

Art and Empire

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The first works of art concerning the British Empire were probably produced by John White, draughtsman on Raleigh's 1585 expedition to America.¹ The study of the art of the British Empire, however, did not begin to develop until the mid-nineteenth century. Although travellers to Africa and the Americas occasionally described the arts or crafts produced by indigenous peoples, and although amateur collectors filled their cabinets with all sorts of 'curiosities' from distant lands during the eighteenth century, these can in no way be considered systematic studies.

Since the mid-nineteenth century scholars from history, art history, anthropology, and cultural studies have produced hundreds of books, articles, and exhibition catalogues about the art of the British Empire, looking not only at British art, but at the art of those lands that were a part of the British Empire, Commonwealth, or sphere of colonial influence. Despite this prodigious scholarly output, synthetic, analytical literature on the art of Empire pales in comparison with that on its other aspects. Moreover, despite the quantity of material that has been produced, and the very high quality of some of it, the history of the art of the British Empire remains to be written.

The historiography of art and the British Empire can be usefully divided into four phases, each capturing a certain need, or function, of the Empire at the time. During the nineteenth century analyses of the art of Empire were concerned with trade and commerce; that is, with fueling Britain's Imperial economy. From the turn of the century until about 1947 there was a nationalist historiography, searching for authenticity and aimed at developing independent states; an interest in so-called 'primitivism', which served to denigrate black African peoples; and, for the first time, an interest in British artists in India (or anywhere in the Empire), as a means of enhancing Britain's Imperial image. After 1947 and through the late-1970s it is possible to trace the impact of decolonization, as scholars began to re-evaluate, often

¹ P. H. Hulton and David B. Quinn, *The American Drawings of John White, 1577-1590*, 2 vols. (London, 1964).

nostalgically, Britain's Imperial legacy. Finally, since 1980 the focus has shifted to reflect the colonized, by looking at the ways British artists represented the colonial 'Other'. In short, the historiography of art and the British Empire has not only paralleled and reflected changes in the Empire, but can be expressed in terms of the Empire's changing needs and functions.

The earliest studies of the art of the British Empire focused on the decorative arts and the twin issues of design and ornamentation that concerned mid-nineteenth-century British art critics such as Owen Jones and John Ruskin. When J. Forbes Royle first brought to the attention of Henry Cole and the other organizers of the Great Exhibition of 1851 the importance of Indian decorative arts in his book *On the Culture and Commerce of Cotton in India* (London, 1851), he characterized India 'as the cradle of one . . . of the nations who earliest practised the arts and cultivated the sciences which characterize civilization'. He was not enamoured of Indian sculpture, however, which he considered 'rude', favouring instead raw materials and manufactured articles, which would benefit British trade.² J. Forbes Watson's *The Textile Manufactures and the Costumes of the People of India* (London, 1866), and T. N. Mukharji's *Art Manufactures of India* (Calcutta, 1888), compiled for the Glasgow International Exhibition of 1888, were similarly oriented towards selling British-made goods in India, and introducing Indian products and designs to British manufactures.

Also driving these works was a widespread fear that industrialization had led to a loss of vitality in design, a decline in trade craftsmanship, stylistic confusion, and the misuse of ornamentation. Owen Jones, in *The Grammar of Ornament* (London, 1856), found Indian and Islamic art critically important in his formulation of 'correct' principles of design, and George C. M. Birdwood, in his introduction to the *Handbook to the Indian Court for the Paris International Exhibition of 1878*, pilloried the effects of industrialization and the Indian schools of art for creating 'mongrel articles'.³ They too were at least implicitly interested in increasing the sale of domestically manufactured goods by using design principles adopted from regions such as India to advance British trade interests with the Empire as well as with more economically developed states. It is worth noting that, with only one obvious exception, this economic phase applied exclusively to India.⁴

² J. Forbes Royle, *On the Culture and Commerce of Cotton in India* (London, 1851), p. 586.

³ George C. M. Birdwood, *Handbook to the Indian Court for the Paris International Exhibition of 1878* (London, 1878), p. 49, and *The Industrial Arts of India* (London, 1880). See also Henry Cole, *Catalogue of the Objects of Indian Art Exhibited in the South Kensington Museum* (London, 1874).

⁴ The exception, and in all likelihood the first chronological entry in the historiography of the art of the British Empire, is William Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, 2 vols. (New York, 1934; rept. Boston, 1918; New York, 1964).

Art critics did not begin to admire Indian painting and drawing until the beginning of the twentieth century. E. B. Havell's *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1908) and *The Ideals of Indian Art* (London, 1911) attempted to bring about the aesthetic appreciation of Indian art, in contrast to earlier design critics who had focused on stylistic qualities. It was Havell who first suggested that Indian art needed to be judged 'on the basis of standards of art criticism evolved within the Indian tradition instead of employing European standards which were extraneous to that tradition'.⁵

Havell's work also marked the beginning of a nationalist period in the historiography of the art of Empire. With respect to India, this nationalism was especially apparent in the work of Ananda Coomaraswamy, Keeper of Indian and Muhammadan Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, who in a succession of books wrote about a distinctive Hindu view of life that informed Indian art. Indian art, he wrote, 'is the statement of a racial experience'.⁶ Percy Brown, Principal of the Government School of Art, acknowledged his intellectual debt of Havell and Coomaraswamy, but in *Indian Painting under the Mughals* (Oxford, 1924) he started with Persian and Indian elements, in contrast to Coomaraswamy, who stressed that Rajput painting belonged 'to a pure Indian tradition' and was 'totally unlike Persian art of any period'.⁷ Throughout his book Brown emphasized the hybridity of Indian art, which drew on both Hindu (Rajput) and Muslim (Mughal) traditions and was, beginning in the sixteenth century, influenced by European art as well. Nevertheless, as with Coomaraswamy, he portrayed Indian art as sophisticated and elaborate, and asserted that rather than criticizing it for its underdeveloped techniques with perspective, it was better to realize 'that the Oriental had his own system of perspective'.⁸ In short, Indian art needed to be judged on its own terms, in its own cultural context, and not always in relation to Western notions of art.

A similar sort of national reclamation project was under way in North America and Australia at approximately the same time, which corresponded with Britain's interest in fostering independent states. The search for something 'Canadian' in painting had actually begun in the late nineteenth century,⁹ but the great surge of academic interest came in the 1930s, when the Ryerson Press in Toronto began to publish books devoted to Canadian art. Albert H. Robson, in *Canadian Landscape*

⁵ Quoted in Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions of Indian Art* (Oxford, 1977), p. 271.

⁶ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Introduction to Indian Art* (Madras, 1923), p. v. See also his *Rajput Painting* (London, 1916) and *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (London, 1927).

⁷ Coomaraswamy, *Introduction to Indian Art*, pp. 121–22.

⁸ Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals* (Oxford, 1924), p. 135.

⁹ See W. A. Sherwood, 'A National Spirit in Art', *Canadian Magazine* (1894).

Painters (Toronto, 1932), wrote unabashedly of the need for 'more artists who will interpret the Canadian landscape through their own eyes'.¹⁰ He and his contemporaries gave only passing mention to the British colonial period, implying that there was little if no 'Canadian' art before there was an independent Canada, and dismissing the contributions of Native Americans as merely decorative.¹¹

The study of American and Australian art, at least that produced by the colonists, was also focused on locating an authentic tradition independent from the British. There was a surge of interest in colonial American art in the 1920s and 1930s, most notably Frank Bayley's *Five Colonial Artists of New England* (Boston, 1929) and Louisa Dresser's *Seventeenth Century Painting in New England* (Worcester, Mass., 1935). The first comprehensive survey of Australian art was William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art*, 2 vols. (Sydney, 1934), a book which served as the basis for most subsequent studies, even though at the time, according to Bernard Smith, the leading scholar of Australian art, it 'fell on thin soil and initially aroused little interest'. Smith regarded his own book, *Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art Since 1788* (Sydney, 1945; rev. edn., Melbourne, 1979) as a 'contribution to the war effort', thus acknowledging its nationalistic agenda. *Place, Taste and Tradition* is much more than that, however. It was the first study of the art of the British Empire to highlight the relationship between the course of art in the colonies and the concurrent European tendencies from which that art drew so substantially. Smith also emphasized aesthetics far less than his predecessors, drawing links between art, economic developments, and social change.

Meanwhile, critics were evaluating the art of Africans, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders in a dramatically different manner. This mode of analysis, which focused on so-called 'primitivism', reflected the British view of non-whites as lacking in national identity and racially inferior. Practised largely by anthropologists, and drawing its inspiration from evolutionary thought, this approach saw art as a reflection of progress in the material culture of mankind as a whole. Some of the earliest work was undertaken by A. C. Hattan, especially his *Decorative Art of British New Guinea* (Dublin, 1894), and by A. H. Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, in a series of papers published together as *Evolution of Culture and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1906). Both espoused what can be called the 'degeneration theory', which attempted to demonstrate that copying natural forms without a full comprehension of them led to purely geometric forms. This theory continued the centuries-old

European tradition that viewed painting as the highest art form and the latest to evolve, and led to the designation of African art as 'primitive'.

The study of so-called 'primitive art' underwent a revolution, beginning with the work of Franz Boas, whose *Primitive Art* (Oslo, 1927; Cambridge, Mass., 1928) demolished the degeneration theory by arguing that all 'races' have the same mental processes, and that 'Even the poorest tribes have produced work that gives to them aesthetic pleasure'.¹² Boas dismissed the pretences to objectivity claimed by his anthropological predecessors, as well as their attempts to seek the origin of all decorative art in realism and technical details. He defined art as the attainment of a certain standard of excellence, and suggested that the ornamentation which appeared formal to European observers was to Native American Indians full of complex symbolic meaning.

At the same time, and due largely to the influence of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India 1899–1905, Anglo-Indian scholars began to show interest in British artists in India, as opposed to indigenous Indian art, largely as a means of boosting Britain's Imperial image. After Queen Victoria became Empress of India in 1878, the British increasingly saw themselves as the successors to the Mughals, although it should be pointed out that this process began as early as the late eighteenth century, as in Sir Joshua Reynolds's portrait of Captain John Foote. Curzon's passion for India's past, and for bolstering Britain's presence, encouraged members of the Anglo-Indian community to begin to collect works by British artists who had visited India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Guided by Evan Cotton and William Foster, two prominent art critics, wealthy Bengalis modelled themselves on the British aristocracy, furnishing their houses in European style and building up large collections of paintings by artists such as the Daniells.¹³ Cotton, who was honorary editor of *Bengal Past and Present*, wrote two path-breaking articles for that journal in which he began to document the work of British artists in India.¹⁴ Foster, who spent most of his career in the India Office, also published regularly in *Bengal Past and Present*, and contributed a lengthy article to *The Walpole Society* on 'British Artists in India, 1760–1820', in essence a biographical dictionary listing more than sixty artists who worked in India at the turn of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ This early work dating from the 1920s and 1930s, however, was little more than compiling and cataloguing, and it was not until after

¹² Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York, 1955 edn.), p. 9.

¹³ See Mildred Archer's Foreword to Maurice Shellim, *Oil Paintings of India and the East by Thomas Daniell R. A. 1749–1840, and William Daniell R. A., 1769–1837* (London, 1979), p. 9.

¹⁴ Evan Cotton, 'The Daniells in India', *Bengal Past and Present*, XXV (1923), pp. 1–70; 'British Artists in India', *ibid.*, XLII (1931), pp. 136–42.

¹⁵ William Foster, 'British Artists in India, 1760–1820', *The Walpole Society*, XIX (1930–31), pp. 1–88. See also his *Descriptive Catalogue of Paintings, Statues, etc. in the India Office* (London, 1902).

¹⁰ Albert H. Robson, *Canadian Landscape Painters* (Toronto, 1932), p. 13.

¹¹ M. O. Hammond, *Painting and Sculpture in Canada* (Toronto, 1930); William Colgate, *Canadian Art: Its Origin and Development* (Toronto, 1943); Donald W. Buchanan, ed., *Canadian Painters: From Paul Kane to the Group of Seven* (London, 1945); Graham McInnes, *A Short History of Canadian Art* (Toronto, 1939).

the British withdrawal from India in 1947 that scholars began to evaluate British painting in India in a serious manner.

The beginnings of decolonization unleashed a flurry of writings about the art of the British Empire, especially Indian art. Much of this work came from the pen of Mildred Archer, Curator of Prints and Drawings at the India Office Library from 1954 to 1979, and her husband W. G. Archer, a member of the Indian Civil Service from 1931 to 1948 and later Keeper of the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹⁶ Together they wrote *Indian Painting for the British, 1770–1880* (London, 1955), a landmark (if Whiggish) view of the westernization and modernization of India and Indian art. In an attempt to re-evaluate Britain's presence in India, the Archers traced the process by which Indian artists adopted British techniques and attempted to flatter British taste. In an analysis that at times appears to justify Britain's domination of India, the Archers recounted how the British made up for an absence of Indian patronage, thus providing some relief from 'conditions of economic plight', and how British-inspired painting played a role in fostering democracy by 'habituating the Indian public to democratic themes'. On the other hand, perhaps reflecting ambiguous feelings about the legacy of Britain's Imperial presence, the Archers wrote that although 'Indian painters had inherited highly cultured traditions', Indian painting for the British was disappointing. The British, unlike the Mughals, were unable to spark any sort of creativity in Indian art. In short, the Imperial presence was a failure. Overall, the Archers provided comprehensive and at times sophisticated analyses that looked at stylistic changes, took into account historical events such as the replacement of the East India Company with the Raj after 1858, and were cognizant of 'Victorian assumption[s] of ethical superiority'.¹⁷

Mildred Archer has been, without a doubt, the leading scholar in the field of Indian art for the British. In addition to her catalogues of the collections in the India Office Library, she has also written and co-authored a number of monographs.¹⁸

¹⁶ W. G. Archer's works include *Kangra Painting* (London, 1952), *Indian Paintings from Rajasthan* (London, 1957), *Indian Painting* (London, 1959), *Paintings of the Sikhs* (London, 1966), and *Kalighat Paintings* (London, 1971).

¹⁷ Mildred Archer and W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting for the British, 1770–1880* (London, 1955), pp. 15, 100, 108, 113.

¹⁸ Mildred Archer's catalogues include *Natural History Drawings in the India Office Library* (London, 1962), *British Drawings in the India Office Library*, 2 vols. (London, 1969), *Company Drawings in the India Office Library* (London, 1972), and *The India Office Collection of Paintings and Sculpture* (London, 1986). Her more important articles and monographs include 'The East India Company and British Art', *Apollo*, LXXXII (1965), pp. 401–09; *India and British Portraiture, 1770–1825* (London, 1979), and *Early Views of India: The Picturesque Journeys of Thomas and William Daniell, 1786–1794* (London, 1980). See also Mildred Archer and T. Falk, *Thomas and William Prinsep in India* (London, 1982), and Mildred Archer and Ronald Lightbown, *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists, 1760–1960* (London, 1982).

But for all the importance of her contributions, her work, like most recent studies of British art of India, has tended towards narrativity and has been overly concerned with issues of art production at the expense of thematic and critical analysis.¹⁹ She has resisted making links between natural history drawings and the Enlightenment project of systematizing knowledge, and in her focus on the 'cult of the picturesque' she missed an opportunity to point out how the drawings of William Simpson, for instance, reveal much more than crude Orientalism of the sort outlined by Edward W. Said.²⁰ Nevertheless, Archer's work inspired a generation of scholars to begin to look closely at individual British artists in India. It is now possible to write of two distinct strands in the historiography of the art of India: that of indigenous Indian art, and that of British artists in India, although the latter has been hampered by its authors' occasionally nostalgic enthusiasm for British India.

This trend towards re-evaluation is also evident in the study of the other areas that were once a part of the British Empire. The great surge of interest in African art, at least in the English-speaking world, took place beginning in the late 1950s, just after the onset of decolonization, but since this subject has been dealt with elsewhere it will not be duplicated here.²¹ In Canada, a notable shift occurred in the early 1960s when R. H. Hubbard began to emphasize not only Canada's colonial past, but its hybrid, bi-cultural colonial experience as the product of both French and British colonization.²² Hubbard also analysed the stylistic contributions of the British to Canadian art, just as the Archers were doing with Indian art. This trend received its most sophisticated and historically oriented treatment in Donald Blake Webster's *Georgian Canada: Conflict and Culture, 1745–1820* (Toronto, 1984). The intricacies of how Anglo-American colonial relations were manifested in art received attention in Waldron P. Belknap's *American Colonial Painting: Materials for a History* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), Jules Prown's *John*

¹⁹ See Shellim, *Oil Paintings of India and the East*; Jagmohan Mahajan, *Picturesque India: Sketches and Travels of Thomas and William Daniell* (New Delhi, 1983) and *The Raj Landscape: British Views of Indian Cities* (South Godstone, Surrey, 1988); Pheroza Godrej and Pauline Rohatgi, *Scenic Splendours: India through the Printed Image* (London, 1989); Vidya Dehijia, *Impossible Picturesqueness: Edward Lear's Indian Watercolours, 1873–1875* (New York, 1989). On the Middle East see Peter A. Clayton, *The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt: Artists and Travellers in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1982), and Briony Llewellyn, *The Orient Observed: Images of the Middle East from the Searight Collection* (London, 1989).

²⁰ Archer, *Natural History Drawings*, p. 2; *Visions of India: The Sketchbooks of William Simpson, 1859–1862* (Oxford, 1986).

²¹ *African Art Studies: The State of the Discipline* [Symposium papers, National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, Sept. 1987] (Washington, 1990).

²² R. H. Hubbard, *An Anthology of Canadian Art* (Toronto, 1960), *The Development of Canadian Art* (Ottawa, 1963), and, with J. R. Ostiguy, *Three Hundred Years of Canadian Art* (Ottawa, 1967). See also J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (1966; Toronto, 1977); Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (1973; Toronto, 1988); and Michael Bell, *Painters in a New Land* (Toronto, 1973).

Singleton Copley, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), and in two collections of essays edited by Ian Quimby, *American Painting to 1776: A Reappraisal* (Charlottesville, Va., 1971) and *Arts of the Anglo-American Community in the Seventeenth Century* (Charlottesville, Va., 1975), which focused on decorative arts.

It was during this period of decolonization that Bernard Smith wrote *European Vision and the South Pacific* (Oxford, 1960; 2nd edn., New Haven, 1985), one of the most important books written on the art of the British Empire. It anticipated many issues that would not be raised fully for another twenty-five years. Smith charted the difficulties experienced by artists in adapting their European training and preconceptions to a new environment, and emphasized that artists look at other humans and the landscape around them through conditioned eyes. He also made the critical distinction between the sketches of the draughtsmen who accompanied Raleigh, Cook, and the other explorers, and the engravings that were later mass-produced, which projected a different sort of image. Part of the importance of *European Vision and the South Pacific* was that it was an attempt at truly interdisciplinary work, in addition to taking the perspective that all perception is culture-bound, although Smith did not go so far as to suggest, as he claimed post-modernists have, that 'Europeans (or for that matter the members of any other ethnic or cultural grouping) are incapable as individuals of seeing what is actually before them'.²³

Smith's approach prompted a considerable amount of research into European perceptions of non-European peoples and parts of the globe. There are now studies of images of blacks, women, Native American Indians, and the Irish.²⁴ One example is Hugh Honour's *The European Vision of America* (Cleveland, 1975), written in connection with the American bicentennial, in which Honour documented how the New World was 'revealed: not suddenly with the news of Christopher Columbus's landfall, but very gradually over the course of more than half a century'. In this respect, one can talk about America being 'invented' more than discovered. The primary difference between Smith's and Honour's work is that in the latter there is analysis of images and background and context, but no broader exploration of the relationship between art and Empire. Nevertheless,

²³ Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 2nd edn. (New Haven, 1985), p. vii. The culmination of Smith's research on Captain Cook was a four-volume set he co-edited with Rudiger Joppien, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages* (New Haven, 1985-88). For a recent critique of Smith see William Eisler, *The Furthest Shore: Images of Terra Australis from the Middle Ages to Captain Cook* (Cambridge, 1995).

²⁴ L. Perry Curtis, Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, 1971); Ellwood Parry, *The Image of the Indian and the Black Man in American Art, 1590-1900* (New York, 1974); Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (Paris, 1985); Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the American Revolution to World War I* (3 vols. to date) IV (Cambridge, Mass., 1989); Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, 1992); Mark Gidley, ed., *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous Peoples* (Exeter, 1992).

what unites the writings in this period is that they are from a British perspective (even when written by non-Britons), and attempt, in cautious ways, to reflect upon the colonial enterprise after its collapse.

The historiography of the art of the British Empire has turned in a radically different direction since the late 1970s. No longer solely a reflection of the British perspective, it has shifted to consider the colonized by focusing on representations of the 'Other'. While it might seem to make sense to date the beginnings of this movement from Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (New York, 1978) and Linda Nochlin's article in *Art in America* on 'The Imaginary Orient' which effectively applied Said's theories to the world of art, neither of these works deal with art and the British Empire.²⁵ As noted above, studies of European representations of non-Europeans began with Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*. But Said gave the study of the 'Other' a theoretical basis that had an immense impact on subsequent studies, as has Nochlin's argument that Orientalist paintings have to be analysed in terms of imperial ideology, and that art history has to break out of its celebratory mode and abandon its concern for aesthetics.

In some respects, what is most remarkable about Said and Nochlin is how little impact they have had on art historian's analyses of the art of the British Empire.²⁶ In *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500-1920* (Cambridge, 1988), John Sweetman called Said's 'an interesting if debatable thesis which in the visual arts . . . is especially worth pondering', but on the whole Sweetman ignored Said. Sweetman also disregarded Nochlin's plea for a new form of art history, writing rather drily about the effects of the motifs of Islamic art.²⁷ Nor is he an exception. Most art historians concerned with British depictions of 'the East' have remained within the older Orientalist tradition that Said so roundly criticized.²⁸ One of the few books in this field that has been openly influenced by *Orientalism* is James Thompson's *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered* (Dublin, 1988). Steeped in Said's language, Thompson's catalogue notes how the 'Orient represented an alluring Other to Western eyes', how the Orient is 'essentially a work of fiction . . . a hermeneutic', and how Europe's East was a frontier land 'ripe for exploits and exploitation'.²⁹

²⁵ Linda Nochlin, 'The Imaginary Orient', *Art in America*, LXXI (1983), pp. 118-31 ff.

²⁶ There is, for example, no mention of Said in Godrej and Royatgi, *Scenic Splendours*, Llewellyn, *The Orient Observed*, or Clayton, *The Rediscovery of Ancient Egypt*.

²⁷ John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500-1920* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 8-9, 117.

²⁸ Philippe Jullian, *The Orientalists: European Painters of Eastern Scenes* (Oxford, 1977).

²⁹ James Thompson, *The East: Imagined, Experienced, Remembered: Orientalist Nineteenth Century Painting* (Dublin, 1988), pp. 4, 6, 30, 34. Bernard Smith has also noted the influence of Said in his most recent book, *Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of the Cook Voyages* (Melbourne, 1992), p. 10.

In the field of cultural studies, on the other hand, where expressions of attitudes, both conscious and subconscious, have become legitimate as well as essential subjects for deconstruction, the impact of Said and Nochlin has been enormous. Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995) uses advertisements, newspaper cartoons, and maps to support the author's contention that Victorian imperialism meant racial politics and degradation. McClintock makes clear that the Empire was always about race, gender, and class, subjects which had been for the most part ignored in the historiography until the mid-1970s at the earliest. In her analysis of advertisements she was building on the earlier work of Thomas Richards, whose book *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, Calif., 1990) explored how exhibitions, advertisements, and Victorian kitsch all served to turn the commodity into 'an instrument of unprecedented violence', an icon of the expanding Empire.³⁰

These recent studies that focus on race, gender, and representation have contributed vitally to the field by explicitly focusing on the power relationship inherent between Britain and the Empire, while also offering a more rigorous, less descriptive mode of analysis than that of the art historians discussed above. Missing in so many of these studies, however, is a historical grounding that specifically links the analysis to the Empire, and takes into account fissures, inconsistencies, and changes in Imperial attitudes. In Richards's account, for example, it is the commodity that colonizes. What has happened to the colonizers? In this type of approach there are no longer actors or agency, only representations. In the most trenchant critique yet of cultural studies approaches to art and Empire, John M. MacKenzie emphasized, in his *Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts* (Manchester, 1995), the need to guard against 'presentism' and moral condemnation, to consider the relationship between elite and popular culture, to avoid unchallenged notions of Western dominance and binary approaches to alterity, and to consider the contrasting socio-economic circumstances of different Imperial territories.

The importance of the approach begun by Bernard Smith, given theoretical rigour by Said and Nochlin, and carried forward by practitioners of cultural studies, is that it is now a virtual truism that art is ideological, political, and served Imperial purposes. The significance of this trend has been both attitudinal and methodological: scholars can no longer approach the material the way they once did.³¹ On the other

³⁰ Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914* (Stanford, 1990), p. 128.

³¹ Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia, *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India, 1757-1930* (Ithaca, NY, 1986); Edward J. Nygren, *Views and Visions: American Landscape Before 1830* (Washington, 1986); Michael Jacobs, *The Painted Voyage: Art, Travel and Exploration, 1564-1875* (London, 1995); Jane Carruthers and Marion I. Arnold, *The Life and Work of Thomas Baines* (Vlaeberg, 1995).

hand, recent studies have tended to ignore artistic developments altogether. Art can be produced for ideological purposes, but the form it takes can be just as conditioned by prevailing aesthetic sensibilities. The significance of the year 1757 on art, for example, may be less Imperial (the British victory at Plassey) than aesthetic (the publication of Edmund Burke's *Enquiry Concerning the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*). Moreover, in addition to this lack of historical and aesthetic grounding, most studies of art and Empire have failed to gauge the effect of Imperial images on historical events, actions, and attitudes except in the vaguest of terms.³²

It would be wrong to suggest that recent studies of art and the British Empire have focused solely on issues of power and representation. Since the splintering of Soviet Eastern Europe in 1989, and the emergence of subaltern studies, scholars have returned to issues of nationalism and national identity, emphasizing the 'inventedness' of nations and the complex relationship between art and history. Two critically important works by Indian authors that discuss art and aesthetics from within the framework of colonial politics are Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920* (Cambridge, 1992) and Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922* (Cambridge, 1994).³³ With so much having been written about the British influence on Indian politics, culture, and society, these two books redress this imbalance by providing a discussion of the indigenous response to British art-making in the Indian Subcontinent that evolved simultaneously. Similarly, M. Franklin Sirmans's important exhibition catalogue, *Transforming the Crown: African, Asian and Caribbean Artists in Britain, 1966-1996* (New York, 1997), explores how 'non-white' artists in Britain have addressed such issues as home, representations of the body, and the implications of skin colour and ethnicity.

Another burgeoning area of study with close links to issues of identity-formation has focused on museums and international exhibitions, especially as scholars begin to examine the way in which art produced throughout the Empire returned to Britain and triggered responses there as well.³⁴ Scholars have also begun to

³² This problem is especially apparent in Carol A. Breckenridge, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Colonial Collecting: India at World's Fairs', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXXI (1989), pp. 195-216.

³³ See also Jules David Prown and others, *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West* (New Haven, 1992); Stephen Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge, 1993).

³⁴ Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas* (Manchester, 1988); Brian Durrans, 'The Future of the Other: Changing Cultures on Display in Ethnographic Museums', in *The Museum Time-Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, ed. Robert Lumley (London, 1988); Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven, 1994); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London, 1995).

explore the interactions between art, imperialism, and popular political culture through the vehicle of propaganda.³⁵ There have been several useful thematic studies, especially on images of the military and of battles, although these have remained in the earlier 'compile and catalogue' mode.³⁶ And, there have finally begun to appear some studies that break down the binary division between colonizer and colonized, the most sumptuous of which is *The Raj: India and the British, 1600–1947* (London, 1990), edited by C. A. Bayly.³⁷ To date there has, however, been only one attempt at a synthetic analysis of art and the British Empire.³⁸

It should be clear by now that there is much excellent work that has been written on art and the British Empire, produced both by British artists and by indigenous peoples. Ultimately, however, this is a fragmented field, divided by disciplinary training and national focus. To paraphrase an infamous phrase, although the sun has set on the British Empire, it has only just begun to rise on that Empire's art.

³⁵ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984), and his edited collection of essays, *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986); Catherine Hughes, 'Imperialism, Illustration and the Daily Mail, 1896–1904', in Michael Harris and Alan Lee, eds., *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth Century to the Nineteenth Century* (Rutherford, NJ, 1986), pp. 187–200; Stephen Constantine, *Buy & Build: The Advertising Posters of the Empire Marketing Board* (London, 1986).

³⁶ The most interesting of these is Alan McNairn's *Behold the Hero: General Wolfe and the Arts in the Eighteenth Century* (Montreal, 1997), about the multitude of representations that turned General Wolfe into a hero after his death in the Battle of Quebec in 1759. See also J. M. W. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815–1914* (Manchester, 1988); Peter Harrington, *British Artists and War: The Face of Battle in Paintings and Prints, 1700–1914* (London, 1993).

³⁷ See also John Guy and Deborah Swallow, eds., *Arts of India: 1550–1900* (London, 1990); Barbara Soler Miller, ed., *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture* (Delhi, 1992).

³⁸ John M. MacKenzie, 'Art and the Empire', in P. J. Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 296–315.

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