

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Letter from Europe: Ten years on

It is fascinating to look back ten years to the September-October 2006 edition of *Arts of Asia*. The Editorial in that issue gave a detailed account of the Brussels Oriental Art Fair, held in June 2006. In the same issue I contributed an article, *Paris in June and a New World-Class Museum*, which celebrated the opening of the **Musée du Quai Branly** in Paris.

This letter examines some of the changes which have taken place in the Oriental art market in Europe in the intervening ten years. I have deliberately excluded the world of the international salerooms from this review. *Arts of Asia* is renowned for its in-depth auction reports and readers will be able to use these to compare prices over the past decade. Three dramatic changes may be mentioned in passing: auction prices for the finest Chinese objects have risen inexorably; from tentative beginnings the Asian contemporary art market has become a major force; and Tang dynasty horses and camels are now endangered species, at least in the salerooms.

To begin at the Quai Branly, this innovative museum has gone from strength to strength in the past decade. Jean Nouvel's building is not to everyone's taste (you either love it or hate it) but it has seen a succession of major exhibitions featuring *arts premiers* and including the tribal arts of Asia. Other European museums—the British Museum, for example—simply cannot match the dynamism and flair of the Quai Branly.

There is space here to mention just one recent show at this venue: *Mata Hoata: Arts et Société aux Iles Marquises*, which ran from 12th April to 24th July, 2016. This was the most comprehensive exhibition ever devoted to the Marquesas Islands and was accompanied by a splendid 320-page catalogue. The art of this Polynesian island group has fascinated collectors and many artists, including Gauguin (who lived and died in the Marquesas) and Picasso. I was shown round the exhibition by its curator, Professor Carol Ivory, who emphasised the Asian origins of the islanders and their art. In particular, the influence of Taiwan on Marquesas art is very apparent.

The Brussels Oriental Art Fair of June 2006 featured thirty-one exhibitors, among them Michael Woerner of Hong Kong and Erik Thomsen, then in the process of relocating to New York. Ten years later the dealers in Asian art (AAB) joined forces with colleagues specialising in Tribal art (BRUNEAF) and Ancient art (BAAF) to create a new entity, **Cultures: The World Arts Fair**, which ran from 8th to 12th June, 2016. This new venture featured some seventy international dealers and effectively took over the Sablon district of Brussels. This combination of previously separate disciplines led to a productive synergy over the five-day event, with crossover sales reported by several dealers.

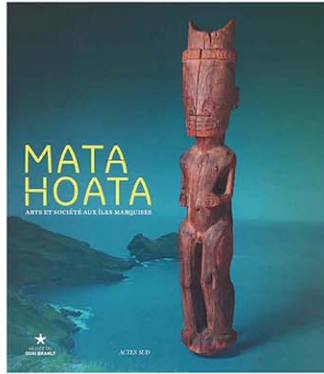
**Parcours des Mondes**, based in the historic



Barbara Harding at the Musée du Quai Branly, 2016



Marquesas Islands club to be offered at *Parcours des Mondes*, 2016, by Voyageurs et Curieux gallery, Paris



Catalogue of the Mata Hoata exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly, 2016



John Murray, *View of the Taj Mahal*, albumen print, circa 1860. Prahlad Bubbar gallery, London

Saint Germain des Prés district of Paris, will run from 6th to 11th September, 2016 and this year celebrates its fifteenth anniversary. A special retrospective exhibition will trace the history of this event from its inception in 2001 and will pay tribute to the dealers and collectors who worked to make this the world's most important Tribal art fair. In 2015 *Parcours* broadened its scope to include fine Asian art and so can claim to be the pioneer of this development. Oriental art dealers participating this year will include such well known names as Gregg Baker, Jacques Barrère, Christophe Hioco, Alexis Renard and Max Rutherford.

The success of *Parcours* can be attributed to several factors, including its admirable location and its relaxed "street party" atmosphere. Significantly, this fair has had a wide-ranging effect on the city of Paris itself; for example, some twenty associated exhibitions are planned for this September, as well as a gala evening at the Musée Cernuschi (don't miss it!).

Shortly before *Parcours des Mondes* opens its doors, London will stage its own, rather smaller, event under the title **Tribal Art London**. This will run from 30th August to 3rd September, 2016 at the elegant Mall Galleries, a short walk from Buckingham Palace. Visitors to this fair will find a good selection of Asian art, together with African and Oceanic objects. *Tribal Art London* has attracted international dealers and is increasingly successful, with some twenty exhibitors booked for this year.

An interesting recent development has

been the burgeoning interest in vintage photography of Asia, no doubt stimulated by some outstanding recent exhibitions (see *Arts of Asia* January-February 2014 and also May-June 2015). An important exhibition staged by the **Prahlad Bubbar gallery** of London brought together photographic images made in India between 1855 and 1870 by Linnaeus Tripe, Dr John Murray and Samuel Bourne. The show ran from 18th April to 22nd May, 2016 at this Cork Street gallery. Shubha Bubbar, who showed me round, said that the exhibition was a commercial success and also attracted a young clientele who would normally focus on contemporary Asian art. I particularly liked the work of John Murray who used both glass and waxed-paper negatives to produce beautiful images of Mughal architecture.

In conclusion we should take note of one highly important change in the Asian art market—the increasing tendency for dealers to conduct their business on the Internet rather than from a gallery. Such dealers often supplement their online business by exhibiting at the major fairs. This trend is very obvious in London where there has been a large-scale exodus of dealers from their Mayfair premises and a relentless advance of international fashion retailers willing to pay the rents now demanded.

What changes will come about in the next decade? I hope to offer a report in 2026.

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