

REVIEWS

A Victorian Salon: Paintings from the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery and Museum, Bournemouth, England. Dahesh Museum, New York, 19 January – 17 April 1999; Frick Art Museum, Pittsburgh, 6 May – 4 July 1999.

Millais: Portraits. National Portrait Gallery, London, 19 February--6 June 1999. *Millais: Portraits* by Peter Funnell, Malcolm Warner et al. London: National Gallery; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1999. 224 pp

Since its inception, the Dahesh Museum has provided a surprisingly spry alternative to the usual range of “old master” venues in Manhattan. This is in contradiction to the parade of nineteenth-century French avant-garde exhibitions that dominate the schedule at the Metropolitan, and the similar concerns of MoMA for whom hierarchical distinction remains part of its mission. Even the National Academy of Design, while ostensibly one of the most venerable institutions of traditionalist art education and display in the country, has favoured more vanguard artists in its recent exhibits (Munch, the lesser-known Harald Sohlberg, and Whistler). The Dahesh Museum occupies the upper floors of a small building wedged between Saks and Benetton (née Scribner’s) on 5th Avenue and was established a few years ago in the name of a Lebanese writer and art collector. The Dahesh has brazenly set out to provide what is truly the only alternative non-commercial exhibition space for pre-twentieth-century European fine art in the city. It must be said that the results have thus far been mixed both in terms of quality and themes, but this is largely irrelevant. The museum’s presence and aspirations should be applauded as providing a necessary institutional corrective to the prevailing dominant and partial view of art of the period. As the collection has now established itself after a few years of largely mixing and matching its own mediocre holdings into various thematic displays, the Dahesh has more recently been able to attract and participate in forming international loan exhibitions. The results have been very impressive.

Of course, the Metropolitan Museum recently put on magnificent exhibitions of Edward Burne-Jones, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and Gustave Moreau, and the Brooklyn Museum has given us thorough unveilings of Americans Thomas Wilmer Dewing and Thomas Cole. This year even MoMA concurrently provided a Julia Margaret Cameron display perhaps because it was photography, a novel art for the period. But these exhibitions do not explain the general lack of attention to certain kinds of nineteenth-century art, as revealed in the hostile criticism such exhibitions have generated. Grace Glueck’s review of the Dahesh Museum’s *Victorian Salon* exhibition in the *New York Times* (22 January 1999, E40) begins by proclaiming that Bournemouth, from whence all these pictures originate, is not exactly a cultural