

The exhibition, 'Leonardo da Vinci. Experience, Experiment and Design', brought together 60 examples of drawings and notebooks from a number of British institutions, accompanied by several large-scale models of designs by Leonardo (including a flying machine and a giant crossbow) as well as computer animations, presenting a dynamic and multi-layered Leonardo. The London exhibition was just one of several exhibitions, held at a number of European venues in the autumn and winter of 2006–7, organised in association with Universal Leonardo and as part of the 28th Council of Europe Art Exhibition. Universal Leonardo, one of the driving forces behind the exhibition, is a project that seeks to deepen understanding (and appreciation) of the rich diversity of the work of Leonardo da Vinci. The best entry point to Universal Leonardo is their website (www.universalleonardo.org) which explains that one of the aims of the project is 'providing a radical alternative to the conventional "blockbuster" exhibition'. Centred around a strong commitment to international and cross-disciplinary collaboration, Universal Leonardo worked with leading curators, art historians, academics and scientists to create a series of linked exhibitions across several European venues, organised in or near places and institutions with rich holdings of the works of Leonardo (Florence, Oxford, London, Munich, Milan). Each of these exhibitions showcased a different facet of Leonardo's rich output, in each case supported by a programme of detailed technical examination of the paintings, and this is where we get back to the London exhibition and Martin Kemp's major catalogue.

The publication openly acknowledges its place within the Universal Leonardo project, and yet its great value lies in the fact that it can stand on its own. One of the recurring themes of the actual exhibition was the use of great models and sophisticated computer animations as a means of reconstructing Leonardo's working processes to illustrate the way in which he thought through his ideas on paper. The catalogue, almost effortlessly and entirely in 2-D, achieves the same aim. Kemp argues that the notebooks provide a glimpse into the workings of Leonardo's mind, and should be read as such. He argues that the notebooks should be considered less for their (undoubted) aesthetic value than as working docu-

ments, illuminating and documenting the development of Leonardo's use of the visual as a means of problem solving. For Leonardo, problems could be visualised and could be solved by looking, so what the notebooks capture is his developing grasp of a particular issue, and some of his scribbles can be best approached as 'alternative solutions' to a question asked of an image. Kemp actually employs a similar approach. The catalogue offers a complementary as well as supplementary discussion of the artefacts at the centre of the 'experience and experiment' of engaging with the images on exhibit and illustrated (in colour) in the catalogue. While the show was arranged in four sections ('The mind's eye', 'The lesser and greater worlds', 'Force' and 'Making things'), the catalogue is organised into just two distinctive parts. In other words, the catalogue is much more than a recreation and memento of the viewer's experience of the exhibition itself; it actually challenges its reader to engage with the exhibits in yet another way, introducing juxtapositions of objects not recreated in the show itself. Kemp's self-proclaimed aim is to write a 'narrative catalogue', taking care to illustrate every drawing exhibited in the show. His subtle and immensely rich text demonstrates his effortless command of his topic. He summarises Leonardo's drawings as a:

unique kind of plastic moulding of ideas ultimately drawn from nature – both nature as observed and the invisible causes he detected as lying behind all natural forms and phenomena. His aim was to penetrate so deeply into nature's 'causes' that he could remake natural 'effects' on his own account in any given situation and to meet any given need.

This serves as one of the hypotheses that Kemp employs to explore 'Models and modelling' (Part I of the catalogue) and 'Thinking on paper'. So, can the catalogue stand on its own? It can, and it does, and it does so with a seductive ease that means that the book is easy to pick up (despite its size!) and hard to put down. Leonardo scholarship can, at times, seem like an industry of its own, but Kemp's thoughtful and thought-provoking publication should find a space on the book shelf of anybody interested in Leonardo da Vinci.

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**OUDRY'S PAINTED MENAGERIE:
PORTRAITS OF EXOTIC ANIMALS IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE**

MARY MORTON (ED.)

J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles £39.00 \$60.00
(H) £24.99 \$39.95 (P)
192 pages, 86 col/17 mono illus
ISBN 978-0-89236-879-2 (H) 978-0-89236-889-1 (P)

In July 1741, a three-year-old female rhinoceros completed the last leg of a seven-month sea journey. She began the voyage near Calcutta, passed around the Cape of Good Hope, headed north across the equator, and wound up in Holland, all the while subsisting on a diet of hay, bread, orange peels, water and beer, with an occasional puff of tobacco smoke blown in her face as a prophylactic against disease. When the Dutch East India Company ship finally docked in Rotterdam, Clara, as the rhinoceros later came to be known, embarked on a 17-year tour of Europe that created a sensation. Coiffeurs and horse harnesses were decorated à la rhinocéros with curling feathers evocative of a horn and ribbons trailing like a tail; Meissen figures of fanciful horned beasts were manufactured in numerous models and sizes; and Dürer's sixteenth-century print of a rhinoceros assumed a second life as a decorative motif adorning snuffboxes, sweetmeat boxes, and numerous other decorative objects. Europe found itself in the throes of a severe case of rhino-mania.

Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755), the most prominent animalier, or animal painter, of his generation, a professor at the Académie royale, and a perennial favourite at the annual Salon du Louvre, first encountered Clara in the spring of 1749 while she was being exhibited with great fanfare at the Saint-Germain fair in Paris. A firm believer in working from nature, Oudry sketched the rhinoceros several times at the fair. He then returned to his studio, where he painted a life-size portrait of the gentle behemoth on a canvas 15 feet long by 10 feet high. Oudry's painting of Clara followed a series of canvases depicting the principal inhabitants of the Royal Menagerie at Versailles, which the artist had been working on since the late 1730s, including a coy-eyed blackbuck with a white rump and splendid undulating horns, a bristling hyena under attack from two dogs, a blue-throated cassowary, and a trio of exotic birds elegant enough to rival the most stylish members of Louis XV's court.



Jean-Baptiste Oudry, *Rhinoceros*, 1749, Staatliches Museum Schwerin. From Oudry's Painted Menagerie: Portraits of Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Europe, edited by Mary Morton.

François Gigot de La Peyronie, First Surgeon to the King, commissioned the suite of paintings with the intention of giving them to the King to decorate a pavilion in the *Jardin du roi*. Upon La Peyronie's death in 1747, however, the series remained in Oudry's studio unclaimed. Ever the astute businessman, Oudry offered the paintings (along with the portrait of Clara) to a collector of his work even more loyal than Louis XV, the great German francophile Christian Ludwig II, the duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. In 1750, Oudry's exotic menagerie was crated and packed off to northern Germany, where the paintings have resided in the ducal collection (or its current incarnation, the Staatliches Museum Schwerin) to this day.

The J Paul Getty Museum, in conjunction with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Staatliches Museum Schwerin, organised a magnificent exhibition of Oudry's animalier paintings. The show consisted of nine paintings of the inhabitants of the Royal Menagerie, the portrait of Clara, a life-size canvas of an Atlas lion (who, in a reversal of Charles LeBrun's physiognomic theory that attributes the facial qualities of animals to human beings, is the spitting image of Bert Lahr in the role of the Cowardly Lion in the *Wizard of Oz*), and a dashing portrait of Crown Prince Friedrich, the son of Christian Ludwig II. The latter was, like his father, a great patron of Oudry's work and played an

instrumental role in amassing what is one of the two premier collections of the artist's paintings and drawings (the other being the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm).

The exhibition and its catalogue are full of revelations, both large and small. Certainly the greatest are the works themselves. After 150 years in storage, during which time they were unseen by the public, the paintings of Clara and the Atlas lion have undergone conservation at the Getty. They recently emerged resplendent, surely as awe-inspiring as when freshly painted. A smaller, but no less wondrous, rediscovery is described in one of six essays in the catalogue. A black chalk drawing of a porcupine, sketched from a dead specimen that bears a striking resemblance to a beady-eyed guinea pig decked in spiky quills, was rediscovered interleaved between the pages of an album, in the Schwerin collection, in which Prince Friedrich traced reproductive engravings after Oudry's finished drawings. The rediscovered drawing, seen for the first time in 250 years, adds to the richness of the corpus of eighteenth-century French drawings in a manner that belies its humble size.

The essays in the catalogue provide a context in which to view Oudry's paintings of animals. Colin Bailey interweaves the artist's biography and descriptions of his œuvre, tracing Oudry's development from a rather stilted reception piece for the Académie royale to the supremely elegant gamepieces he painted while working in his studio in the Louvre – magnificent compositions in which fur and feathers are

juxtaposed against metal and glass. Christine Giviskos uses Oudry's drawings as a springboard from which to launch a fascinating examination of the balance the artist struck between the exacting study of nature and the received ideas of previous generations of artists. Mary Morton's catalogue entries offer lively, focused readings of the 12 paintings in the show – the reader cannot help but share in the pleasure she derives from Oudry's work.

There is, however, a degree of redundancy among the six essays and the catalogue entries: the history of the menagerie paintings is told several times in the various essays, without ever adding new information to the initial telling. In addition, the authors skirt around some of the meatier issues that surround Oudry's paintings of exotic fauna. For instance, none of the authors grapples with the socio-political motivations or ramifications of the collection of exotica by a world power, in this case the French monarchy. In what manner does Louis XV's menagerie at Versailles constitute a microcosm of the King's aspirations to world dominion, with French hegemony symbolised by the possession and containment of exotic creatures? Such a reading might speak more of an early-twenty-first-century mindset than of one contemporary to the paintings, but can a zoo laid out on the ground plan of a panopticon be construed as merely a pleasant locale for members of the royal family to drink their morning chocolate while admiring foreign beasts? Or is it, as I suspect, a highly politicised re-enactment that situates the King and his minions at the centre of a symbolic world over which he maintains total sovereignty?

The Getty catalogue does a great service in furthering the study of an aspect of eighteenth-century French art that has, over the years, lost some of its former status. The essays, while geared, for the most part, to a reader with little or no familiarity with Oudry or his art, serve as an excellent introduction to the subject, and the beautiful plates cannot help but draw in even the most casual of readers. Thanks to the scholars who worked on this exhibition and its accompanying publication, Oudry's œuvre has been positioned to return in its full glory to the critical prominence it once held.

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