Exotic Anatomies: Stubbs, Banks & Cultures of Natural History (London, 9 Mar 15)

Royal Museums Greenwich, London, Mar 09, 2015
www.rmg.co.uk/researchers/conferences

Katy Barrett

Symposium discussing the wider contexts of our paintings by George Stubbs 'The Kongouro from New Holland' (Kangaroo) and ‘Portrait of a Large Dog’ (Dingo).

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Exotic Anatomies: Stubbs, Banks and the cultures of Natural History
When Joseph Banks came back from Cook’s first voyage of exploration, he returned with a new world. Not only did he bring collections of specimens that would occupy him and his assistant Daniel Solander for a lifetime, but also images and accounts of the South Pacific that changed forever how Europeans saw the world.
One of the oddest items was the pelt of a kangaroo, a new animal encountered in Australia, which would tax scientists and fascinate the public for decades. Banks commissioned George Stubbs to paint the animal’s portrait, reconstructed from the inflated or stuffed skin, drawings and descriptions. The painting then hung in his house in Soho Square, part of a domestic and scholarly space that soon became a virtual institution and gathering-place for the scientific community.
Further afield, Banks’s specimens were dissected and analysed by the famous surgeon brothers, William and John Hunter. They became anatomical objects in the same spaces where the Hunters taught and studied human anatomy, and where they displayed their collections, including other examples of Stubbs ‘exotic’ animal paintings. Stubbs’s kangaroo was rapidly engraved for the published account of Cook’s voyage, while Cook and his successors brought back live kangaroos for royal menageries and popular entertainments.
Considering the interrelationship between Stubbs, Banks, Cook and the Hunter brothers, this symposium will place Stubbs’s kangaroo at the centre of a number of burgeoning cultures of natural history in 18th-century London. From the gentleman-scholar’s fashionable home, to the practical and controversial space of the anatomy theatre, to the hyperbolic public entertainment, the kangaroo brought a new ‘exoticism’ to natural history.

Programme
09.30–10.00 Registration and refreshments

10.00–11.30 Session 1
Stubbs in Soho Square with the Bankses

Getting to know you: Joseph Banks, Australia and the kangaroo after Stubbs
Jordan Goodman, University College London

Science and sociability: Sarah Sophia Banks and the domestic quarters at 32 Soho Square
Arlene Leis, University of York

Chair/comment: Simon Werrett, University College London

11.30–12.00 Coffee and tea

12.00–13.30 Session 2
Stubbs in the anatomy theatre with the Hunter brothers

William Hunter, George Stubbs and the pursuit of Nature
Helen McCormack, The Glasgow School of Art

John Hunter, 1728–93: Dr Jekyll or Dr Dolittle?
Wendy Moore, author and freelance journalist

Chair/comment: Katy Barrett, Royal Museums Greenwich
13.30–14.30 Lunch

14.30–16.00 Session 3
Stubbs in the London exhibition hall with the public

The kangaroo as scientific curiosity and public spectacle in the late 18th century – from Sydney Cove to London
Markman Ellis, Queen Mary, University of London

Wonders from Down Under: kangaroos in popular menageries
Helen Cowie, University of York

Chair/comment: Christine Riding, Royal Museums Greenwich

16.00–16.30 Round up and response session

Richard Dunn, Royal Museums Greenwich
Geoff Quilley, University of Sussex

16.30–17.00 Curator-led tour of The Art and Science of Exploration

17.00–18.30 Wine reception

Fee: £10. Concessions: £7.50
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Reference:

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