CASUALTY OF WAR: Portrait of Maharajah Duleep Singh
2013
Poster Colour, Gouache and gold dust on Conservation mountboard
(Museums of Scotland Collection)

Artists' Commentary - © The Singh Twins 2104.

'Casualty of War: A Portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh' - A Summary

This painting is inspired by a group of artefacts (mostly jewellery) in the National Museum of Scotland collections that are associated with the historical figure of Maharaja Duleep Singh whose life is intimately connected with British history. Essentially, it depicts the man behind these artefacts. But rather than being a straightforward portrait, it paints a narrative of his life, times and legacy to provide a context for exploring what these artefacts represent from different perspectives. That is, not just as the once personal property of a Sikh Maharaja now in public British possession, but as material objects belonging to a specific culture and time - namely, that of pre-Partition India, Colonialism and Empire. Interwoven into this visual history, is Duleep Singh's special connection with Sir John Login, an individual who, possibly more than any other, influenced Duleep Singh's early upbringing. And whose involvement with the Maharaja, both as his guardian and as a key player in British interests in India, reflected the ambiguous nature of Duleep Singh's relationship with the British establishment. On the one hand, it shows Duleep Singh's importance as an historical figure of tremendous significance and global relevance whose life story is inextricably tied to and helped shaped British-Indian, Punjabi, Anglo-Sikh history, politics and culture, past and present. On the other hand, it depicts Duleep Singh as the tragic, human figure. An innocent individual and victim of circumstance who became a casualty of war, caught up in the power games and politics of the British Empire. Overall, it is a tribute to the Maharaja who became Britain's first resident Sikh. Appropriately, this landmark event in Britain's history celebrates its 160th anniversary in 2104, the same year the painting was officially unveiled by the National Museums Scotland.

Maharaja Duleep Singh: A Background

Born 1838, in the Royal citadel of Lahore, Duleep Singh was the last ruler of the independent Sikh Empire of Punjab in North West India, which was established by his father Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1801. He ascended the Sikh throne in 1843, aged five, initially under the Regency of his mother Maharani Jindan Kaur. However, in 1846, following a military conflict known as the First Anglo-Sikh War, she was exiled from the Lahore Court and imprisoned by the British East India Company who, seeking to expand their trade and the territories they already ruled over in India, had seized the opportunity of Ranjit Singh's death to strengthen their military presence and power in Northern India and to gain control of his Kingdom of Punjab - a region considered the gateway to India and, therefore of immense strategic and economic importance.

A British representative was placed at Lahore under a formal Treaty, which was to offer security for Punjab under British protection and ensure that the child Maharaja would be given full control of his domains when he came of age. However, In 1849, Sikh defeat in a subsequent military conflict known as the Second Anglo-Sikh War, resulted in British annexation of Punjab - one of the richest Kingdoms of its times. Like his mother before him, Duleep Singh was exiled from his homeland. Removed from his family and the Sikh community, he was entrusted to the care of Sir John Login, a Scottish Surgeon in the employment of the British East India Company, with whom he resided in the Christian missionary centre of Fatehgarh before being taken to Britain in 1854 at the age of 16. There, he was bought up as an English Christian aristocrat under the continued guardianship of Sir John Login and the watchful eye of the British Government. He was given an annual allowance that kept him in a lifestyle befitting an English gentleman but from which he also had to pay the wages and associated expenses of his appointed keeper Sir John Login. Though comfortable, his existence was far removed from the privileged lifestyle, luxury and splendour of the Lahore Court. Duleep Singh soon became a curiosity of Victorian society and a favourite of Queen Victoria's household, dividing his time between Scotland and England where he remained for most of his life and eventually raised a family - but still very much under the control of the British authorities, as a political pawn. When the Indian Mutiny (or First War of Indian Independence, as it is now known) broke out in 1857, the British Government regarded Duleep Singh as a greater threat to their rule there, fearing that he might be adopted as a figurehead of the Indian Rebellion. After the Mutiny, in 1858, direct control of India was transferred from the East India Company to the British Crown. And in 1861 the British Government finally permitted Maharani Jindan Kaur (whom they no longer considered to be a threat to their foreign policy in India) to meet and renew her relationship with her son again. She rekindled Duleep Singh's pride in his past Sikh heritage and influenced him to lobby the British Government to honour past promises and reinstate him as rightful ruler of Punjab. Although supported to some extent by Login and Queen Victoria, his petitions to the Government and through the press largely fell on deaf ears. After failed efforts to rally support from foreign European powers (as well as Indian Princes) and following the British Government's active sabotaging of any attempts he made to return to Punjab, Maharaja Duleep Singh left England for Paris where he died a couple of years later, a broken man, in ill health, alone and penniless in a Parisian hotel room in 1893.

The Painting: Content and Meaning - An Overview

Dominating the composition is Maharaja Duleep Singh who is dressed in the finery of the Lahore Court at the height of its power, wearing the Sikh turban, the royal seal ring of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the imperial black plume of Kingship and adorned with some of the most famous and coveted jewels from the Lahore treasury - including the Timur Ruby necklace, the celebrated emerald belt of Maharaja Sher Singh and the legendary Koh-i-noor diamond (set between two teardrop diamonds and worn as an amulet on his left arm). Once the largest known diamond in the world, this historic jewel, which over more than three centuries was owned by some of the greatest Eastern dynasties before finally coming into British possession, was regarded as the ultimate symbol of sovereignty and power. This is the young Sikh Maharaja in all his splendour, imagined by the artists as he would and should have been, had his rightful position as Sikh Emperor of Punjab not been taken from him. Behind his left shoulder are the gateway and a pavilion of the Lahore Fort, where Duleep Singh spent his childhood in lavish surroundings and princely pursuits. Below these, the Sutej River, which under Treaty of friendship during his father's rule remained the boundary between the Sikh Kingdom of Punjab and the British

Empire. Stained red with the blood of the Anglo-Sikh Wars, it represents a period in history that marked the beginning of the end of Sikh Sovereignty in Punjab and a new chapter, not only in the personal life of Duleep Singh, but British-Sikh relations. Behind his right shoulder are the Church and official Indian residence of Sir John Login at Fatehgarh, the place of Duleep Singh's exile, western education and conversion to Christianity. Below that, the young Maharaja rides in procession on an elephant (the vehicle of Kings) alongside his personal guards of the Lahore Khalsa Army - away from his motherland and onto alien British soil. This scene, recalls the due respect, pomp and ceremony afforded to him as ruler of Punjab but which, as the deposed child King and ward of the British Government, would become a thing of the past. Adapted from and painted in the style of a Victorian engraving that appeared in The Pictorial Times newspaper (which in 1846 reported on Duleep Singh's submission to the British), it also denotes the popular interest in Duleep Singh and Punjab at that time amongst British society hungry for news about their Empire's latest conquests.

In stark contrast to the central portrait, Duleep Singh appears again (bottom right) - this time in European dress and of diminished stature, standing next to the gravestone which marks the place he was buried by the British Government according to Christian rites, despite having reconverted to Sikhism in later life. This representation of Duleep Singh as the 'tamed', 'English, Christian, gentleman' is a sad reminder of what he was reduced to under British manipulation and rule. Denied the rituals and devoid of the symbols of his Sikh faith and royal status, this is the image of a man robbed of his rightful heritage and assimilated for political gain into Victorian society and western culture. At the same time, as a man whose personal life determined the fate of a region of India (Punjab) which might still have been an independent Sikh kingdom had it not been annexed to the British Raj in 1849, this figure of Duleep Singh as a mere shadow of his former self, also reflects the tragic state of a Sikh homeland destroyed geographically, economically and culturally by one of the lasting legacies of the British Empire - namely, the Partition of India in 1947. The link between Duleep Singh's life and the declining fortunes of the Sikhs and Punjab in post Independent India is suggested by the three dates on the banner which supports the clipper ship (symbolising Duleep Singh's childhood journey from India to England) at the bottom of the painting. Alongside the dates marking British annexation and later Partition of Punjab, is the year 1984 which witnessed the Indian Government's military attack on the Sikh's Golden Temple at Amritsar - an event that many regard as the culmination of the growing tensions between the Indian Government and the Sikhs. A tension rooted in the post Partition politics of Punjab, which saw further geographic divisions of the former Sikh Empire and the marginalisation and victimisation of Sikhs as a minority community in free India. The turmoil and bloodshed suffered by Punjab as a Sikh homeland torn apart by events that stem back to British policy in India intimately related to Duleep Singh's personal story, is represented by the map of India on the table in front of Duleep Singh, which shows a bleeding Punjab and the name of the country (Pakistan) that would be created out of her soil as a result of Partition.

The map, which is painted as a jigsaw puzzle, is one of several objects and imagery associated with the 'education' of Maharaja Duleep Singh under British rule. Comprising a bumblebee; a paint box; a sketch of his mother; a flute; a copy of The Boys Own with Archery written on it; a Bible and a mechanical toy in the form of a frog (a common Christian symbol for the Trinity and Resurrection), these represent geography, botany, learning in the arts, the 'gentleman's' sports and Christianity - everything required for a young boy to be groomed in the manners, faith and values of Victorian society. On the left side of the table is another separate group of objects comprising a pen case, rosewater bottle and ornametal bird shaped pot. These, together with the square breast pendant (depicting a image of the Goddess Durga riding her tiger), are amongst the Duleep Singh artefacts in the National Museums Scotland Collections. They are painted alongside other precious objects of historical and cultural significance to the Sikhs - namely, the Golden Throne (painted in miniature form) and star shaped medal of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the turban aigrette (kalgi) of the tenth spiritual leader of the Sikhs (Guru Gobind Singh). These objects, which once belonged to the Royal Lahore Treasury (Toshkana), were amongst an inventory of items (including the Koh-i-noor Diamond) that John Login made for the East India Company - treasures taken by the British following the Anglo Sikh Wars. Some of these are now in British Museum and Royal collections. Others (in the case of the kalgi) have since been lost. But all of them have continued to be a bone of contention, sparking debate about issues of cultural ownership and 'crimes' of Empire. And none more so than the Koh-i-noor - as the Independent newspaper article (depicted far left) reporting David Cameron's trip to India in 2013 and the controversy of this Diamond (now part of the crown jewels) shows.

In the green pastures of the English landscape various buildings represent the places Duleep Singh visited and lived during his life in Britain. On the left side are Osbourne House (Queen Victoria's residence on the Isle of Wight where, through frequent visits, he grew close to the Royal family), and Menzies Castle, Scotland, (where he enjoyed the Highland country life). Above these, the English Heritage blue plaque which marks Duleep Singh's London town house at 53 Holland Park. On the right side, are Mulgrave Castle, Yorkshire (which Duleep Singh rented), the ancestral castle of Lord Dalhousie, and South Park in Kent (the family Estate of Viscount Hardinge). The latter two being amongst a tour of stately homes which Login organised for the young Duleep Singh to undertake, with the hope that it would "inspire him with a desire to settle down in England". Behind South Park, are the Tivoli Fountain, Rome and Eiffel tower, Paris - representing the European tours Duleep Singh embarked on, initially at the suggestion of the British East India Company (and under the guardianship of Sir John and Lady Login) as part their efforts to 'civilize' the young Maharaja and to distract him from the affairs of India. Duleep Singh is framed by a white, marble, Indian archway, taken from Elveden Hall - the Estate he acquired in later life on the border of Norfolk and Suffolk. It's surrounded by cream and gold architectural details from the White Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace where he first met Queen Victoria and was painted by the court artist, Franz Xaver Winterhalter in 1854. It's this portrait, which The Singh Twins chose to model their central figure of Duleep Singh on. Not only because it remains one of the most celebrated and therefore well-known portraits of the Maharaja, but because it was created in the year he arrived in Britain, and so, symbolically marks the beginning of his story as Britain's first resident Sikh - which is another theme explored in their painting. A theme referenced through details such as his gravestone at Elveden Church decorated with tiles from Elveden Hall; the red lines denoting the road from Whitby to Sandsend (which Duleep Singh built); the sign "Be not forgetful to Entertain Strangers' (a reference to the Strangers' home for Lascars in London which Duleep Singh helped finance); and the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary coat of arms which was commissioned in 1993 by the Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary Trust to mark the 100th anniversary of Duleep Singh's presence in UK and the establishment of an Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail - a project which, as part of a larger initiative to document wider Anglo-Sikh historical and cultural connections, has mapped the material evidence of his life in Britain. The coat of arms itself is a key feature of and therefore, recalls the statue that was erected to the memory of the Maharaja in Thetford - an English town, which benefited from his generosity and that of his sons. Unveiled in 1999 by HRH The Prince of Wales, it has become a focus of heritage pilgrimage for members of a global Sikh community keen to discover and connect with their history. Within this context, the coat of arms, together with the gold lion motif on Duleep Singh's letterhead (which is the logo of Coronet House - a publishers that has produced landmark books on Duleep Singh in recent years), also represents today's fascination with Maharaja Duleep Singh and his legacy, as well as the growing interest to bring his story to a wider public through literature and arts.

Elsewhere in the painting, Duleep Singh's story as Britain's first resident Sikh is linked to the legacy of Empire as a phenomenon which not only shaped British foreign policy, politics, trade and conflict in India but also influenced cross cultural fertilisation and patterns of migration across the globe. In this respect, the artists present Duleep Singh as an individual geographically displaced by the British Empire from his traditional homeland; whose life was a product of two cultures; whose personal identity (first as a Punjabi Indian Sikh Maharaja, then as an Indian English Christian Gentleman and finally as a Sikh again) was culturally complex and often contradictory and whose treatment at the hands of the British Empire determined the fate and changed the dynamics of Anglo Sikh relations in a way that would have lasting impact on Britain and its development as a multicultural nation. In this respect, the Indo-European archway under which Duleep Singh stands symbolises the dual cultural influences on his upbringing and identity. The falcon, which soars from the Indian landscape of Duleep Singh's past and into the English landscape of his future, further represents the duality of Duleep Singh's identity as Britain's first resident Sikh. As a mark of royalty in India associated with the hawking - the sport of Indian nobility which the Victorians regarded as barbaric but which Duleep Singh refused to give up, this bird symbolises the independent spirit of a man whom the British lamented, they could never fully divest of his "eastern nature "despite every effort " to make [him] English in all save name". It represents the same spark and deep-rooted sense of Indian-ness and royal status that Duleep Singh clung on and sought to express in other ways throughout his life, such as the refurbishing of his Elveden Estate in royal Indian architectural style. Duleep Singh's love hate relationship with Britain as both a victim and product of the British Raj is represented elsewhere by various imagery including the tomb and it's inscription (depicted left) which, significantly, Duleep Singh erected to the memory of his 'keeper' Sir John Login; the sentiments expressed in the letter he is writing to Queen Victoria; and the historical quotes contained in the two vignettes to his right. On the one hand, these are the words of a man who is disillusioned by the western ideals and culture he was taught, grew to admire and adopted as a child. Who feels betrayed by a Government, which he believes has failed to live up to its own 'high' principles and the promises it made to look after his interests. Who is filled with a sense of injustice that makes him no longer content to live the life of an English, Christian, gentleman but desires instead to return to his Indian identity. Yet still feels, it appears, some sense of allegiance, belonging and attachment to Britain - not least through the figures of Queen Victoria and John Login whom he refers to as 'My Sovereign' and 'father', even at the height of his struggles to have his inheritance returned to him. And whom he looked upon with mixed feelings of loyalty, affection, resentment and hostility throughout his life - regarding them as both his Godmother and childhood Guardian and the agents of his manipulation and downfall. The polarity of Duleep Singh's relationship with the British reflects how the character of Anglo-Sikh relations in general would develop after his deposition because a key consequence of the annexation of his kingdom, was the East India Company's disbanding of the State army of Punjab (the Sikh Khlasa Army). Like Duleep Singh, Sikh allegiance transferred to the new rulers and the Sikhs (previously the staunch enemies of the British) now became one of their most loyal subjects - something which is represented in the painting by a member of Duleep Singh's personal guards (far right) who is dressed in the yellow uniform of Skinner's Horse (a famous cavalry regiment of the Raj and one of many which the Sikhs joined within the British Indian Army) and the Indian domed Chattri Memorial, Brighton (far left) dedicated to Sikh (and other Indian soldiers) of WWI. The modern day legacy of this history of loyalty to the British and of a Sikh Diaspora in UK connected to the subsequent politics and history of 20th century Punjab is documented in a newspaper's front-page headline (left), which relates to the appointment of the first turbaned Sikh Queen's Guards in 2009 and 2012. As the first Queen's guards to be permitted to exchange the traditional headwear for the turban (a requirement and expression of their religious beliefs), the headline also reflects how Sikhs in Britain, not unlike Duleep Singh himself, have left their mark on British heritage and continue to redefine concepts of British-ness.

The Singh Twins: An Artists Perspective

The Duleep Singh commission for National Museums Scotland explores a subject we personally identify with as British Sikhs and which has continued to fascinate us for more than two decades not only as former students, current researchers and collectors of Sikh heritage and memorabilia but as artists for whom dialogues around the politics of identity and culture and a commitment to the use of historical art and artefacts for contemporary expression, have remained at the core of our work. It's also provided further opportunity for us to combine our love for academia with our passion for art - resulting in a painting where creative and analytical practice meet. That is, based on history but also embodying a very personal perspective and creative response to the subject.

In being asked to offer an artistic response to the Duleep Singh artefacts in the National Museums Scotland Collections, our first step was to study these firsthand - which we did during a visit to the Museum archives in 2012. Our next step (as per the methodology we employ for most of our work) was to research the subject that stood out to us as being the most logical and helpful way forward in terms of providing a context for understanding the value of and offering a creative response to these artefacts - namely, the history of the man who once owned them. For this we turned to several sources comprising the Internet, our private collection of historical Sikh memorabilia and a range of published works on Sikh history and arts. Amongst these were key publications such Michael Alexander and Sushila Anand's, 'Queen Victoria's Maharaja:Duleep Singh 1838-93'; Peter Bance's, 'The Duleep Singhs: The photograph album of Queen Victoria's Maharajah' and 'Maharajah Duleep Singh, 'Sovereign, Squire & Rebel'; The V&A's 'Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms'; and T.S Randhawa's 'The Sikhs: Images of Heritage'. We paid particular attention to 19th century accounts of the life and politics of Duleep Singh and Punjab sourced from published Government correspondence and documents, private letters and memoirs and newspaper articles of the day. Amongst these were, 'Lady Logins Recollections'; 'Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie'; 'The Punjab Papers' and the 'The Illustrated London News'. Collectively, these sources provided the information and inspiration for developing the main themes for the commission. Deciding on which aspects of this research to include in the painting and how to represent that visually was the next stage. Given the complexity of Duleep Singh's story, this proved quite a challenge. In the end we decided to focus on key stages of his associated history and on anecdotes pertaining to his life that we related to personally and which interested us the most.

Our aim was to present not just an overview of Duleep Singh's life and times but also something about his personality, character and legacy. As such, much of the imagery relates to factual aspects about his life. Some of this is taken directly from illustrated sources. Some based on historical description. For instance, the group of imagery pertaining to Duleep Singh's education under the British, draws on a description of the educational items and toys that John Login (in Fatehgarh) requested his wife to send from England for Duleep Singh, as recorded in her memoirs. Whilst the fireworks relate to Login's own description of Duleep Singh's first birthday as the deposed Maharaja in exile in Fatehgarh. The bible (placed under the paint box and denoting Duleep Singh's Christian education), faithfully copies the one (now in private collection) that Lord Dalhousie gifted to Duleep Singh when he left for England. The standing figure of Duleep Singh in western attire is a copy of the caricature by Spy, published in an 1882 edition of Vanity Fair. And the images of Login's residence and the Tivoli fountain are sourced from Internet photographs. Whilst, the text in the sky to the right of the Centenary Trust coat of arms, is quoted from an article about the Lahore Treaty in an 1846 edition of The Illustrated London News. In some cases it was especially important to us to maintain historical accuracy. So most of the jewelry worn by Duleep Singh is sourced from

known historical paintings of himself and other members of the Sikh court, such as the famous portrait of his predecessor and half brother, Maharaja Sher Singh, painted in c.1850 by August Theodor Schoefft. Our emphasis on historical accuracy in this particular instance makes the point of testifying to the immense wealth of the Sikh Kingdom that was Duleep Singh's birthright.

Other imagery is invented or, else, has been modified from historical pictorial references to provide a symbolic meaning that draws (in some cases) on our personal reflections and conclusions about the story of Duleep Singh. For example, the decorative details comprising a Punjabi paisley motif imprinted with an English rose, represent British domination of Punjab, whilst the tendrils and flowers that weave through and connect other visual details in the landscape, draw on traditional plant symbolism to represent two things. Firstly, an Empire and conquest of Punjab built on avarice (Alpine Auricular), a lust for wealth (Orchid) and deceitful charms (Thorn Apple). And, secondly, the various emotions, feelings and traits of personality associated with Duleep Singh and his struggle to regain his lost heritage - namely, remorse (Raspberries), stubborn pride and strength of character (Thistle) and sense of injustice (Hop flower). The inscriptions on Login's monument refer both to his official role as keeper of the Lahore Treasury and the feelings of grief which Duleep Singh's expressed on the occasion of his death. Neither inscription appears in fact on Login's tomb. Their inclusion and positioning within the composition serve another purpose. That is, to emphasise the paradoxical nature of the Duleep/Login relationship - something, which is further expressed by the shackles leading from the monument to Duleep Singh's wrist. The message here is that for us, Login, as the carefully chosen 'orchestrator' of Duleep Singh was in reality more 'master' than father, more 'jail keeper' than guardian. This is something that Duleep Singh would come to learn and subsequently resent and rebel against in the same way that he would come to reject a British Government intent on controlling and molding him in its own image and for its own, self serving, motives. The latter is represented in the painting by the words of his letter to Queen Victoria, which is an extract of his response to the offer of peerages for his sons in 1880 following repeated but failed appeals to be properly compensated for the loss of his 'rightful' inheritance and to be permitted to pass whatever estates and property he might still possess on his death, to his sons. Duleep Singh's sense of having been grossly mistreated and wronged by the British is represented by his fountain pen, which has an ostrich feather (the ancient symbol of truth, right and justice) for its plume. The genuineness of his words to Queen Victoria is represented, by the pearl and blue sapphire decoration at the base of the feather - gems associated with integrity and sincerity and faithfulness.

Like the inscription on Login's monument, the precise placement of every detail within the composition was carefully considered. In part, this was to ensure that the painting not only had balance and symmetry but a controlled order that echoed the nature of Duleep Singh's life under Login's guardianship. More importantly, for us, the spatial relationship and juxtaposition of details within the painting served to create dialogue between different elements of the work. For example, the Lahore (falconry) Bells, said to be the only thing found in the hands of Duleep Singh when he died in Paris, are shown at his graveside. As objects linked to both the final moments of Duleep Singh's death and his birthplace Lahore, they are a poignant reminder of an unfulfilled destiny and a life spent - particularly in his later years and to the last - in longing for his homeland and lost heritage. The grave itself is placed on a bed of grass, which denotes submission and usefulness in plant symbolism. The suggestion here is of a life also spent largely under British control and in the service of British economic and political interests. Next to the Lahore Bells is a wreath of Hemlock, Marigolds and Monkshood - representing death, deceit and ill luck; pain and grief; and crime, treachery and the poison of words, respectively. All of which, in our estimation, express something about the tragedy of Duleep's life and how he felt the British had treated him. A fourth plant, Poison Ivy, represents the conspiracy theories about Duleep Singh's death and the documented accounts of his family's belief that under instruction of the British Government, poison (which would make them infertile) was being slowly administered to them by the cooks at Elveden Hall to ensure an end to Duleep Singh's line and the continuation of Britain's long term control of Punjab. The pattern on the grave (taken from a tiled floor in Duleep Singh's English Estate, Elveden Hall) points to its location at Elveden Church. And a Khanda (emblem of the Sikh religion), which is absent in fact from the actual grave, has been added to the headstone. This reminder of Duleep Singh's re-conversion to Sikhism in later life emphasizes the significance of his burial as a Christian and the importance that the British administration placed on the political advantage of ensuring that he remained and was seen to have died a Christian - as expressed in the words of Dalhousie quoted in the vignette (top left). Returning to Login's monument, the two strawberries (denoting a life of good deeds in Christian symbolism) acknowledge that, according to his own colonial perspective (one dictated by the values of a Victorian Christian society that regarded itself as culturally, morally and spiritually superior to the 'natives' of their Empire) Login sincerely believed that in educating Duleep Singh in western manners, customs and religion, he was acting in his best interests, as any good Christian would do. And there is evidence to suggest that both he and his wife developed a degree of affection toward Duleep Singh. However, the medal next to the strawberries, which is the Knighthood Login received for duties rendered as Duleep Singh's guardian, points to an alternative reality. That all things considered, however genuine his feelings for Duleep Singh may have been, his relationship with him was essentially official business, in service to the Crown.

As is characteristic of our work, much of the imagery has a double meaning or offers multi layers of interpretation. The orchid, for example, mentioned earlier as representing a lust for wealth, is specifically the Lion Orchid - a reference to the lion of British Sovereignty and Imperialism. The clipper ship bears two names, Media and Duleep Singh. The former is the name of the British War vessel that carried the Koh-i-noor diamond to England in 1850. The latter is the vessel built and named after Duleep Singh by Liverpool merchants in 1863 - hence the Liverbirds (Liverpool's emblems) on the sails. On top of the mast is the flag of British East India Company, which connects British conquest of Punjab with its trading interest in India. As both a war and trade vessel, the naming of a ship after Duleep Singh is interpreted, by us, not as a tribute to him but, rather, to British military and commercial success in India. That is, as an act that boasted the triumph of an Empire that viewed and was keen to present the Maharaja of Punjab, like his riches (epitomized by the Koh-i-noor Diamond), as a trophy of war. The banner underpinning the clipper ship represents both Duleep Singh's physical journey from India to Britain (denoted by the flags) and his initial conversion from Sikhism to Christianity (saffron being the colour of Sikhism and white, the colour of Christianity). In addition to denoting Duleep Singh's education in zoology, the bumblebee, depicted (not without significance) hovering over the map of Punjab, is (as a symbol of industry) also linked to commerce and trade - the foundations upon which the British Empire and her domination of Punjab as a region of India that was rich in natural resources and priceless commodities such as the Kashmir shawl (seen spread across the table) was based. In addition to its aforementioned symbolism, the Thistle represents Duleep Singh's particular affiliation with and love for Scotland. Elsewhere, on the horizon of the Lahore Fort landscape, is a red sun that could be taken as both setting or rising. This detail represents the simultaneous fall of the Sikh Empire and rise of the British Empire in India. To the right of Lahore Fort is the Church at Fatehgarh, engulfed in flames on a river (the Ganges) flowing red. This detail within the painting depicts the turmoil and bloodshed of the Indian Rebellion ('Mutiny') which historical accounts record as having resulted in the destruction and sacking of Duleep Singh's personal estates and wealth at Fatehgarh in 1857. As such it represents the British Government's failed promises (referenced in Dalhousie's 1848 quote, top left) to project the young Maharaja's interests in India. However, as one of the most famous and more controversial incidents of Sikh loyalty to the British Empire in which Sikhs fought against the Indian 'mutineers' alongside the British, it also represents an important legacy of the Duleep Singh story - namely the British-Sikh military connection.

Amongst the range of historical imagery that was available for us to consider using in the painting, some was selected for its ability to communicate something beyond the purely factual or historical perspective. For example, the residences of Lord Dalhousie and Viscount Hardinge (two men who were at the forefront of engineering and executing the political and military strategies that ultimately destroyed the Sikh Empire) were specifically chosen to reflect the irony of Duleep Singh's situation as a young man who, under Login's guidance, was expected to consider amongst his new circle of friends in Britain the very people who had bought about his downfall. The paint box, branded with the word 'Superior' (specifically chosen from a number of Victorian paint box imagery sourced from the internet), sums up the self-assured attitude of Duleep Singh's British conquerors and educators and a society whose assumed position of political, moral and cultural superiority was used to justify their foreign policy in the East – something that the quote in the bottom right of the landscape also indicates. This quote, taken from an historical news article reporting on the conquest of Punjab, stands alone as a testimony to Victorian England's image of itself. But when read together, with the three other quotes written into the landscape and sky, it serves to illustrate what we observed during our research into Duleep Singh's history as the parallels between the rhetoric of the British Empire and that surrounding the politics and conflicts of more contemporary times. These quotes struck a particular cord with us because they betray a cultural hierarchy, which in our personal experience (as British Asians and artists who have been expected to conform to Western norms) continues to persist as a legacy of Empire today. A legacy which, we feel, demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Duleep Singh's story, - that is, as a life and times which can help us to better understand the cultural dynamics, politics and foreign policy of a modern multicultural, global society still influenced and defined by an East-West divide rooted in colonial notions of western superiority.

Turning to aspects of the painting that convey something about Duleep Singh's character, it is significant that the paint box contains a personal bank note made out in favour of Lady Login. As a reference to the Maharaja's commitment to "do all on his part" to provide for the future of his former guardian's widow and children, this, together with the monument he erected to the memory of Sir John Login, reveals a man who was not only generous in nature but sensitive and loyal to those closest to him. This loyalty to friendships is further represented by the lion and crown motif of his letterhead which is taken from the coat of arms that Prince Albert designed for him and which (according to historical accounts) he used only "out of courtesy to Her Majesty" despite the fact that he did not consider himself to be English. At the same time the contents of this letter to Queen Victoria portrays a man who was principled, proud and bold - unafraid to openly assert his position and the firm identity he still maintained in his heritage and ancestry. Whist the quotes in the two vignettes (top and bottom, right) which imply a deep-rooted sense of betrayal and injury, convey a vulnerable side to his personality.

When researching the history of Duleep Singh, some aspects of his life stood out as being particularly relevant to include in the painting. For example, the prominence given to the Koh-i-noor diamond within the work recognizes what we belief to be its tremendous significance to the story of Duleep Singh and his modern day legacy, not only as a symbol of the vast personal wealth he once possessed and as the token of submission he was required (under the Treaty of Lahore) to surrender to Queen Victoria, but because of what the stories surrounding its acquisition by the British reveal about the tactics and political intrigue of the British Empire. Our particular interest to reference the strategy of Empire and its relationship to material culture is further represented by the pencil sketch of Maharani Jindan (a copy of the 1863 pencil drawing by George Richmond, now in private collection) as a figure whose political power and influence over Duleep Singh the British sought to end by, amongst other things, confiscating her wealth (jewelry). Accordingly, she is shown wearing a single earring from the National Museums Scotland Duleep Singh collection. Whether this artifact (or any other item of female jewelry from the collection) might once have belonged to the Maharani is pure speculation. But its placement on her image suggests this as a possibility, at least. And in doing so, serves to beg the question we asked ourselves – that is, as to whether or not this (as indeed other Duleep Singh artifacts) might once have been amongst the seized personal possessions of Jindan that the British kept as political leverage for more than a decade after their annexation of Punjab - when their return was finally promised to the Maharani in exchange for her agreeing to leave India and live in England.

As artists it's always been important to us to show how we personally connect or identify with the subjects we explore through our work. For this reason much of our art has an autobiographical dimension and 'Casualty of War: A Portrait of Maharaja Duleep Singh' is no exception in this respect - not least for the fact that Duleep Singh, as an important figure of our own Sikh heritage, has been an ongoing part of our lives and creative practice. This is reflected, for example, by The Maharaja Duleep Singh Centenary coat of arms which, in fact, is something we designed and created for the Trust in 1993 and by Osbourne House, Dalhousie Castle, Menzies Castle, Elveden Hall, Duleep Singh's grave, The National Museums Scotland, the Lahore Fort and the two English heritage plaques denoting a former London residence and the birthplace of Sir John Login - all of which we have visited ourselves in the course of our personal research into Duleep Singh's life.

The Duleep Singh Artifacts: Conclusions

So what of the National Museum Scotland Duleep Singh artifacts? How might we view these not only in terms of their physicality, provenance and relationship to other artifacts pertaining to Duleep Singh's life, which are recorded in the painting but also within the context of his personal story?

Here are, some of the conclusion we drew:

- As objects made (for the most part) from a variety of expensive, precious materials (including gold, silver, crystal, emeralds, rubies and diamonds) they are intrinsically valuable in their own right - not just in monetary terms but, also, as status symbols that reflect the wealth and social position of those who once owned them.

- As artifacts, comprising a variety of decorative objects and jewelry executed in diverse styles, materials and techniques, they also provide an important documentation of and resource for studying traditional Indian arts and crafts.

- As objects that were acquired by the National Museums Scotland from Major Donald Lindsay Carnegie (a British Indian Army officer descended from Scottish nobility) who bought them at an auction in the late 19th century following the Maharajahs death, they are a sad reminder of the declining fortunes of Duleep Singh and his descendents.

- As objects of Indian origin associated with nobility, they testify both to the emotional attachment that Duleep Singh continued to maintain in his Indian heritage and to his sense of belonging to a royal dynasty. A testimony which, like his redesigning of Elveden Hall in Indian style and his adoption of Indian dress at various times throughout his life, emphasises the important role that material culture plays as an expression of personal and cultural identity. A role that is as relevant now as it was to Duleep Singh and his times - And not just in terms of the British multicultural and wider migrant, Diaspora community experience, but globally.

- In being amongst the few remaining personal effects of the last sovereign of Punjab they provide a rare and tangible link to one of the most important figures of British, Indian, Sikh history. Like the other physical places and objects around Britain that are connected to Duleep Singh (identified, for example by the Anglo Sikh Heritage Trail) they provide material evidence of the existence of a man who continues to fascinate both Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike.

- As objects, which (in some cases) might conceivably have once belonged to the Lahore Treasury but which, in any case, once belonged to the last Sikh ruler of Punjab, they might be perceived as 'spoils of war'- amongst other objects of historical and cultural significance to the Sikhs which are now in British Collections as a consequence (either directly or indirectly) of Britain's conquest of Punjab.

- As a mere fraction of the once legendary wealth of the Sikh Empire, they might be regarded as symbolizing a lost or 'stolen' heritage. The remnants of what many Sikhs today still look upon with a sense of collective ownership and nostalgia as a glorious, bygone era of Sikh culture, independence and power.

What's clear to us is that throughout his life, Maharaja Duleep Singh has represented and continues to represent many different things to different people - viewed variously as Sikh Sovereign, as a casualty of war, as a pawn of Empire, as a figurehead of Punjab, as national hero and rebel, as a Sikh, as a Christian, as a philanthropist, as Indian nobility, as English aristocracy, as Britain's first resident Sikh and as a modern symbol of Anglo-Sikh relations. A relationship that acknowledges historical friendships and moments of confluence which both British and Sikh communities can identify with and celebrate positively. But a relationship, which is also largely fraught with tensions, contradictions and controversies that continue to resonate today.

With the latter thought foremost in our minds, it is perhaps not surprising that - beyond being objects of great artistry and historical importance - the National Museum Scotland Duleep Singh are for us, highly symbolic, emotionally charged and politically loaded objects which, throughout our process of physically handling and exploring their contemporary relevance and importance (both as museum artifacts and as personal property associated with the last Sikh Emperor of Punjab), evoked mixed feelings of excitement, wonder and pride but also anger, regret and sadness. Emotions, which we consciously tried to reflect in the portrait we have created for National Museums Scotland.

Creative Practice:The making of the painting.

Our creative process for 'Casualty of War: A Portrait of Duleep Singh' was, like most of our work, very much a collaborative one. We started by researching the broad theme of Duleep Singh's history independently. After we each completed this, we came together to pool our information and to develop an overall narrative for the work. Next, we made a shortlist of what aspects of Duleep Singh's life, history and legacy to include in the work and decided on how that might best be represented. At this stage, some further research was necessary which would help us to find the appropriate imagery to represent our ideas for the painting. This included things like looking into plant and flower symbolism or locating historical images of Viscount Hardinge's residence for example. The next stage was to gather our visual source material and work out the composition. We did this using digital technology - importing imagery scanned from books, archival material and photographs and downloaded from the Internet. But also dropping in elements extracted from some of our existing artworks, which were relevant to the Duleep Singh commission and enabled us to create a rough visual of the overall composition. We explored several options - arranging, scaling and trying different imagery within the work, before agreeing on a final composition. This was then printed out, traced and overworked in pencil to produce an original, fine line, detailed drawing of the artwork. We painted the drawing in stages, starting with blocks of background colour and building up to the fine detail, texturing and outlining, working in a rota and sharing various elements between us. Whilst working on the painting, we are continuously developing new ideas or ways of approaching and representing the subject, which sometimes result in changes being made to the original composition. In the case of 'Casualty of War', we replaced an artist's cartoon image relating to the Koh-i-noor controversy (which we had sourced from the Internet and represented in the final digital composition for our artwork) with an image of an imaginary newspaper front page which we felt in retrospect would better represent the complexity of narratives we wanted to convey through that detail within the work. Overall the artwork took several months to complete.