

JOHAN ZOFFANY RA: SOCIETY OBSERVED

The Sackler Wing of Galleries

10 March – 10 June 2012

Supported by Cox & Kings

Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed will constitute a radical re-evaluation of the extraordinary life and career of this brilliant and enigmatic artist. Born near Frankfurt in 1733, Zoffany moved to London in 1760. Adapting to the indigenous art culture and patterns of patronage, he created virtuoso portraits and subject pictures that proved to be highly desirable to a wide range of patrons including the actor David Garrick and the court of George III. A nomination member of the Royal Academy, his work provides an invaluable and often unique appraisal of key British institutions and edifices: the art academy; the Court; the theatre; the bourgeois family; and the British Empire. Of all the major artists at work in eighteenth-century England, none explored more inventively the interstices of Georgian society and the complexities of British imperial rule than Johan Zoffany.

The exhibition will feature over 60 oil paintings, and a selection of drawings and prints from British and international public and private collections, a number of which have rarely or never been exhibited before. The works testify to the central importance of Zoffany to the artistic culture of eighteenth-century Europe.

Arranged thematically into eight sections, the exhibition will open with an exploration of his art in the 1750s when he trained in Rome and worked for German patrons, including the Prince-Archbishop and Elector of Trier, producing history paintings in the grand style. A highlight of this section will include an astonishing allegorical painting of David which has been traditionally considered to be a self-portrait (Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria).

Two years after Zoffany's arrival in London in 1760, he was introduced to the actor, David Garrick. The section of **Garrick and the London Stage** will examine Zoffany's portraits and representations of the theatre showing Garrick and other famous British actors. These reveal Zoffany's brilliance in capturing the excitement of live performance on canvas, in the context of the theatrical revolution spearheaded by Garrick.

The Court will focus on the importance of patronage in Zoffany's portrait career from his introduction to the Court of George III in the early 1760s to his portraits of the family of the Empress Maria Theresa. Highlights in this section will include *Queen Charlotte and her Two Eldest Sons*, 1764-

5 (The Royal Collection) which demonstrates Zoffany's innovative treatment of royal sitters by placing them within a domestic setting.

The section devoted to the **Royal Academy** will have as its focus Zoffany's major Royal commission, *The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy*, 1771-2 (The Royal Collection). Through this work and other major paintings associated with the Academy, the section reveals Zoffany's attitude towards the academic infrastructure of British artistic society and celebrates the formative years of the King's Academy of Arts.

The section **Families and Friends** will present Zoffany's approach to portraiture as commissioned by aristocratic and bourgeois sitters. Developing the full potential of the group portrait as 'conversation piece', these works celebrate informality and sociability, and reveal the dynamics of ordinary, everyday family life. Often placed within grand interiors or on landed estates, these group portraits confirm the social and economic standing of sitters drawn from the world of politics, commerce and the arts.

Zoffany's sojourn in Italy from 1772 – 1779 will be featured in **Italy, Old Masters, and the Antique**. This period resulted in arguably his greatest painting: *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, 1772-7 (The Royal Collection). The ways in which Italy impacted upon Zoffany's visualization of the collecting of antique statuary and old-master paintings will also be explored.

A Passage to India will examine Zoffany's life and work in India from 1783 to 1789. The life of the Indian courts and the relative integration of the British residents, many in the employ of the East India Company, are vividly captured in his portraits, genre paintings and landscapes, including his Indian masterpiece, *Colonel Mordaunt's Cock Match*, 1784-8 (Tate, London).

Revolution, Reaction, and Retirement will focus on Zoffany's career in the 1790s after his return from India. His most ambitious paintings of this final period were the two pendant pictures portraying acts of barbarity perpetrated during the French Revolution; *Plundering the King's Cellar at Paris*, 1794, (Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut) and *A Scene in the Champ de Mars, Celebrating over the Bodies of the Swiss Soldiers on the 12th August 1792, with a Portrait of the Duke of Orleans*, c.1794 (Museen der Stadt, Regensburg). Their shocking subject matter reveals the intensity of Zoffany's response to recent events in France, and his continuing desire to make a deeply personal statement through his art.

BIOGRAPHY

Johan Zoffany RA (né Zauffaly) was born near Frankfurt in 1733. He trained as an artist in Germany and Italy. His earliest known works were made for German princedoms in the 1750s. In 1760 Zoffany moved to London. There he was patronised initially by the actor, David Garrick, and by the Court of George III, where he achieved considerable success. Zoffany became a Royal Academician in 1769, a year after the Academy was founded by George III with Sir Joshua Reynolds as its first President. In 1772 Zoffany went to Italy with a commission from Queen Charlotte to paint *The Tribuna of the*

Uffizi. He also visited Vienna and Parma, before returning to England in 1779. Following a sojourn in India from 1783 to 1789, he worked once more in England, until his retirement around 1800. Zoffany died in 1810, and was buried near his home in Kew, alongside Thomas Gainsborough.

ORGANISATION

Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed has been co-organised by the Royal Academy of Arts and the Yale Center for British Art. The exhibition is curated by Martin Postle, Assistant Director for Academic Activities at the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The organising curator at the Yale Center for British Art is Gillian Forrester, Curator of Prints and Drawings, and, at the Royal Academy, MaryAnne Stevens, Director of Academic Affairs.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated book edited by Martin Postle, written by an international team of distinguished scholars, and published by Yale University Press in association with the Yale Center for British Art and the Royal Academy of Arts.

DATES AND OPENING HOURS

Open to public: Saturday 10 March – Sunday 10 June 2012
 10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30 pm)
 Fridays until 10 pm (last admission 9.30 pm)

ADMISSION

£9 full price; £7 registered disabled and 60 + years; £5 NUS / ISIC cardholders; £3 12–18 years and Income Support; £3 8–11 years; 7 and under free. RA Friends go free.

TICKETS

Tickets are available daily at the RA. Advance bookings: Telephone 0844 209 0051 or visit www.royalacademy.org.uk. Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 5995, fax 020 7300 5781 or email groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk

IMAGES

Publicity images for **Johan Zoffany RA: Society Observed** can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at www.picselect.com and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

For further press information, please contact Johanna Bennett on tel: 020 7300 5615, fax: 020 7300 8032, or email press.office@royalacademy.org.uk

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Royal Academy of Arts, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1J 0BD

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