730. 237.7 by 112 by 66.5 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

absorption by the west of Asian things and ideas and of artefacts made in Asia for the west, usually in shapes in demand in the west, then this is hardly surprising, for this is an exhibition in London. Some of these things will be familiar; the Chinese export porcelain; the 'Medici porcelain' attempts at hard-paste, and the Meissen successes; Japanese export lacquer, including the famous Van Diemen box (no.18.6), although this is not so much 'export' as a personal gift; lacquered and hardwood and ivory furniture made in China for European demand (Fig.79); and superb painted and printed Indian calicoes. Less familiar may be things in European taste, or in imitation of European paintings or objects, or even those objects that incorporate European things or persons made for Asians in Asia (Fig.80). Particularly interesting are the Japanese six-fold screen with a world map and illustrations of different peoples taken from the maps of Willem Blaeu of 1606–07 (no.24.21), and the beautiful Mughal miniature painting of Shah Jahan holding a flintlock gun (no.22.14).

The catalogue is as delightful as the exhibition.¹ It is more a book than a catalogue, and it is therefore difficult to see among the large number of excellent illustrations just what is in the exhibition and what is not. The exhibits are listed at the back, but without numbers referring either to the illustrations in the book or to the exhibition itself. That said, as a book it is both pleasing and useful. Some twenty-seven essays by leading specialists are complemented by shorter pieces, giving a good background to the vast subject covered by the exhibition.

¹ Catalogue: *Encounters: the meeting of Asia and Europe 1500–1800*. Edited by Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer. 395 pp. incl. 350 col. pls. + 50 b. & w. ills. (V. & A. Publications, London, 2004), £45 (HB). ISBN 1-85177-432-7; £24.95 (PB). ISBN 1-85177-431-9.

other hand, when such things as porcelain or lacquer went out of fashion, or rather, the shapes went out of fashion, then Chinese porcelain could be adapted by the addition of ormolu or silver mounts so that cups or jars could become candlesticks or chandeliers, and Japanese lacquer cabinets could be dismantled so that their panels could be inlaid into new furniture that conformed to the latest fashion.

The exhibition is divided into two rooms, the first and smaller room is definitely the more exotic, with brightly lit exhibits in a darkened ambience; the first thing one sees is a Japanese *namban* screen (no.16.1). A Portuguese ship docks in a Japanese port at the left, her goods are landed and her crew move towards the right bearing gifts and trade-goods; this was probably the left-hand of a pair, with a right-hand screen showing the Japanese greeting the visitors. This object was not made for Europeans, but was an exotic item for a Japanese audience. The point is made to the Japanese consumer for, unlike all other Japanese screens, *namban* screens 'read' from left to right, in the foreign manner.

Exhibits comprise two sections: 'Discoveries' and 'Encounters'. The latter is divided into Diplomatic, Religious and Personal Encounters with relevant exhibits from Europe and from all over Asia. Thus we see Sinhalese ivory cabinets, Japanese *namban* and Gujarat pearl-shell as well as such particular gifts as that of the suit of Japanese armour pre-

sented in 1613 by the Shōgun Hidetada to King James I (no.7.7), and the ebony, ivory and rock-crystal casket presented by the Dutch East India Company to the Shōgun Ieyasu and still preserved at the Tokugawa mausolea at Nikko (no.7.10). Most of the religious exhibits relate to Christianity, rather than to Buddhism or Islam, as the spread of religion tended to be a one-way movement. Interestingly, both the Mughal emperor Akbar and the Japanese dictator Oda Nobunaga encouraged the spread of the Christian faith. Akbar patronised European artists, whereupon some Mughal court artists rapidly learned the conventions of late Renaissance art; Nobunaga's interest was not followed by his successors, with disastrous results.

In the 'Personal Encounters' section things are equally two-way; outstanding are the group of Indian miniatures, some showing European 'nabobs' (no.6.1; Fig.78), and the two superb paintings by Johann Zoffany: *Colonel Mordaunt's cock-fight* (no.12.2) and the charming family group of General William Palmer and his beloved Muslim wife, Fyze (no.12.8).

The second room is larger, more open and more brightly lit. The exhibits cover so much ground as to be almost daunting, and they would be if they were not so well chosen. This room is called 'Exchanges', and shows wonderful instances of east influencing west and vice-versa; if the emphasis is on the



80. Outer kimono (*uchikake*), silk woven in Lyon. c.1760. Made up in Japan, late eighteenth–early nineteenth century. 147 by 130 cm. (Private collection, Kyoto; exh. Victoria and Albert Museum).