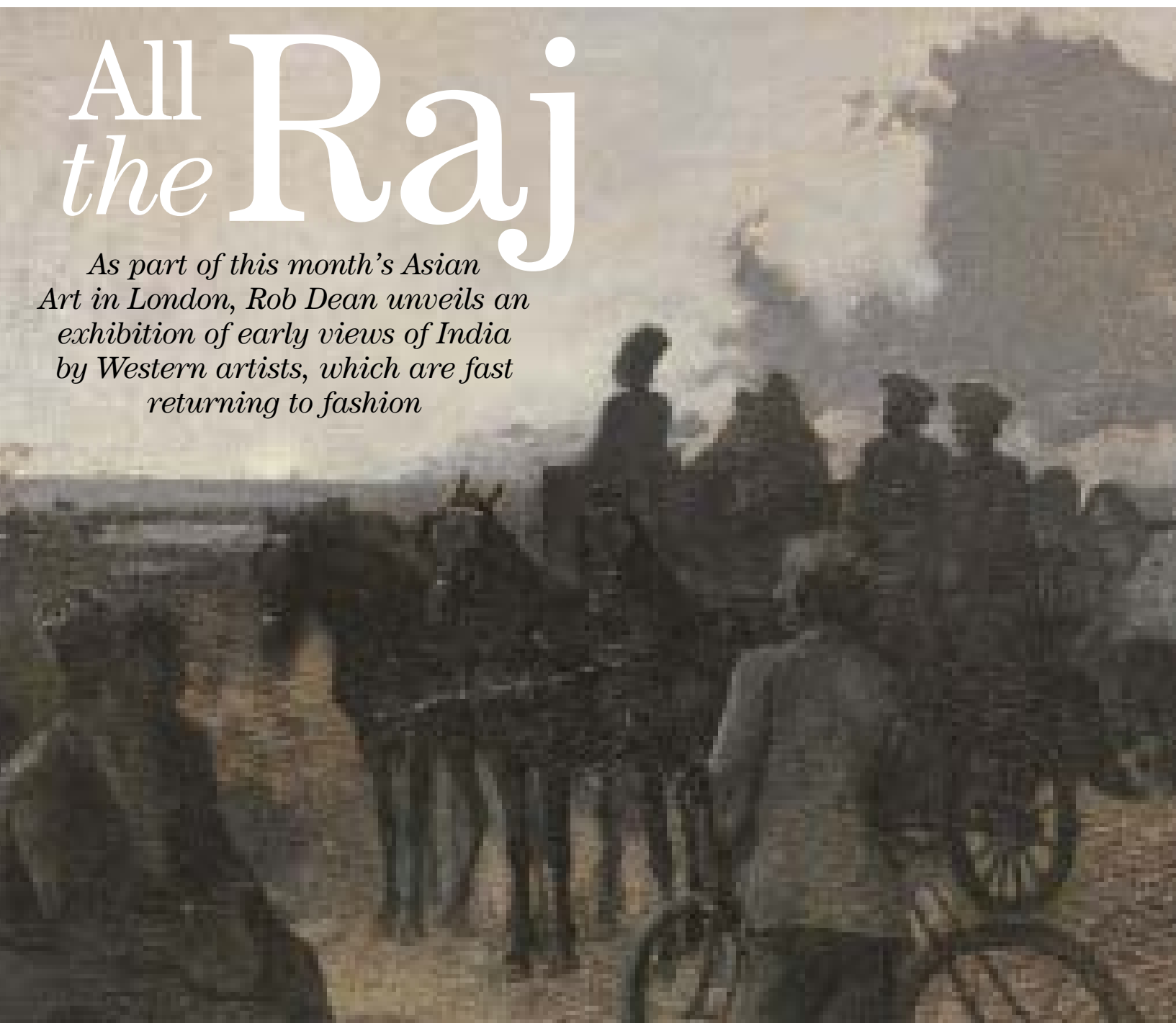


All the Raj

As part of this month's Asian Art in London, Rob Dean unveils an exhibition of early views of India by Western artists, which are fast returning to fashion



India in the late 18th century was an unusual mixture of two worlds. The East India Company exercised control over a small portion of the country, from the increasingly European-styled cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Elsewhere in India ancient ways of life continued as they had done for centuries. Rajas and nawabs ruled small kingdoms, and vast areas of the country remained largely unexplored and were covered in dangerous mountainous terrain or thick dense jungle. It was this exotic world of myths and legends, dotted with imposing forts, palaces and ancient ruins that excited a small courageous band of European Artists, who risked everything, to document a country and way of life that was almost unknown to the outside world.

Above Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903), *Modern Fire Worshippers*. An illustration from his book *From the Black Sea Through Persia and India*, published by Harper & Brothers, 1896

THE DANIELL FAMILY

Of the great European artists working in India in the 18th and 19th centuries, it was Thomas Daniell R.A. (1749-1840) and his nephew William Daniell R.A. (1769-1837), who played a pre-eminent role in documenting the country for European eyes.

The aquatints of India by the Daniell family have remained popular since their publication between 1795 and 1810. The British serving in India purchased them for their libraries, or framed them in their houses, offices and clubs. In the early 19th century, collectors eagerly acquired them as a celebration of the sublime, picturesque and the exotic, as well as to record many of the recently-documented heritage sites of India. More recently, a new breed of Indian collectors has

begun to admire the ancient views that represent an India that has rapidly disappeared from view.

GRAND TOURS

Inspired by William Hodges (1744-1797), who had made a tour of the Ganges in 1780, the Daniells finally set off from England in 1786 to make their fortune in India. In the six years they spent in India, they ventured further than any previous European artists, completing three tours around India, along the Ganges from Calcutta to Srinagar (1788-1791), a tour of Madras (1792-1793) and, before their return to England in 1793, a tour of the temple sites in and around Bombay.

Included in the exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery from October 31 to November 9, are several sketches and watercolours by Thomas and William Daniell including, *Dalmow on the Ganges* (overleaf). The watercolour was painted on their return journey to Calcutta in July 1789. Although the Daniells never turned the view into an aquatint, in 1804 Edward Orme published a print of a similar view based on paintings and sketches provided by the pair.

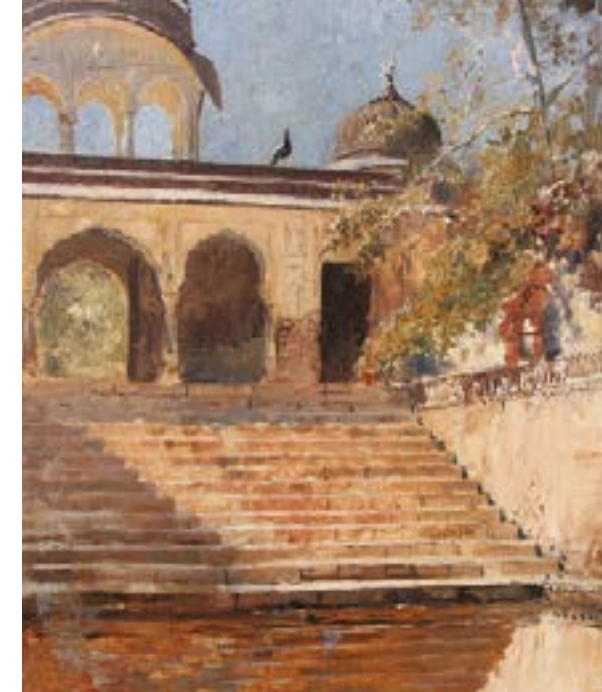
'The British serving in India purchased them for their libraries, or framed them in their houses, offices and clubs. More recently a new breed of Indian collectors has begun to admire the ancient views of India that have rapidly disappeared from view'



Right Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903) *Steps in Sunlight*, oil on canvas

Below left George Chinnery (1774-1852), self portrait, 1825-1828, oil on canvas, image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (not in exhibition)

Below right George Chinnery (1774-1852), *Indian Temple*, 1808-1812, watercolour, image courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (not in exhibition)



Amateur works

Alongside the professional artists who visited India were a large number of amateur artists who provided further invaluable documentation of the subcontinent. There are several examples represented in this month's exhibition, including a particularly fine view of the Qutb Minar by an unknown artist of the early 19th century.

The Qutb Minar remains the tallest brick minaret in the world. Construction started in the late 12th century and underwent numerous additions and repairs over many centuries. In 1803, it was damaged by an earthquake, and Colonel Robert Smith, the British garrison engineer repaired the damage but controversially, in 1828, he added a Bengali-style cupola. The painting is depicted before the addition of "Smith's Cupola" which suggests the painting was completed before 1828.

VIEWS OF MADRAS

A sketch of Madras presents an early view of the city that was published as an aquatint titled *Part of Black Town, Madras*. It includes a view of the Armenian Church in Madras that remains one of the oldest surviving churches of the Indian subcontinent. A final watercolour of bullocks (overleaf) is a charming scene by William Daniell that depicts pack animals resting during one of their long journeys, giving us an intriguing insight into the challenges that the artists





Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903), *Street Scene in Bombay*, oil on board

was a talented artist, known as both a portrait and landscape painter, often working in miniature, he painted industriously, producing portraits of the local community and scenes of Eastern life. *Three Figures by the Water* (opposite) is a characteristic pen and ink sketch depicting women at the river's edge collecting water and washing cooking vessels. He produced these sketches in large numbers for reference, showing his concern for just the right 'sentiment' as he called it, in his oil paintings. Above all, they confirm his talent as an outstanding draughtsman. A lively sketch of a small Indian temple, falling into ruin and buffeted by a passing squall, likely dates to his residence in Dacca between 1808 and 1812. In that period the artist stayed with the British East India representative Sir Charles D'Oyly. When not painting portraits, the artist sketched the local scenery and gave watercolour lessons to his host.

EAST INDIA COMPANY

As the East India Company and then the British government took greater control of India, increasing numbers of Western artists travelled there to document the country. Among them were the Australian-born artist Mortimer Menpes (1855-1938) and the American-born artist Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903). Both artists are included in the exhibition and present a more typical 19th-century 'Orientalist' vision of India.

Weeks was the most famous American Orientalist painter in the expatriate community of academic artists of the late 19th century. He was born in Boston to an affluent merchant family who financed his interest in painting and travel.

In 1872 Weeks moved to Paris where he trained under Leon Bonnat. After his studies, he travelled to South America, Egypt, Persia and India (1882-1883). On these trips he frequently completed paintings in situ, despite the dangers of travel and the problems of the climate. Having first shown at the Paris Salon in 1878, Weeks ultimately attained in 1896, the highest distinction in the academic painter's world, the Salon's award of the Chévalier de la Légion d'Honneur, and his works were exhibited across Europe and America from



Below Edwin Lord Weeks (1849-1903), *Merchants along a street in Bombay*, c.1883, oil on canvas, signed E.L. Weeks

faced during their travels. William documented their travels in a diary, which is full of amusing details that further highlight the problems they encountered.

In the first week of May 1792 a coolie tripped, breaking two bottles of madeira – 'a serious consideration' wrote William, the next day the dubash (interpreter) absconded taking the servants' money and four days later they were robbed of all their clothes during the night. These problems were set against a backdrop of thugs, war, and the challenges of tropical diseases for which there were no known cures.

GEORGE CHINNERY (1774-1852)

In light of these dangers it is sometimes surprising that so many artists risked so much to travel widely in Asia – but many did. George Chinnery followed the Daniells to India, leaving Britain at the age of 28 and spending the last 50 years of his life in Asia. After leaving London in 1802 he lived and worked in India until 1825, before moving to Macao. Chinnery



Top William Daniell, R.A. (1769-1837) *Part of Black Town*, c. 1793



Above William Daniell R.A. (1769-1837) *Bullocks*, pencil and wash on paper, c. 1780-90

Right George Chinnery (1774-1852) *Three Figures by the Water* pen and ink on paper; c. 1810-20

Below William and Thomas Daniell, *Dalmow on the Ganges*, pencil and wash on paper, 1789



AFFORDABLE TODAY

The paintings offer unique insights into the many faces of India at a time of sudden and extreme change. Considering the importance of the artists represented in the exhibition, it is interesting to note that the artworks remain comparatively affordable, with sketches and paintings ranging in price from a few hundred pounds to a few thousand.

It is an area of the market which for many reasons remains somewhat overlooked. The exhibition will provide an opportunity for a new generation of collectors to become inspired by this exciting period of Indian art.

1876 to 1903. Then in 1903 Weeks died suddenly and mysteriously at home in Paris, aged 54.

Two years later his widow arranged a sale in New York of Weeks' remaining works, from small sketches to monumental canvases, in a three-day auction so remarkable that it received front page coverage in the New York press. *Sunset in Bombay*, included in the exhibition, depicts carriages of wealthy Indian families gathered at the water's edge to watch the sunset. The tall hats of many of the men depicted are of the Parsi style favoured in the late 19th century. The choice of composition suggests it may have been a preparatory work commissioned by a wealthy patron from the Bombay Parsi community.

Views of India will be on view at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, from October 31 to November 9 as part of Asian Art in London.



'As the East India Company and then the British government took greater control of India, increasing numbers of Western artists travelled there to document the country'

