

European Visions: American Voices.* Kim Sloan, ed. British Museum Research Publication, 172. London: British Museum, 2009. 142 pp.

Reviewed by Margaret Huber

This collection of essays emerged from the exhibition *A New World: England's First View of America*, at the British Museum in 2007 and afterwards in North Carolina, New Haven, and Williamsburg. The exhibition presented John White's watercolors of the flora, fauna, and native people from Sir Walter Raleigh's colonizing voyage to the Outer Banks of North Carolina in 1585; together with the derived images by Theodor de Bry and the written descriptions of the area by the polymath Thomas Harriot. The editor of the volume, Kim Sloan, observes in her "Introduction" that since such an exhibition does not allow the inclusion of the natives' points of view, the conference was arranged to explore these perspectives, the present volume being the published proceedings.

Despite this stated intention, most of the papers are about situating the work of White, Harriot, de Bry, and their contemporaries in the European context that produced the colonizing effort in the first place. The variety and quality of scholarly interest in the subject is impressive. Although such diversity tends to distract the reader from the main point, the brief introductory essay that begins each of the four main sections is an effective anchor.

Providing a European background for these works is a necessary first step in re-creating indigenous points of view, since it makes it possible to allow for the artists' preconceptions. Simply acknowledging the obvious economic, political, and religious interests motivating the colonists' accounts leaves us none the wiser about the specifics of contemporary European culture and begs the question of their own understanding of even these aspects of it. The papers that address this aspect of the documents provide valuable and engrossing detail about European concerns and about White's own world. In this context, his paintings of wildlife become part of a swelling European interest in the natural history of the world as a whole rather than things in themselves. Likewise, his representations of the Carolina Algonkians can be re-evaluated as contributions to a burgeoning interest in all aspects of other peoples. White's and de Bry's images, as these papers make clear, offer a "civilizing" image of the New World, showing the natives in clothing (however abbreviated) and engaged in family life; producing, cooking, and sharing their food; recognizing and obeying persons of high status; and engaging in religious ritual (however misguided). Emphasizing the "civilized" nature of the Indians, the images represent them in the mannered style in which artists were accustomed to show civilized Europeans: an elegantly extended elbow, a gracefully posed hand, a Praxitelean s-curve to the spine. In her essay "Truth and Artifice in the Visualization of Native Peoples," Stephanie Pratt suggests that such treatment of the Native Americans makes these images "ideologically suspect" (p. 35). Ethnographically suspect, perhaps; but should we not applaud these artists' wish to translate undeniably strange customs and appearances into something their compatriots could understand and approve? One has only to compare the intemperate language of later colonials to

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appreciate the more charitable intentions of Raleigh's explorers.

The first two sections and part of the fourth section deal with such matters; the essays in the third section shift the focus to White's materials, techniques, and style; and to the conservation of his work today. To anyone interested in the ethnographic value of the images these analyses may be tedious or irrelevant. But it would be a mistake to dismiss them. For example, the demonstration that White copied many of his images from the work of others contributes to our ability to judge just how ethnographically reliable they are. Knowing what changes the images have undergone—chemical alterations of the pigment, fire and water damage—likewise contributes to our attempt to re-create the images that the originals represented.

These papers contain much of interest, and much that can be used to understand how the Carolina Algonkians themselves apprehended and reacted to the presence of Englishmen in their midst. But comparatively few of them take their arguments that far. Karen Kupperman draws attention to the contribution of the Algonkian Indian Manteo to Harriot's text and White's choices of subjects for his images. Otherwise, only two essays—both excellent—really look at these events from the indigenous point of view. Michael Leroy Oberg argues that what happened on these voyages cannot be understood simply in terms of what the English did or did not do, or should or should not, have done. "Raleigh's Roanoke ventures failed because those native people in the region that they called Ossomocumuck, and who initially had welcomed the newcomers, decided to withdraw their support and assistance," he writes (p 101). Audrey Horning similarly urges us to recognize the validity of alternative histories, including those of the Native Americans; and of archaeological evidence. She criticizes, justly, colonial history that rejects the possibility of contact or influence from the local people despite abundant archaeological evidence—potsherds, food remains, and projectile points—to the contrary. Archaeology also allows us to test the validity of some of White's ethnographic images, and she argues that he fairly represented what he depicted.

Neither she nor Oberg, however, makes explicit reference to the conclusions—and cautions—presented in the papers directed to understanding these works as expressions of European culture. It remains for the reader to effect such a synthesis. That this collection does not offer one is the only shortcoming of an otherwise valuable resource for anyone interested in the early ethnohistory of the Outer Banks.

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