

Artist & Empire

25 November 2015 – 10 April 2016

Room 3

Imperial Heroics

Large Print Guide



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3 Imperial Heroics

History painting can be defined as the visual commemoration of some remarkable or heroic occasion. It was an all-inclusive hybrid species of art that brought documentary forms of portraiture, topography and genre into dialogue with the poetic licence required for high art. From the period of the Seven Years War (1756–63) to the colonial wars of the late Victorian era, British historical painting played a key role in shaping British perceptions of overseas events. Initially characterised by treaty and negotiation scenes, as seen in paintings by Francis Hayman, Thomas Daniell and Agostino Brunias, it later came to be dominated by representations of heroic struggle and martyrdom by artists who also served as illustrators for the popular press.

Although seemingly objective, with some pictures purporting to be eye-witness accounts, history paintings were carefully staged to win the sympathy of audiences in Britain for the Empire. Only a few are suggestive of the social upheavals and unequal power relationships which the rhetoric of Empire sought to gloss over. From the mid-nineteenth century, photography contributed to the narratives of imperialism but, as the images of Felice Beato indicate, it also accustomed viewers to representations of warfare, eventually displacing painting as reportage.

Work captions and labels
Clockwise from right of wall text

Andrew Gilbert b.1980

British Infantry Advance on Jerusalem, 4th of July, 1879

2015

Mixed media installation

As part of his objective to exorcise Britain's imperial past, the Scottish-born artist Andrew Gilbert has created temporary installations which refer to the tableaux found in European military and ethnographic museums. In making British soldiers the objects of attention, the artist opens up the possibility that instead of being defeated at Ulundi, the Zulus had triumphed and placed British soldiers on display as 'curious, exotic and primitive'.

Courtesy of the artist. X55840

Thomas Jones Barker 1815–1852

**The Secret of England's Greatness (Queen Victoria
Presenting a Bible in the Audience Chamber at Windsor)**

c.1863

Oil paint on canvas

Barker's painting was likely to have been based on an unfounded anecdote popular in evangelical circles in the 1850s. Apparently when asked by an envoy speaking for an African prince how Britain had become so powerful in the world, the queen handed him a Bible and pronounced the words given in the title. The picture is an allegory dramatising the role played by statesmanship, monarchy and Protestantism in the development of Britain's emerging colonies in Africa. Prince Albert stands to the left of the queen, and behind the African are Foreign Secretary Lord John Russell, and Prime Minister Lord Palmerston.

National Portrait Gallery, London. X52414

George William Joy 1844–1925

**The Death of General Gordon, Khartoum,
26th January, 1885**

1893

Oil paint on canvas

Gordon's death at Khartoum was prompted by the nationalist uprising in the Sudan led by Muhammad Ahmad who, as the 'Mahdi' became the focus for a jihad against the Anglo-Egyptian administration in the region. Besieged by the Mahdi's forces, the city under Gordon's command held out for almost a year until it fell just two days before the arrival of a relief expedition reluctantly sent by the British government. Gordon became a martyr in the service of Empire as immortalised in Joy's iconic painting.

Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery)

X52544

Elizabeth Butler 1846–1933

The Remnants of an Army: Jellalabad, January 13th 1842

**'One man alone reached Jellalabad. Literally one man –
Dr. Brydon.'**

1879

Oil paint on canvas

Butler's painting is a retrospective image of a tragic episode for the British from the First Afghan War of 1839–42. This was provoked when the forces of the East India Company occupied Kabul with the aim of protecting British India from alleged threats from the Russian Empire to the north. In the face of Afghan resistance, the British contingent was forced to retreat in hazardous conditions to Jalalabad. The painting shows Dr William Brydon, assistant surgeon in the Bengal army, arriving alone at the British garrison. At the time he was believed to be the sole survivor from the expedition.

Tate. Presented by Sir Henry Tate 1897. N01553

Charles Edwin Fripp 1854–1906

The Last Stand at Isandlhula

1885

Oil paint on canvas

The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879–80 was prompted by the British invasion of Zululand in South Africa. Underestimating the military skills of the Zulus under their king Cetshwayo, the British force was divided on 22 January 1879, leaving the temporary base camp at Isandlwana disorganised and unprotected. Later that day it was routed in a surprise attack. Fripp visited the site as a 'special artist' covering the war for *The Graphic*. The 'last stand' format turns a scene of chaos and carnage into one of discipline and courage on the part of the 24th Regiment.

The Council of the National Army Museum. X55851

Allan Stewart 1865–1951

To the Memory of Brave Men:

**The Last Stand of Major Allan Wilson at the Shangani,
4th December 1893**

1897

Oil paint on canvas

Stewart's painting represents a moment from the first Matabele War of 1893 when a small band of soldiers in the service of the British South Africa Company were wiped out by Matabele warriors determined to prevent the capture of their king Lobengula. The painting was commissioned by the hotelier and mayor of Bournemouth, Merton Russell-Cotes, after the original painting exhibited in 1896. The latter belonged to George Cawston, one of the board of directors of the BSAC, who donated his picture to the people of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth
X52602

William Barnes Wollen 1857–1936

The Last Stand of the 44th Regiment at Gundamuck, 1842
1898

Oil paint on canvas

Wollen's painting commemorates an incident on the retreat from Kabul during the closing stages of the First Afghan War. Following eight days under siege the last 50 survivors of the 44th East Essex Regiment were overwhelmed on the top of the hill of Gandamak in the Jagdalak Pass. One of the few survivors was Lieutenant Thomas Souter (right of centre) who was taken hostage after wrapping the regimental colours around his body.

Essex Regiment Museum, Chelmsford. X56043

Joseph Noel Paton 1821–1901

In Memoriam

1858

Oil paint on panel

The slaughter of women and children at Cawnpore (now Kanpur) on 15 July 1857 was the most notorious atrocity associated with the Indian Rebellion, provoking bloody reprisals. It was in response to the event that Noel Paton exhibited this picture which originally featured murderous sepoy breaking into the cell. Apparently the original image caused such outrage that the artist was compelled to alter it by inserting Highlanders in place of the rebels. This might have been at the request of the publisher, Alexander Hill, who purchased the painting with the intention of issuing an engraving with a particularly Scottish appeal.

Private collection. X52730

Henry Nelson O'Neil 1817–1880

Home Again, 1858

1859

Oil paint on canvas

This picture forms the sequel to **Eastward Ho!**. It shows soldiers alighting at Gravesend in the company of their families and reprises many of the characters seen in the first picture including the young rifleman with a Victoria Cross and the sergeant, now wounded, in the centre. Reviews of the second painting were less enthusiastic than the first, probably because the image of returning troops was less easy for audiences to accept as honest reportage with many men experiencing ill-health and poverty.

Museum of London. Purchased with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund. X52724

Edward Armitage 1817–1896

Retribution

1858

Oil paint on canvas

Armitage was one of the few exponents of public art in Britain and it is likely that this picture was intended for the new Town Hall in Leeds. The painting is an allegory of retribution in which a hefty Amazonian embodiment of Britannia or Justice is shown impaling a Bengal tiger, emblematic of India, with her sword. The bodies in the foreground refer to the massacre of women and children at Cawnpore during the 1857 Indian Rebellion – an event which caught the imagination of the British public and fuelled the appetite for revenge.

Leeds Museums and Galleries (Leeds Art Gallery)

X52545

Henry Nelson O'Neil 1817–1880

Eastward Ho! August 1857

1857

Oil paint on canvas

O'Neil's picture was made in response to the revolt of Indian soldiers in Britain's East India Company Bengal army which began in May 1857. August, to which the title of the picture refers, saw a large number of troops despatched to Calcutta to help contain the rebellion. The picture depicts an embarkation scene with anonymous soldiers saying farewell to loved ones. Included in the group are a Chelsea Pensioner holding up a medal to his grandson and a sergeant reaching down for a final clasp of his wife's hand.

Elton Hall Collection. X52776

Robert Home 1752–1834

**The Reception of the Mysorean Hostage Princes
by Marquis Cornwallis, 26 February 1792**

c.1793

Oil paint on canvas

Opposition from Haidar 'Ali and his son Tipu to the East India Company's expansionism led to successive Anglo-Mysore wars. In 1792, Tipu was forced to hand the Company a large amount of money and territory. To ensure his compliance, Lord Cornwallis, Governor-General, took two of Tipu's sons as hostages.

Home's picture depicts the handover of the young princes to Cornwallis and his staff, who appear as models of patrician benevolence, sparing a British audience the anger and distress their actions must have caused. Home witnessed the event and includes himself, portfolio in hand, as if to corroborate the truth of his picture.

The Council of the National Army Museum. X52790

William Blake 1757–1827

The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan

c.1805–9

Tempera on wood

Admiral Nelson's victories over the French and Spanish navies and death at Trafalgar (1805) made him a national hero. They introduced a century of British sea power and underpinned the expansion of Empire.

Blake's picture posits a visionary type of history painting that he hoped to realise on a larger scale. Based partly on Indian images of Shiva, Nelson is given divine status, while the sea monster Leviathan twines itself around the 'Nations of the Earth' with which Britain was at war. A manacled slave awaits rescue by the Royal Navy. The slave trade was made illegal in the Empire in 1807.

Tate. Purchased 1914. N03006

Agostino Brunias c.1730–1796

**Sir William Young Conducting a Treaty with
the Black Caribs on the Island of St Vincent**

c.1773

Oil paint on canvas

Brunias painted this picture for his patron, Sir William Young, Commissioner for the Caribbean Islands ceded to Britain after the Seven Years War. Under their leader Joseph Chatoyer, the Black Caribs of St Vincent had resisted repeated demands that they sell their land to the British colonial government. The picture commemorates the treaty which ended the conflict. Chatoyer (the tall figure in the centre) stands with other chiefs warily contemplating the terms of the treaty dictated by the British delegation on the right.

Private collection. X56044

Thomas Daniell 1749–1840

**Charles Warre Malet, Concluding a Treaty in 1790 in Durbar
with the Peshwa of the Maratha Empire**

1805

Oil paint on canvas

While fighting its opponents, the East India Company made alliances with other Indian rulers. In 1790 it concluded a treaty with the Nizam of Hyderabad and the Peshwa of the Maratha Empire, establishing 'friendship' with the aim of preventing Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, from 'disturbing the general tranquillity'.

The treaty was negotiated in the Peshwa's capital, Poona (Pune), by the British Resident, Charles Warre Malet.

In Daniell's picture, painted for him, Malet presents the document in formal durbar in the Peshwa's court. When exhibited in London, the picture was praised as 'unrivalled perhaps in Oriental grouping, characters and costume'.

Tate. Accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax and allocated to Tate 2007. T12511

Francis Hayman 1708–1776

Robert Clive and Mir Jafar after the Battle of Plassey, 1757

c.1760

Oil paint on canvas

Hayman was the first British artist to turn imperial subjects into significant history paintings. Hung in London's pleasure grounds, Vauxhall Gardens, as patriotic propaganda for 'every Briton, who regards the honour and prosperity of his country', they showed British advances in North America and India, the global extremes of Empire.

The originals do not survive. This is a sketch for one of them, depicting negotiations between Robert Clive and the quisling Mir Jafar, whose treachery helped give the British victory over the Nawab of Oudh (Avadh) and put the East India Company in control of Bengal.

National Portrait Gallery, London. X52416

Benjamin West 1738–1820

The Death of General James Wolfe

1779

Oil paint on canvas

James Wolfe became a national hero for his successful conquest of French-controlled Quebec during the Seven Years War. He died from wounds as news arrived of the victory, which paved the way for British hegemony in North America.

West created a sensation with his picture of the subject, exhibited in 1771 and repeated in other versions. This one was painted for the uncle of Wolfe's aide-de-camp, who regarded the general as a 'military saint'. Wolfe's death is attended by his officers and staff, including a Highlander and a green-coated Ranger, and witnessed by a concerned Native American.

Ickworth, the Bristol Collection (acquired by the National Land Fund and transferred to the National Trust in 1956).

X52520

Showcase

Indian Artist, possibly Murshidabad, Bengal

Chess Set

c.1795

Ivory

This chess set is composed of pieces representing the armies of Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore, and the East India Company.

Manchester City Galleries. X52723

Showcase

Felice A Beato 1832–1909

Hodson's Horse

c.1858

Photograph, albumen print on paper

This image is typical in combining propaganda familiar from history painting and engraved illustrations with more realistic photo-reportage. It celebrates a Sikh cavalry regiment raised in 1857 by Major William Hodson to fight Hindu and Muslim sepoys who were mounting the Indian Rebellion. Hodson's Horse played a famous role in the brutal retaking of Delhi and Lucknow by the British. Hodson does not appear in the photograph because Beato arrived after he was shot in battle.

Wilson Centre for Photography. X53617

Showcase

Felice A Beato 1832–1909

Interior View of the North Fort of Taku

Bastion of the 'Pehtang Fort'

1860

From the album **The Views of China**

Photographs, albumen prints on paper

In the 19th century Britain and other Western powers fought China for access to markets, and infiltrated an illegal trade in opium. In 1860, Beato photographed the aftermath of the Third Battle of Taku Forts in the so-called Second Opium War. Beato was careful to show only non-British bodies.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London. X54118, X54116

Showcase

John Burke 1843–1900

left: **General Roberts Inspecting the Captured Guns** 1880

right: **Upper Bala Hissar from Gateway above the Residency**
1880

From the **Kabul War Album**

Photographs, albumen prints on paper

Rudyard Kipling described the imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia over Central Asia as the 'Great Game'. Burke ran a studio in Peshawar, between India and Afghanistan, and accompanied the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–81). Burke's albums display orderly campsites, group portraits and diplomatic ceremonies. He implies British violence without showing it.

Wilson Centre for Photography. X53618

Showcase

Jonathan Adagogo Green 1873–1905

Portrait of the King of Benin, Oba Ovonramwen

1897

Photographic print

Adogogo Green was an 'artist-photographer' working for African traders in the Niger Delta, and for Europeans. He took this photograph of the Oba of Benin in captivity aboard the *Ivy*, an armed British government steam yacht. Guarded by British-trained soldiers, and with his ankles shackled, Oba Ovonramwen retains a regal dignity.

The British Museum, London. X53206