Johan Zoffany and his International Contexts

Conference, 14 May 2012, at the Royal Academy of Arts and the Geological Society of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly

The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the Royal Academy of Arts, London, and the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, co-hosted this conference on Monday 14 May 2012 to accompany a major exhibition on the eighteenth-century Anglo-German artist Johan Zoffany (1733-1810). The exhibition, Johan Zoffany RA. Society Observed, curated by Martin Postle (Paul Mellon Centre) with Gillian Forrester (Yale Center for British Art), and MaryAnne Stevens (Royal Academy), is being held at the Yale Center for British Art from 27 October 2011 to 12 February 2012, and at the Royal Academy of Arts from 10 March to 10 June 2012. The conference aimed to address Zoffany's art in the context of four locations that were central to his practice: Germany, England, Italy, and India. Born in Frankfurt in 1733, Johan Zoffany trained as an artist in Germany and Italy. In 1760 he moved to London, where he adapted brilliantly to the indigenous art culture and patterns of patronage, creating virtuoso portraits and subject pictures that proved to be highly desirable to a wide range of patrons. Of all the major artists working in eighteenth-century England, none explored more inventively the complexities of Georgian society and British imperial rule than Zoffany. Yet, despite achieving considerable success there, he remained in many ways an outsider, looking dispassionately at British society. Resisting complete integration into his adopted country, Zoffany travelled for extended periods in Europe and spent six years in northern India. His body of work offers unique perspectives on key British and European institutions, including the art academy, the royal court, the theatre, and the families of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. In India, Zoffany constructed new idioms for portraying the emerging colonial society in both public and private spheres, as well providing a nuanced account of the complex network of power relations, race, and culture at a critical moment in British imperial history.

Geological Society of London

09.00 Registration

09.30 Amy Meyers (Yale Center for British Art) Welcome and opening remarks

09.40 Martin Postle (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art) ‘“Zoffany and his International Contexts”: An introduction to the exhibition and conference

09.50 Morning session introduced and chaired by Robin Simon (University College, London)

09.55 Craig Hanson (Calvin College, Michigan) ‘Zoffany’s Virtuoso Ambitions and the Theatre of Natural History’


10.55 Questions

11.05 Coffee

11.35 Steffen Egle (Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart) ‘Johan Zoffany and Germany: Early Training and Later Reception’
12.05 Kate Roach (Virginia Commonwealth University) ‘Johan Zoffany’s Tribuna of the Uffizi: an international visual lineage’

12.35 Questions

12.45 Lunch

14.00 Afternoon session introduced and chaired by Kate Retford (Birkbeck College, University of London)

14.05 Anna Maria Ambrosini (University of Urbino ‘Carlo Bo’, Palazzo Albani) ‘A rediscovered Zoffany Madonna for the Grand Duke of Tuscany’

14.35 Kenneth Bendiner (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee) ‘Johan Zoffany in Italy: The Beginning of Visual Dissonance’

15.05 Richard Leppert (University of Minnesota) ‘Zoffany and the Visual Politics of Private Musical Culture in England and India’

15.35 Questions

15.45 Tea

16.15 William Pressly (University of Maryland) ‘The Artist’s Role as Social Commentator: Zoffany’s Scathing Condemnation of Gillray as well as Hogarth in Plundering the King’s Wine Cellar’

16.45-17.30 Response, and discussion chaired by MaryAnne Stevens (Royal Academy of Arts)

Royal Academy of Arts

17.45 - Drinks Reception in the ‘Reynolds Room’

18.15-20.00 Private View of ‘Johan Zoffany RA. Society Observed’ in the Sackler Galleries