The great Zoffany exhibition curated by Martin Postle arrives in the Royal Academy in London in March. It is bound to be hugely popular and will establish Zoffany’s reputation once and for all. Even with the important addition of The Tribuna of the Uffizi (cat. 53), along with some other pictures from the Royal Collection and from Vienna, it will be difficult for the display to look as sumptuous as it did in the rooms of the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven. The lay-out was exemplary in its clarity and the lighting astonishingly good, enabling the closest examination of these often complex, teasing masterpieces. The scale of most of the paintings might almost have been calculated to fit the spaces of Louis Kahn’s famous building, which are not generally, to take only one tricky issue, suited to whole-lengths on a large scale. There are not many such portraits by Zoffany in any case, and there was only one on view on this occasion. The positioning of this picture, the well-known National Gallery portrait of the formidable Mrs Oswald (cat. 66), was ingenious, as it could be glimpsed at a distance – a difficult thing to achieve in this gallery – through the opening between the third and fourth rooms. But this was only one of many felicities.

The hang brought off countless stimulating juxtapositions or solved, effortlessly it seemed, any potential difficulties. Prints in the theatre section complemented paintings, an important point since this was the way Zoffany made much of his money and his clients extended their celebrity; the early small-scale mythologies (some of them modelli no doubt for larger pictures, although the brilliant handling suggests that they were valued in themselves) were hung beside rare study drawings in an intimate closet-like space. Genre scenes had a short wall to themselves in one corner, while the same room brought together the various academy paintings: Dr William Hunter teaching Anatomy at the Royal Academy (cat. 46); The Portraits of the Academicians of the Royal Academy (cat. 44); and An Academy by Lamplight, A life Class at St Martin’s Lane Academy (cat. 41). Next to Dr William Hunter teaching Anatomy, appropriately, was another image related to scientific enquiry; the portrait of the optician John Cuff and his assistant (cat. 51) (Pl 1). Like the nearby Royal Academicians, it entered the Royal Collection within the lifetime of George III, an admirer of Cuff.

The long room that followed was filled with family groups and individual portraits, especially of children, including the Drummond Family (cat. 69) in the Yale Center collection, which was accompanied by an absorbing video about the Center’s technical examination of the painting. It revealed that the painting was put together by Zoffany over time like some mad jigsaw, the result of many changes of mind and composition.

The next corner space re-asserted Zoffany’s continuing connections with the courts of Europe, including the first of the Habsburg commissions, Archduke Francis (1775; cat. 40), leading into a room that included two of the self-portraits...
2 Self-portrait with Friar's Habit, 13 March 1779.
Oil on panel, 43 x 39 cm. Galleria Nazionale di Parma

3 Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Family, 1766.
Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 125.5 cm. J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

4 Self-portrait, c1775-8.
Oil on panel, 87.5 x 77 cm.
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

5 Holy Family/Repose on the Flight into Egypt, 1779.
Oil on panel, 43 x 39 cm. Galleria Nazionale di Parma

6 Detail of tea-urn in painting illustrated in Pl 3, with a hitherto undetected self-portrait by Zoffany

7 Sir Lawrence Dundas and his Grandson, 1769-70.
Oil on canvas, 101.6 x 127 cm. The Zetland Collection

8 Susannah and the Elders, 1760.
Oil on canvas, 66.5 x 85.5 cm.
Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier
The BRITISH ART Journal  Volume XII, No. 3

painted in Italy, from the Uffizi (cat. 59) and Parma (cat. 60). The Parma portrait is, of course, double-sided – that is its point – and the need to show both sides of the picture (Pl 2, Pl 5) while maintaining the needs of security and conservation was ingeniously solved in-house by displaying the picture within Perspex mounted on a separate plinth free of the wall. As one looked at this Self-portrait, thanks to another deft touch it was possible also to refer to the Uffizi Self-portrait (Pl 4) on the wall behind. Meanwhile, to the right of both was the painting of the festival of the maize harvest, *La Scartocciata* (cat. 62), also from Parma (in the royal collection there from the time it was painted), and the Tate scene of a market stall in Florence (cat. 57).

The most was then made of the Indian paintings, perhaps the trickiest section of all to put together. Zoffany’s handling in this period of his career, perforce it would seem, became less rich than hitherto, although it remained no less sure, and was accompanied by a corresponding spareness of composition in the individual portraits especially that created a distinctive geometry of design. Among many remarkable images, the nocturnal scene of a ceremony on the banks of a river stood out (cat. 95), a painting formerly ascribed to Thomas Daniell but listed in the 1801 inventory of Claude Martin. It served again to point up Zoffany’s extraordinary range, which was amply apparent in the late compositions based on events associated with the French Revolution. The tumultuous intricacy of these pictures, with their many layers of meaning, was anticipated in some of the Indian scenes (although those requested from India never, alas, arrived) including *Colonel Mordaunt’s Cock Match* (cat. 86) from the Tate, hung here beside the bizarre version of the same subject at White’s Club in London which was evidently begun by Zoffany – his hand is easy to distinguish in a number of the figures – but completed by a local Lucknow painter.

The clarity of the setting in Yale enabled several discoveries and re-considerations among the pictures. Zoffany was perhaps the most compulsive self-portraitist of all, for ever popping up within a composition, even when he was not – as he so often was – creating yet another separate painting or drawing of himself. Matthew Hargraves of the Yale Center spotted another, hitherto unsuspected – and unusually discreet – self-portrait by Zoffany in a reflection on a tea-urn in *Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Family* (cat. 72; Pl 3, Pl 6).
The present writer (who it must be admitted was responsible for some of the catalogue) was able to re-examine the Parma Self-portrait with Friar's Habit (cat. 60) (Pl. 2) in these excellent conditions and realized that the 'tear' to the print showing the Venus of Urbino was nothing of the sort but, yet more appositely, another condom positioned over the genital area. The pink ribbon for attachment around the circumference of one end of the condom is just visible, matching the other two hanging on the wall behind the artist (part of the difficulty in reading this area is due to its closeness to the frame). A further thought is that the gesture of donning the cowl, itself part of a protective masquerade outfit that will facilitate an evening's sexual adventures, is (in a sense) congruent with the putting-on of a condom. In the background of another Parma picture, La Scartocciata, the pairing in the right background of the young man and the old woman, who joke with the seated musician at the extreme right, is complemented by two husks of corn, one of which, one could now perceive, is old and withered, the other fresh. The young man is clasping the two husks together.

Another picture that it was possible to examine more clearly was the Uffizi Self-portrait (cat. 59) (Pl. 4) where the considerable amount of bitumen present, creating cracks and craters on the paint surface, has always made the mysterious scene in the painting on the back wall even more difficult to interpret than it might have been. It seems that the monk or friar kneeling in the background is not turning back to look in the direction of the Three Graces but has his head forward and is in the act of ladling/basting whatever is on the fire. To say that John Cuff and his Assistant (Pl. 1) is a highlight of this exhibition is also to draw attention to the painting's most distinctive feature: its concentration upon the fall of light on surfaces to a greater degree than in any other painting by Zoffany, who was as a matter of course a master of such effects. The reason is that this virtuoso display by the painter illuminates the subject of his painting, for Cuff was one of the greatest makers of optical instruments of the century. Everywhere in the painting we see how light defines objects and is itself the means by which we discern the world around us. The light floods in through the window and glints upon every imaginable surface: wood, glass (sheet, bottle, window, lens), ceramic, metal, pottery, bristle, cloth, flesh, and paper. Moreover, the painting is deliberately reminiscent of Dutch 17th-century painting (as Martin Postle observes in the catalogue), a school pre-eminently associated with the realistic depiction of light in interiors. Zoffany's understanding of Dutch painting was evidently profound and can be seen in his handling of the paintings on the walls of Sir Lawrence Dundas with his Grandson (cat. 71; Pl. 7) every one of which can be identified in the sale catalogue of the Dundas collection in 1794. Each is painted in the artist's particular...
style, including Jan van de Capelle’s Shipping Recalmed, on the chimneybreast, a majestic masterpiece now in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff.

Early on in the exhibition, Susannah and the Elders of 1760 from Trier (cat. 8; Pl 8) turns out to be painted in a Dutch manner so specific that the only matter of debate is one more familiar in Rembrandt studies: whether this painting ‘of’ c1628-30 might be by Rembrandt or Jan Lievens, or by their master Pieter Lastman. For an artist academically trained as Zoffany was, the imitation of earlier masters such as these would have been a familiar exercise, and he was able to exploit his chameleon-like capacity for the rest of his career, not least when he found himself in England, where he so swiftly adapted to local expectations, although his debt to Hogarth in particular went far deeper than stylistic pyrotechnics. Conversely, for the Habsburgs Zoffany was readily able to adopt a gleaming, licked and polished finish of the kind favoured in contemporary international court circles, notably in Archduke Francis.

Even among more familiar canvases the opportunity to examine paintings closely in such good conditions revealed fresh things, for example, in the Garrick Club version of David Garrick and Mrs Pritchard in Macbeth (cat. 28) which includes a detail that recurs in 18th-century stage depictions of madness. Macbeth’s own hair (although it would not in fact have been Garrick’s own hair) can be seen to have escaped from beneath his wig to flow freely behind his back. This occurs in Zoffany’s portrait of David Ross as Hamlet (Garrick Club) and Francis Hayman’s Springer Barry and Mary Elmy in Hamlet (Garrick Club). In contemporary terms, this was obviously so serious a breach of decorum as to demonstrate that Macbeth, like Hamlet, is in mental disarray, temporarily out of his mind, a key point in Garrick’s interpretation of this pivotal scene.

The exhibition offers the chance to study Zoffany’s picture-making at almost every stage, for the very good reason that he left so many canvases incomplete. As he moved from one country to another, with barely time to sort out his affairs, whether he found himself in Germany, Italy, England or India, at every stage he would leave a trail of unfinished commissions. Some he simply arranged to have sold after his departure. Others remained in his studio many years after they had been begun, as did Charles Macklin in the
The Merchant of Venice (cat. 29). This particular painting was started in about 1768 only to be worked upon again in 1779 after Zoffany's prolonged absence in Italy, although even then it was never finished. It is interesting to note the perfection of the portraits of the two contemporary judges whom latterly Zoffany chose to include in this painting. One of them, Lord Mansfield, had presided over a court case involving Macklin when he had complimented the actor upon his fine performance in court. Macklin's head is also fully finished, as is that of Matthew Clarke, the actor playing Antonio (to the right, with shirt open). The kind of surface we find in this painting, with large areas of free and masterly blocking-in to be seen immediately alongside fully worked-up passages, can quite often be seen in Zoffany's canvases and is a phenomenon that has led to many errors of attribution, with some paintings manifestly by Zoffany incorrectly identified as of doubtful authorship.

In practice, some of Zoffany's unfinished pictures were evidently accepted by those who had commissioned them, grateful for something rather than nothing, especially when what there was of Zoffany's painting was of such superior quality and when there was no certainty of ever seeing the wandering artist again. The St Martin's Lane Academy (cat. 41), first identified as such by Martin Postle, is another incomplete masterpiece. It includes the almost inevitable self-portrait together with important records of other artists in attendance, and features many acute touches as Zoffany worked from left to right across the surface, although not steadily but—and it seems to have been instinctive—finishing as much or as little as the fancy took him along the way: as is much or as little as the fancy took him along the way: as is the case with The Merchant of Venice.

Then there is the question of various versions of the same composition that Zoffany produced (and very occasionally someone else produced). This has come into prominence with the recent acquisition by the Garrick Club of the two conversation pieces from the Lambton collection showing Garrick at his villa beside the Thames at Hampton (Pl 11, PI 12). Neither was lent to the exhibition, since their presence in a sale at Sotheby's that coincided with the show was considered more pressing. The Yale Center's (later) version of Mr and Mrs Garrick by the Shakespeare Temple (Pl 9) is, however, in the exhibition and here, thanks to the generosity of Iain Macintosh, the writer can correct some misinformation that he promulgated in the catalogue. Iain points out that the Temple to Shakespeare cannot have been designed, as is usually said, by Robert Adam, who was away in Italy from October 1754 and first saw the Temple only in 1759. On that occasion, his brother John declared that the Temple to Shakespeare in the prime version of the picture. This was carefully corrected in the second version, the Yale Center's own, exhibited in Yale (Pl 9), where the outlines of the vertical lines especially can be seen marked in, although the artist did not entirely adhere to them. This version does contain some pentimenti, for example, around the outstretched arm of Garrick and the temple dome, and the face of Mrs Garrick was evidently not fully finished. But these are as nothing compared with the Garrick Club version where there is a full-length figure wearing buckled shoes discernible reclining on the bank between the dog and the boatman, with plentiful changes of mind around the dog and each figure, the dome, and even the footscrapers. In the companion piece there are just as many. Together, these two pictures create a charming contrast in mood. The happy atmosphere of the tea-party picture gives way to something more melancholy in the Temple painting, where the sky, upstream and towards the west, is tinged with the sunset, while darker clouds advance from the right, as Garrick prepares to leave for town (he has been reading a play in the tea-party composition). Seen hanging alongside each other, it is also evident that they form, as it were, two parts of an interrupted panorama, an ingenious conceit.


Reviews follow in the next number of The British Art Journal of the exhibition in London and also of Mary Webster, Johan Zoffany 1733-1810, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, New Haven and London, 2011.