

range of the study, probably unavoidable. Most importantly, in reapplying a familiar postcolonial trope, Bernards maintains that the different narratives “write back” not only to colonial but also to national authorities “that repress or elide these creole histories under discourses of race, indigeneity, diaspora, assimilation, and even multiculturalism” (p. 9). The main significance of his study rests in this reassessment, as Bernards foregrounds how individual authors articulate the suppression of their creole histories under sterile categories.

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Southeast Asia in Ruins: Art and Empire in the Early 19th Century.
By Sarah Tiffin. Singapore: NUS Press, 2016. xii+316 pp.

Sarah Tiffin’s *Southeast Asia in Ruins* is the inaugural volume under NUS Press’s new series dedicated to art history in Southeast Asia, the first of its kind since Oxford University Press stopped its publications on Southeast Asian art in the 1990s. This impeccable art history scholarship is the result of long and thorough doctoral research on decoding narratives hinted in landscape paintings and prints of Southeast Asia’s Hindu and Buddhist sanctuaries in ruins. This pioneering engagement of the author with the topic is evident in the numerous notes — occupying almost a third of the book — that contain references to primary sources and related poetry, artworks and publications. Tiffin demonstrates how images, when analysed with historical text and other sources, can help to unravel the otherwise concealed aspirations and anxieties of British “progress and power” (p. 2) encoded in colonial art and image production of the British in Southeast Asia, more specifically in the Malay world. In particular, she adapts the postcolonial discourse of Edward Said

and Linda Nochlin to shed light on Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles's intentions in establishing British influence and presence in the region, his wider political agenda, and the reasons for his failure to convince the government and the East India Company to establish their power in Java.

The author analysed a corpus of eighty-two colour illustrations depicting sanctuaries in ruins from the Malayan archipelago and Burma, but more specifically Java. Tiffin observed that ruins were a common leitmotif in Britain's eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century art on Southeast Asia that fed a growing demand on the part of British audiences for information about the frontier region. Tiffin chose to concentrate her study on images that were available for view by these audiences. These images include works on public display at exhibitions, illustrations in publications such as Raffles's *The History of Java* (1817), and images that were available to an "official audience" (Tiffin 2016, p. 3) at the East India Company offices, library and museum. The book also builds on rich scholarship of the history of British Imperial presence in India and Southeast Asia. These materials include John Bastin's study of Raffles and British policy in the region (see for example, Bastin 1957, 1965 and 2009), *The History of Java* (Raffles 1817), and the collections of curators and scholars — for example, John Bastin, Nigel Barley, Mildred Archer, Pauline Rohatgi, Patricia Kattenhorn, Bea Brommer, Annabel Teh Gallop and others — of early illustrations procured by Raffles.

Southeast Asia in Ruins follows the interpretive anthropology pioneered by Anthony Forge (1994) in which he uses a specific corpus of human figures from *The History of Java* (Raffles 1817) to show Raffles's intention to depict the Javanese as belonging to a literate civilization — and hence favouring Java as a colony. Tiffin builds a coherent corpus of images — mostly distributed among the British Library, the British Museum and the British Museum of Natural History — on the theme of ruins in Southeast Asia. This thematic collection of images is probably one of the most extensive corpus outside the Natural History Museum pertaining to Britain's

presence in Southeast Asia in the early nineteenth century. It is also the most extensive corpus of images for which the creative process and meaning are systematically analysed in the historical, art historical and political context of the British Empire. The author convincingly shows how Raffles's *The History of Java* (1817), and the series of drawings he had commissioned depicting melancholic landscapes with ruins, were a subtle way for him to "imbue a sense of loss" (Tiffin 2016, p. 210) of the Javanese civilization's glory, and by extension a lost opportunity for the British in not colonizing Java.

The book also confirms the findings from Tiffin's article published in 2008 which was shortlisted for the First Sir George Staunton Prize. In that article, she shows how Raffles considered the Javanese civilization as the "highest among all others in the Southern Hemisphere" (Tiffin 2008, p. 349) on one hand, and on the other as "degenerate" (Tiffin 2008, p. 355) as suggested by the theme on ruins. Tiffin's reason for such a bleak assessment is based on Raffles's observation of "Asian despotism" (Tiffin 2016, pp. 4, 14) and the unstable political systems in the region. British power intervention was thus the solution to bring the "former lustre" (Tiffin 2016, p. 15) back to these "moribund" (Tiffin 2016, pp. 14–15) civilizations.

Tiffin's work and methodology are exemplary in showing how the study of images may be as heuristic as the study of text. A footnote reminds the reader that not fewer than a thousand archaeological drawings of sites in Indonesia alone have been kept in Great Britain to this day. It would be interesting, in a future study, to see the author compare her corpus of ruins staged as belonging to a civilization in decay against the broader Raffles's collection of drawings and illustrations not addressed in this book. In particular, there are a few other unpublished materials commissioned by Raffles and kept in collections in the United Kingdom that show contemporary (early nineteenth-century) buildings in masonry — ramparts, palaces and houses — as well as artworks, artefacts and modern furniture commissioned by the Javanese nobility. These unpublished drawings

convey an image of a dynamic — not decaying — Javanese society that contrasts sharply with that of *The History of Java*.

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Thai Art: Currencies of the Contemporary. By David Teh. Singapore: NUS Press and Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017. xi+274 pp.

The central premise of David Teh’s book concerns the complicated inheritances of the “nation” as the dominant framework for analysing contemporary Thai art. Rather than simply replacing this framework with that of the “global” or the “regional”, Teh holds these interpretative scales in tandem, exposing their contradictions and convergences. The same can be said for his use of the terms