

EXHIBITIONS



72. *Julia Jackson*, by Julia Margaret Cameron. 1867. Albumen print from wet collodion glass negative, 31 by 26 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

exhibitions seen in London. But, as it is probably the finest of all the Cameron albums known to survive, it contains many superb images, including the only known print of what has become the most popular and widely recognised of all her photographs, *Lago, study from an Italian* (1867).

Influence and Intimacy is, like the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition, a little light on Cameron's most famous and admired portraits. This can be attributed to the fact that the Herschel Album is biased towards her early, particularly her religious, work. For that reason, although the album was originally purchased for the National Portrait Gallery, London, by public subscription in 1975, the Gallery's Trustees agreed to pass the album on to the Bradford Museum upon its founding eight years later. Nevertheless, it contains no less than seven portraits of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, as well as other Victorian heroes such as Henry Taylor (one of Tennyson's rivals for the post of Poet Laureate), William Carlyle, the artists Watts and Holman Hunt and, of course, Herschel himself.

Not all the prints seen here come from the Herschel Album. Near the end of the exhibition are eight of the images made during the last four years of Cameron's life in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. Although these were also in the last Cameron exhibition in London, they are perennially fascinating, and give the lie to those who accuse her of looking down on her servants and plantation workers in Ceylon (or in the Isle of Wight).

Although this exhibition is not hung so as to tell a narrative as revealingly as that at the Victoria and Albert Museum, it has some fascinating extras. One is the only surviving piece of Cameron's equipment, her first camera lens. Its fixed *f*₆ aperture helps to explain why her photographs are rarely totally in focus. There is also the manuscript of her unfinished biography, *Annals of My Glass House*, and important letters between her and Herschel. The letter (dated 31st December 1864) displayed at the beginning of the exhibition is particularly insightful, providing a clear expression of her artistic credo.

While all these objects have been exhibited on more than one occasion, the recently acquired daguerreotype portrait of Cameron with her daughter, Julia, probably taken by a commercial studio in Calcutta in early 1845, is a real first. It is a pity that the caption wrongly claims it to be the earliest 'image' of her in existence, as a drawing by James Prinsep shows her about a decade earlier.⁴ But the daguerreotype is certainly the first known photographic image of Cameron, and a valuable addition to our records of a great artist.

And a great artist she was. Hilton Kramer, chief art critic of *The New York Times* for seventeen years, once called her 'one of the finest portraitists of the nineteenth century – in any medium'. Anyone who visits these two exhibitions will surely only agree – and this reviewer can only profoundly hope that many of those visitors will also recognise that her artistry is by no means only seen in portraits.

¹ The exhibition was previously shown at the **Multi-media Art Museum, Moscow** (18th November 2014 to 1st February 2015), the **Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent** (14th March to 14th June 2015) and the **Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney** (13th August to 25th October 2015). After its London showing it travels to **Fundación MAPFRE, Madrid** (15th March to 15th May) and the **Mitsubishi Ichigokan Museum, Tokyo** (2nd July to 19th September).

² Catalogue: *Julia Margaret Cameron: Photographs to electrify you with delight and startle the world*. By Marta Weiss. 186 pp. incl. 137 col. ills. (MACK, London, 2015), £25. ISBN 978-1-910164-29-7.

³ According to the British Museum acquisitions register, they were presented on Thursday 12th January 1865, mounted in one large frame and described as 'Being the Fruits of the Spirit. Illustrated from Life'. All nine were transferred to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2000, and are shown (in separate frames) in the current exhibition.

⁴ The portrait is reproduced in C. Ford: *Julia Margaret Cameron: 19th Century Photographer of Genius*, London 2003. The portrait carries her maiden name, 'Pattle'. She married Charles Hay Cameron in 1838. James Prinsep died in 1840.

Recent exhibitions

London

by JAMES LAWRENCE

FOR VIEWERS WHO regard an encounter with a work of art primarily as an insight into a singular creative episode, exhibitions at museums can be unsatisfying. Dense crowds are a problem, especially when distracted by hand-held devices. A greater problem, however, lies in the curatorial habit of directing viewers' attention before they have a chance to formulate their own responses. The worst versions of this – condescending interpretive texts and pedagogical gimmicks – may be in retreat. Nonetheless, within the ecology of the art world, museum shows are painstakingly cultivated specimens that exemplify artistic and intellectual lineage. They may contribute significantly to the general understanding of art; but they leave scant room for instances of doubt and dissent to announce themselves as more than bumps in the road to some greater achievement. Such delicate and fleeting qualities are best presented in shows that are tightly focused and not rehearsed to exhaustion.

The exhibition *Early Mondrian: Paintings 1900–1905*, at **David Zwirner, London** (closed 23rd January), exemplified the virtue of swiftness of execution on a restricted canvas.¹ Twelve small paintings, hung in a single room, elucidated the uncertainties of an artist whose direction was far from clear. Only the generous amount of hindsight that we now possess allows us to discern – or impose – hints of what was to come from Mondrian. The broad strokes and perspectival elision in these paintings have considerable rudimentary charm that simultaneously suggests incipient greatness or a potential lifetime of pleasant adequacy. A farmhouse behind a fence