

Research-based: Excerpt of AH2203 Art and Empire Term Paper (586 words)

It seems fitting to describe Company School Painting as an art-science because it does not fall squarely into either realm of art or science. But, this mere process of elimination should not be the foremost reason. Company School Paintings' extensive and sensitive artistic documentation of local nature, people, and culture laid the foundations for further scientific discovery and the development of local art forms. These interdisciplinary contributions to institutions of knowledge in and outside of colonies lend the greatest merit to its status as an art-science. As Barnard (2016) broadly puts, colony institutions like the Calcutta Botanical Gardens and the Singapore Botanic Gardens, even if created as derivatives of royal metropole institutions, did not act merely in the capacity of a lesser body; conversely, strong intra-peripheral cooperation helped these gardens build their own reputations and develop a purpose outside of imperial service. The artists, scribes, informants, and participants in the creation of botanical Company School Paintings commissioned by Farquhar, Raffles, and other colonial administrators helped build a lasting trove of native natural history knowledge for the Singapore Botanical Gardens to eventually rely on when they pivoted to focusing on their own independent collections and research (Barnard 2016, Kwa 2010). It is chiefly the efforts of these people that ensured the successful brokering of knowledge to be made accessible to educational fraternities and the public as well as between periphery and metropole. Burkill (1949) notes Farquhar's collection had none of his own handwriting, with the exercise of his influence in its production limited to some direction of species choices; he emphasises the greater role that Farquhar's Malay staff played. This is echoed by Kathirithamby-Wells' (2009) singling out of Orang Asli skills in forestry, tree climbing, and tree identification: essential steps to procure the parts of plants

needed to paint its every stage fully. Outside of botanical art, Patna, where Company School Paintings proliferated, had an art school set up by Commercial Resident Charles D'Oyly to cultivate local artists' talents and introduce them to new methods and media (Archer 1992). These artists, equipped with their previous experiences in Mughal art and new instruction in British techniques, made use of their advantageous skillsets to open their own stores and market their art independently and successfully (Archer 1992). They enjoyed autonomy in style and substance: whether they adhered to a more British style of muted watercolours or brightly painted indigenous styles was their choice, as were the subjects they could depict, whether landscapes, occupations, animals, or scenes of their daily lives (Archer 1992).

Yet, as vibrant a view these Company School Paintings provided Europeans of the arts and sciences in the colonies and as much as they encouraged growth in these colonies' own arts and science sectors, the inherent power imbalances of colonialism have erased or stifled equal recognition of its contributors. The Chinese artists and Malay scribes to Southeast Asian botanical art paintings were unidentified and unattributed (Joraimi 2022, Kwa 2010), while Ishwari Prasad, a Company School painter who had Indian training and was hired at the Calcutta School of Art, was still seen as inferior to and paid less than a European-trained counterpart (Archer 1992). Despite the indigenous and non-European voices being the most valuable and unique characteristics of the production of Company School Paintings, they have also ended up the most obscured, a fate that may be remedied, albeit belatedly, by exhibiting and approaching the paintings from an art-science perspective that completely uncovers all the local labours that have otherwise been in the shadows of their commissioners.

Reference List

- Archer, M. (1992) *Company paintings: Indian paintings of the British period*. Edited by Victoria and Albert Museum and G. Parlett. London : Ahmedabad : Middletown, NJ: The Museum ; Mapin Pub. Pvt. ; Grantha Corp (Indian art series).
- Barnard, T.P. (2016) 'CHAPTER ONE Nature's Colony', in *Nature's Colony: Empire, Nation and Environment in the Singapore Botanic Gardens*. NUS Press Pte Ltd, pp. 1–13.
- Burkill, I.H. (1949) 'William Farquhar's Drawings of Malacca Plants', *The Gardens' Bulletin Singapore*, pp. 404–407.
- Joraimi, F. (2021) 'A Banquet of Malayan Fruits', *Biblioasia*, June.
- Kathirithamby-Wells, J. (2009) 'PENINSULAR MALAYSIA IN THE CONTEXT OF NATURAL HISTORY AND COLONIAL SCIENCE', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, 11(1), pp. 337–74.
- Kwa, C.G. (2010) 'Drawing Nature in the East Indies', in *Natural history drawings: the complete William Farquhar collection: Malay Peninsula, 1803-1818*. Singapore: Editions Didier Millet : National Museum of Singapore, pp. 316–317.

Creative: Excerpt of Creative Writing Response to *The House on Mango Street* (504 words)

They come home together, which never happens. It's always Mama first. She walks from the nearby hospital. About an hour later, the truck rolls around. Not Papa's own, but the company truck that drops him off. Once he gets more seniority, he'll be able to take over the truck. *Tío* Pablo promises, and I believe him. More than I believe anything that comes from Mama's boss, at least. He looks like the priest at our school, always up around the altars, higher than us.

But he did something good today, at least. Mama got a bonus at work. A big enough one for Mama to use a quarter at a payphone to call Papa and tell him that we can have a big dinner today. She also has the day off tomorrow. There's no rush when she comes into the kitchen, when her hands will be wet or oily or occupied until late at night when her eyes are closing and her mouth is slowed. I use the best paper I can find for her hands. The least crumpled, least scratchy paper, paired with the least chewed-down pencil. The prized Crayola—you wouldn't be able to recognise it because the label's fallen off, but, yes, it's name brand.

Lastly, Papa's hand isn't drawn by me, but by himself. He sees me doing Mama's hand and joins in, saying he can do a better one, a cooler one. The word *cool* doesn't sound like it belongs in Papa's mouth, but we've never been the kinds to care much about fitting in. I marvel at the paper hand Papa raises in the air triumphantly long after I'm done with Mama's. It's more than just cool. It's almost perfect. He brings it up again. The throwaway story that he went to art school in Mexico. But he doesn't dismiss it as quickly as he usually does. It lingers in the air a little, like the smell of the *tamales* Mama is making, waiting to float down to the table, wondering if today is the time.

By the time I draw the house, it's dark out. I'm only allowed to stand at the porch and sketch it from there. The angle's wonky and I can't see much. Instead, I can hear the boys

thumping down the stairs and Nenny squealing. There's lots more smells now, delicious aromas that get my heart pumping and belly fired up.

The paper hands are stuck down with packing tape as fast as I can. I have a dinner waiting for me. One that I'm more excited about than whatever Mrs. Green might tell me about the slanted hands and crumbly colors.

I know she doesn't mean any harm, but I see it, sometimes, that same look in her eye as the nun. The one that stared at my house and my family, wondering how we could live like that. Like we were nothing. That's not true. We are something. We are so something that the whole picture just can't fit on her paper.