

**Annabel Teh Gallop, *Early Views of Indonesia: Drawings from the British Library. Pemandangan Indonesia di Masa Lampau: Seni Gambar dari British Library.* Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1995, 128 pp., \$34.00 (U.S.) paper**

Astri Wright

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as an awareness that at the basis of the argument of the exhibition-as-text is the recognition that there exists by necessity an author of that text and that increasingly the author must be perceived not as the institution but as the curator. However, any exploration of the curator-as-artist falls short of endorsing the kind of unilateral power that such an extreme position might entail. Instead, the authorial function of the exhibition designer or curator is seen as one point in the continuum that characterizes the history of exhibition practices.

The arrival of this anthology is timely. *Thinking About Exhibitions* brings together a collection of essays which fills in the gap found in much art historical study today between the traditional preoccupation with objects and a free-floating theoretical enterprise that is almost entirely divorced from the art that purports to be its subject. In its focus on exhibitions as discursive events, the editors have shown that the traditional art historical focus on objects and artists – and even the more “left-leaning” exploration of institutional politics – can only be enriched through the attention to the presence, however temporally and site specific, of the object in space. Similarly, current critical approaches to the discursive properties of the art object benefit from the ma-

terial application of their analyses in specific displays. Particularly in its combination of a diversity of cultural and theoretical approaches to the study of exhibitions, *Thinking About Exhibitions* figures as an important contribution to the study of art and, in its focus on the specificity of the exhibitionary event, provides crucial insights into the analysis of cultural discourse as a whole.

ANNE WHITELAW  
University of Rochester

- 1 See for example Carol Duncan, “The MoMA’s Hot Mamas,” *Art Journal*, XLVIII:2, (Summer 1989), 171-8, and various protests in the early 1970s highlighting the lack of women artists in major museum collections.
- 2 See James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Harvard, 1988), and Donna Haraway, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City 1908-36,” *Social Text*, XI (1984/5), 20-64.
- 3 This is particularly apparent in such collections as Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, eds, *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington, 1991), and Ivan Karp, Steven D. Lavine and Christine Mullen Kreamer, eds, *Museums and Communities* (Washington, 1992).

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This attractive bilingual publication is the catalogue of 510 early nineteenth-century watercolours and drawings made in Java and today stored in the British Library in London.<sup>1</sup> A set of facsimiles were given to the National Library of Indonesia after the drawings were exhibited in Jakarta in 1995 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Indonesian independence. The essays are informative and well written; the visual material ranges from delightful to interesting to outrageous; and some of it is of exceptional artistic merit.

This is not, however, a scholarly contribution of new materials: most of the drawings have been published and described elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Neither is *Early Views* a critical discussion of the colonial context for and motivations behind the production of these drawings. Rather, when one steps back and looks at the context for its publication, one realizes that this book represents a diplomatic effort between two nations (Indonesia and the U.K.) closely involved for a few years in the international arena of politics in the nineteenth century and now, again, in the arena of economics,

with a limited amount of cultural exchange. It also represents the ongoing process of popularizing scholarship, by commercial and university presses alike, which is part of the new wave of publishing about Southeast Asia for general readerships, both inside and outside of the region.

Whereas books with text in both English and Indonesian used to appear only in Indonesia, *Early Views* is also symptomatic of a new kind of product from western commercial or academic publishers that stress bilingual treatment, a positive trend pioneered in the West by *Modern Indonesian Art*, one of several art books published in connection with the 1990 Festival of Indonesia.<sup>3</sup>

With its many strengths – as the memento of a gift, cementing a relationship of a certain kind; as an informative publication; as a more accessibly packaged and broader selection of reproductions than previously available; and as a guide to newcomers for further reading – *Early Views* also inspires questions in cultural analysts engaged with the interface between printed matter and readers across cultural and regional boundaries, questions regarding point of view and all the important issues pertaining to context not addressed in the book. One basic question that arises during the perusal of this largely visual volume is: what are the parallels and the differences between the economic, political and artistic contexts that originally produced the draw-

ings and those which recently orchestrated their revival in the form of the exhibition and the book? And how does the work elucidate the relationships between the images presented? This review will not seek to give exhaustive answers but rather point to some of the data and perspectives that would figure in the answering process. These issues are not clearly addressed in the book, and it must be said that this weakens its contribution to the literature on Southeast Asia and to the contextualization of art in history, both areas where it might have made a more critical contribution, or even pointed towards one.

The book is divided into three sections of drawings and watercolours. The first is devoted to archaeology, the second to scenes of daily life and the third to natural history. The archaeological images depict statuary (both monumental and small-scale), temples and bathing places; some interesting comparisons are made between drawings and photographs of the originals, when they are known. While the first section features almost entirely Western artists, the section on daily life introduces us also to a Eur-Asian and to indigenous artists (Javanese, one is left to assume). Here we encounter villagers crossing rivers, taking refreshments in road-side *warungs*, huddled over cockfights, or carrying their rulers in procession. Both the latter sections include some of the humorous and lively illustrations from Javanese manuscripts which were introduced to the reading public by the same author and the Lontar Foundation in recent years.<sup>4</sup> The section on natural history, featuring animals and plant life, introduces us to Indian and Chinese as well as Indonesian artists. Most of the watercolours throughout the three categories are highly elaborate and well reproduced; the delicacy of pencil on paper is harder to capture in reproductions, and it is thus hard to do justice to many of the drawings.

It is never made clear why the facsimiles of the drawings in the latter two categories were not also included in the gift to Indonesia's National Library. Only the archaeological drawings are mentioned as gifts to Indonesia on the anniversary of its independence. Although this may not have been intended on the part of the authors, the organization of the book echoes a similar outdated colonial hierarchy of value, exemplified by the primary place given to "classical" stone monuments as high-points of cultural achievement. The problem with this perspective outside of classical Greece or Rome, and particularly in the major areas of the globe with tropical or subtropical climates, is that it creates a false measure against which the greatest majority of observable contemporary local cultural forms perforce pales in comparison. Such hierarchization reflects European definitions of "art," "culture" and "civilization" theorized into the dis-

ciplines of art history and archaeology in the nineteenth century. These ideas shaped the classification of the world and, particular to this venture, the study of Asian art in ways often at odds with the values operative locally in parts of India and Southeast Asia. An editorial shift would have changed the overall reading of the book. What if "nature" had been placed first, not as that resource that could be harvested and sold at great profit to Europeans far away, but as the context for both the people and their monuments? Or, even more antithetically to the colonial enterprise, what if the people had been presented first, being, as it were, the originators of the monuments, with nature presented as the background context for both?

The artists are divided into two groups: the known artists who are English or American, Dutch, Eur-Asian and, in one case, Indian, and the unknown artists, who are Indonesian (area of origin not specified further) and Chinese. In contrast to many contemporary European images of the unknown peoples, plants and animals of the archipelago, these drawings represent some of the first of the subjects "as seen directly through the eyes of the artists themselves, without the intermediate influence of the engraver" (John Bastin, Foreword, p. 9). The drawings represent a relatively concerted attempt to depict, firsthand, the people, contexts and objects in this part of the world unfamiliar to the English. This accounts for their freshness and relatively informative nature, especially evident when compared with contemporary European depictions which are more stiff and several steps removed from accuracy of detail in human types or habitat. Here, a sense of recognition and even humour at times provides a bridge between the reader's mind and that of the artist: Thomas Horsfield depicting himself in the middle of his image, drawn in the act of drawing, is endearing and, more interesting yet, gives us a very different view of the foreign presence than most illustrations where Europeans are shown. In Illustration 37, for example, drawn by an anonymous European, two Europeans are given clear primary importance. Both are drawn either larger in size than their native attendants (though one of these is dressed as a high-status courtier) or respectfully shielded by a parasol. By contrast, in Horsfield's drawing in Plate 17, "Suspension bridge across the river at Ladok, East Java," a small foreign figure in trousers, jacket and hat is seated with his drawing-board on a rock by the river, near two local men clad in sarongs and turbans, apparently drawing the men bathing upriver. The figure of the artist is no larger than that of the two Javanese men squatting by the river; he is not distinguished from them by any markers of respect; in fact, he is quite integrated into the landscape and the image of village life. It is perhaps significant that the artist was a post-

colonial American and a naturalist, the first factor placing him somewhat outside of the dominant currents in contemporary colonialism, and the second factor having trained his eye both to details in nature and to ways of depicting these in drawing. How issues of personality, culture and training affect pictorial point of view would have been an interesting analytical perspective to have added to the present text.

One of the reasons that the archaeological drawings are highlighted is the fact that these are the first known images of many of the major antiquities, in their original dilapidated states, before restoration work commenced. This is no doubt the reason why these drawings were singled out as of primary importance to the Indonesian nation as a vital addition to the documentation of their monuments. The early date, and the lack of intervention by an engraver, might lead one to expect greater accuracy in observation and detailing, and less Europeanizing or exoticizing of human figures, postures and landscapes than in renditions made later and published second- or third-hand in Europe.

In fact, however, many of the faces on “natives” in the drawings by the Englishmen (and their Dutch assistants) are still predominantly European, as are the aesthetics and conventions governing body types, postures, body hair and so on. In these drawings, nudity is sometimes covered over, and the iconographic and expressive fierceness in some of the sculptural masterpieces most acclaimed today is softened. The Kala head over the doorway to Candi Jabung (p. 48) looks like nothing so much as a Viking. Appropriately, Gallop acknowledges the English and European distaste for the “monstrous” associated with Indian and other Asian art and discusses some (though not all) of these inaccuracies. She makes it clear that these drawings are not presented here for their documentary value but as works of art.

Having said this, however, Gallop nevertheless commends the archaeological drawings later in the text for their historical importance, without clarifying in *what* this importance consists, if not as documentation. Certainly these drawings are important for their primary place in the chronology of Europeans documenting Javanese antiquities, for they predate by several decades the first photographic record of Javanese archaeological monuments undertaken in 1841,<sup>5</sup> but more clarity in defining importance could be wished for.

To this reviewer, the most interesting though not highlighted features of this publication are the differences between the drawings by the Europeans and the Asian artists. Despite the greater space, visually and textually, given the drawings by English Lieutenant-Colonel Colin MacKenzie or American doctor and naturalist Thomas Horsfield, it is frequently the drawings by the Asian artists that are more accurate in detail, more lively, and more aesthetically infused.

The work by the “Eur-Asian” artist, John Newman – especially well represented in the scenes of village life and the tableaux of encounters between Europeans and natives of different groups in Plates 19-30 – stands in a middle position, bridging the stiffness and “otherness” imposed on the local people by the amateur Euro-American artists and the variously fluid, detailed, elegant or outrageously caricaturistic depictions by Indian, Chinese and Javanese artists.

Even John Newman, who is featured widely, also referred to as “a young boy of mixed blood” (p. 121), never comes alive to us as an individual in the same way the “heroes” do despite a short biography in an appendix. In fact, MacKenzie speaks of him in the way one might speak of a well-trained, favourite dog (pp. 121-22). Presumably part English and part Indian, the imbalance in this treatment provides a parallel to the references in the text to details and quality in the western artists’ work and the absence of any serious commentary on the work of local artists. This imbalance is particularly noticeable because their work is every bit as art historically significant and in some instances of higher artistic quality and interest value than that of the Europeans. Furthermore, this is the work which has the greatest relevance today beyond the colonial venture, as the first meeting ground between western and Asian (Chinese, Indian, Javanese, “Indonesian”) ideas about art, medium and styles, and which provides us with a glimpse of the earliest training ground in what was later to become modern Indonesian art, an analogous situation to those which spawned modern art throughout Asia. Since the study of modern Asian art has become one of the cutting-edge areas of new art historical research and thinking in the past five years, this dimension might have garnered at least footnote commentary.

Here, then, is a capsule of a pluralistic pictorial world and multiple, cross-cultural and cross-regional relationships more complex than the simpler “east meets west” framework in which they are presented. It is an oversight, at best, to have given priority in this publication to pale amateur drawings by white colonists, taking the unfamiliar as their subject matter, over the high-quality, colourful and vibrant work by local professionals, whose technical skills matched their familiarity with every detail of their subjects. Many examples could be cited, but I will only mention the Durian and the Watermelon by an anonymous Chinese artist (plates 31 and 32) which vibrate in that peculiar two-dimensional twilight where stylization and composition merge with hyperrealism, to create an image that seems alive on the page. Another example of images suffused with knowledge of the subject matter, combined with a sharp eye and mas-

terful pen, are the pen-and-ink drawings of Islamic tombs by unknown Indonesian artists (pp. 54-55). These artists were not "unknowns" when these drawings were commissioned and delivered; it is a sad fact of the colonial *modus vivendi* that their names were not recorded at the time of production, as were those of the Europeans.

The author must be commended for trying, at several junctures, to avoid the pitfalls of older western-centric scholarship. For example, a clear corrective is made to the old fallacious convention of stating that a given classical monument was "discovered" by a certain European on a specific date. Gallop acknowledges that these monuments were known by local villagers and, though not maintained on a large scale, have probably always remained the site of a certain amount of worship, right until the present. Furthermore, a fairly honest discussion is offered regarding the accuracy of the drawings and their biases, admitting that fierceness and nudity were downplayed due to the British dislike of the "monstrous" qualities they perceived in Indian art.

It would be interesting to consider how these British colonial drawings compare with Dutch ones, such as those published by the Hakluyt Society. (Although this book places these nineteenth-century drawings in the context of other collections in Britain, there is no mention at all of equivalent collections in the Netherlands or elsewhere.) How does the original intent behind the commissioning of these drawings compare with the intention of the 1995 gift? How did the nineteenth-century reading and reception of these drawings compare with that of today?

At the time of their production, these drawings were images of contemporaneity, produced above all for their usefulness in the colonial venture which Britain had every reason to believe would be an ongoing one. At one and the same time, these drawings could contribute to the English taste for the exotic, to persuading the British public of the importance of the colonial venture abroad, and to providing scientific data for political and economic decision-making. Today these drawings are images of the past, providing nostalgic and lush details illustrating up close the heroes of the British Colonial Empire at work, with their shirt sleeves up as it were. It is notable that the colonial context for the production of the drawings is downplayed in the text, and the image presented is rather one of "early academic research."

Thomas Stamford Raffles's colonial mission is not discussed (at least no marble bust of him, Roman emperor style, is reproduced here, as it is elsewhere<sup>6</sup>). Instead, Raffles is presented in a noble light, perhaps justifiably so, as a progressive colonial official who believed in serious study

of the colony at hand, resulting in his much celebrated and historiographically important *The History of Java* in two volumes.<sup>7</sup> However, history writing at its best provides a dialectic between the individual and the era, and this is what is missing here. Instead, having eschewed a more multi-pronged or interdisciplinary approach, contemporary western academics and Indonesia-philés are allowed a sense of romantic identification in passages such as the following, describing Raffles coordinating his research from his cozy bungalow in West Java:

Accompanied by two pet tiger cubs which he fed on vegetables and milk, and with a resident gamelan orchestra hired to play from morning to night, Raffles was surrounded by kindred spirits: a few British officials, and the Javanese scholars who were assisting him with the translation of the *Bharatayuddha* (p. 15).

The implication here that the Javanese scholars were not the main source for data in the translation of a classical Javanese text, but merely assisting Raffles, the great scholar, is indicative of the kind of British-privileging that underlies the textual part of this publication. (It has always struck me as an irony of history that the *Rafflesia*, the largest orchid in the world, illustrated on p. 97, was so named with no intention of a pun or an analogue between colonialism and this largest of the parasitic flowers in the world.) When one shifts one's focus to the visual text, however, a very different story emerges.

Stepping back from the critical project of the review at this point, after having raised some of the issues triggered by the reading and viewing of this publication, my conclusion is that the presentation succeeds according to the terms it sets itself but could have done better to formulate its intention in somewhat more depth. Sometimes consciously, sometimes despite itself, it variously informs and entertains readers, each according to his or her interests. Finally, *Early Views*, without knowing it, merely by publishing the pictorial material in the way it does, presents, for the first time in easily accessible format, a glimpse of the first beginnings of that dynamic and fascinating arena the western world has recently discovered and the Asian business world has embraced, namely that of modern and contemporary Asian art. This is a contemporary art world which resembles the international encounters and cultural cross-fertilization of colonial times, with increasingly fluid cross-national artistic relations and artistic institutional exchanges, at times fuelled by and at times in counterpoint to the play of global economic relations. It is from this perspective that those drawings made by Indonesian or local Chinese artists should also be returned, in the original, to Indonesia: they repre-

sent the earliest beginnings of modern Indonesian art, as it grew out of the political and human relations spawned by individual actors in the context of colonial expansion.

ASTRI WRIGHT  
University of Victoria

- 1 A shorter version of this review will appear in *Crossroads*, Journal for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Northern Illinois.
- 2 Notably in Mildred Archer, *Natural History Drawings in the India Office Library* (London, 1962), and *idem*, *British Drawings in the India Office Library*, 2 vols (London, 1969).
- 3 Joseph Fischer, ed., *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change, 1945-1990* (New York and Jakarta, 1990). Although *Modern Indonesian Art* had the lowest budget and the least official support from the American side of any of the Festival-sponsored books, it not only attempted to include Indonesian authors the most equitably, in terms of numbers, but in its use of bilingualism it was also the only one to make the text accessible to an Indonesian readership.
- 4 Annabel Teh Gallop with Bernard Arps, *Golden Letters: Writing Traditions of Indonesia = Surat Emas: Budaya Tulis di Indonesia* (London and Jakarta, 1991).
- 5 Victor T. King et al., *Tourism in Southeast Asia* (London, 1993), 13.
- 6 See M. Archer and J. Bastin, *The Raffles Drawings in the India Office Library* (Kuala Lumpur, 1978).
- 7 T.S. Raffles, *The History of Java*, 2 vols (London, 1817).