

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY

An introduction to the Sir Abe Bailey Collection of Sporting Paintings

MARCH 1970

This exhibition of the Sir Abe Bailey collection of British sporting paintings has been arranged to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the 1820 British Settlers in South Africa. With the publication of the special descriptive catalogue prepared by Mr Paul Thomson of Sotheby & Co., London, it is also the first fully documented exposition of the collection, which was bequeathed to the South African National Gallery in 1940.

The traditions of British sporting and country life have been recorded pictorially since the 17th century, and the works described in the catalogue represent a fair cross-section of the development of the art in Britain from Stubbs to Munnings. It is therefore of interest, especially in the light of the Settler celebrations, to consider some aspects of sporting life in South Africa in the 19th century.

The British sporting tradition was formally introduced into this country during the post-Napoleonic period, when Britain was again in possession of the Cape. Lord Charles Somerset, during whose governorship (1814-26) the Albany Settlement took place, was largely responsible. The year 1820 saw not only the landing of the Settlers in Algoa Bay, but also the arrival in the Cape of the first pack of English fox-hounds, imported by the Governor. Traditionally the pursuits of the landed classes in Britain, fox-hunting, horse-racing and shooting for pleasure were sustained in South Africa at this time by the British military élite garrisoned in the country or on furlough from India, and by the "colonial gentry" amongst the Settlers.

In 1818 the first South African Turf Club was formed by officers of the British garrison at the Cape, under the official patronage of Lord Charles Somerset, and held regular meetings on Green Point Common. The Governor's enthusiasm was such that he imported English stallions and mares to improve the local stock, and ploughed up the Company's Garden to grow oats for his stable. Horse-breeding was later taken up by the British Settlers in the Natal midlands, and assumed prominence when the 85th regiment sold their stables to local sportsmen on leaving Natal in 1863. It is also recorded that a number of race-horses landed with the Settlers in 1820.

By the mid-19th century, further stimulated by the arrival in 1848 of another sporting Governor, Sir Harry Smith, there were two hunts operating in the Cape, at Wynberg and

at Durbanville. Every formality was observed and the huntsmen pursued the black-backed Cape fox in uniforms of "scarlet, with plain collar and white hunting cap". Hunts were also established in the Eastern Cape at Fort Beaufort, Knysna and Port Elizabeth. The first, the Beaufort hunt, was established by the 7th Dragoon Guards in 1843, and "farmers in the neighbourhood who joined the field were mostly Albany Settlers". Here they wore "short pink jackets, white breeches, long jackboots and black velvet hunting caps", and hunted the jackal. In Natal the first hunt, whose quarry was the bush duiker or the peattie buck, was organised by officers of the 32nd regiment in the 1870's.

As far as shooting was concerned, the drama of big game hunting provided the draw to the British sportsman, but here there is no parallel tradition. On the other hand, the "solitary sportsman who shoots for pleasure in his marksmanship", so often depicted by Wolstenholme after snipe and woodcock, found in South Africa game-birds aplenty on which to exercise his skill. In the nineteenth century an attempt was made to establish pheasants in the Natal midlands, and there was fine quail shooting on Robben Island.

Of all the subjects embraced by the Bailey Collection, coaching is perhaps the most innocent, and even this found an echo in South Africa, although coaching in the two British Colonies declined with the advent of the railways and subsequent neglect of the roads, long before it did in the isolated Boer republics. One famous coachman, J. W. Welch, who ran a service between Pietermaritzburg and Durban in 1862, had previously "driven 'Paul Fry' and other famous coaches" in England, between London and Worcester.

The hedonistic Regency and patrician tastes of frivolous governors, well-connected commissioned officers and colonial gentry, the snobbery and privilege, read unfavourably in the light of current Boer grievances, threatened frontiers and the real privations and disappointments of the Albany Settlement. But, as far as art is concerned, it would be easier to forgive these luxurious pursuits had they given rise to a lively tradition of South African sporting painting. However, sportsmen "inherited conservatism with their sporting customs", and in our country wooden portraits of famous racers or fecund brood mares appear to suffice, where the British sporting artist indulged to the full in formality and pageantry, and the thrill of the chase. It was, in fact, in the hunting of big game or in the frontier wars that the 19th century documentary artist looked for action in South Africa.

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SUID-AFRIKAANSE NASIONALE KUNSMUSEUM

'n Inleiding tot die Sir Abe Bailey Versameling van Perdesportskilderye

MAART 1970

Hierdie tentoonstelling van die Sir Abe Bailey versameling van Britse perdesportskilderye is ingerig om saam te val met die 150ste verjaarsdag van die aankoms van die Britse Setlaars in Suid-Afrika. As gevolg van die publikasie van die spesiale beskrywende katalogus, saamgestel deur mnr. Paul Thomson van Sotheby en Kie, Londen, is dit ook die eerste volledig gedokumenteerde tentoonstelling van die versameling, wat in 1940 aan die Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionale Kunsmuseum bemaak is.

Die tradisies van die Britse perdesport en buitelewe is sedert die 17de eeu in die skilderkuns vasgelê, en die werke wat in die katalogus beskryf word vorm 'n redelike deursnee van die ontwikkeling van die kuns in Brittanje vanaf Stubbs tot Munnings. Dit is daarom van belang, veral met die oog op die Setlaarvierings, om sekere aspekte van die perdesportslewe in Suid-Afrika in die negentiende eeu te oorweeg.

Die Britse sportstradisie is formeel in die land ingevoer gedurende die na-Napoleontiese periode, toe die Kaap weer Britse besit was. Lord Charles Somerset, tydens wie se goewerneurskap (1814-26) die vestiging in Albanie plaasgevind het, was grotendeels hiervoor verantwoordelik. Die jaar 1820 sal nie net onthou word weens die landing van Setlaars in Algoabaai nie, maar ook weens die aankoms van die eerste trop Engelse jakkalshonde, ingevoer deur die Goewerneur.

Volgens tradisie die plesier wat deur die Britse grondbesittende klas nagejaag is, word vossejag, perderesies en skiet in hierdie periode in Suid-Afrika gehandhaaf deur die Britse militêre elite wat in die land gestasioneer is of op verlof uit Indië is, asook deur die „koloniale deftige burgery” onder die Setlaars.

In 1818 is die eerste Suid-Afrikaanse Wedrenklub gestig deur offisiere van die Britse garnisoen aan die Kaap, onder offisiële beskerming van Lord Charles Somerset, en gereelde byeenkomste is op die Groenpuntse Meent gehou. Die Goewerneur was so entoesiasies dat hy Engelse hingste en merries ingevoer het om die plaaslike ras te verbeter, en glad die Kompanjies tuin omgeploeg het om hawer vir sy renperde te plant. Perde is later deur die Britse Setlaars in die Natalse Middelland geteel, en dit kom op die voorgrond toe die 85ste regiment hulle perde aan plaaslike sportliefhebbers verkoop by vertrek uit Natal in 1863. Dit is ook aangeteken dat 'n aantal resiesperde saam met die Britse Setlaars geland het in 1820.

Teen die middel van die 19de eeu, verder gestimuleer deur die aankoms in 1848 van nog 'n

Goewerneur wat in perdesport belangstel, Sir Harry Smith, is daar twee jaggeselskappe aan die Kaap, te Wynberg en te Durbanville. Al die vorme is getrou in ag geneem en die jagters het die swartrug Kaapse jakkals agtervolg, in uniforms van „skarlaken, met eenvoudige kraag en wit jagpet”. Jaggeselskappe is ook gestig in die Oostelike Provinsie te Fort Beaufort, Knysna en Port Elizabeth. Die eerste hiervan, die Beaufort geselskap, is in 1843 deur die 7de Dragonder Garde gestig, en „boere uit die omgewing wat by die jag aangesluit het was hoofsaaklik Albanie Setlaars”. Hier het hulle „kort ligroos baadjies, wit broeke, lang kaplaarse en swart fluweelpette” gedra, en jakkalse gejag. In Natal is die eerste jag, waarby die bosduiker en peattiebok die prooi was, gereël deur offisiere van die 32ste regiment in die jare sewentig.

Sover as wat skietkuns aanbetref, is die Britse sportman deur die drama van grootwildjag aangetrek, maar hier vind ons geen ooreenkomstige tradisie nie. Aan die ander kant het „die eensame sportman wat vir die plesier van die skietkuns jag”, wat so gereeld deur Wolstenholme uitgebeeld word waar hy snippe en houtsnippe jag, in Suid-Afrika volop geleentheid gehad om sy vaardigheid uit te oefen. In die negentiende eeu is ’n poging aangewend om fisante in die Natalse middelland in te voer, en op Robbeneiland tref ons voortrefflike kwartel skiet aan.

Van al die onderwerpe wat deur die Bailey Versameling omvat word, is koetsry moontlik die onskuldigste vermaak, en selfs dit het weerklank gevind in Suid-Afrika, alhoewel koetsry in die twee Britse kolonies afgeneem het met die koms van die spoorweë en die gevolglike verwaarlosing van paaie, lank voordat dit in die afgesonderde Boere-republieke kon gebeur. Een befaamde koetsier, J. W. Welch, wat ’n diens tussen Pietermaritzburg en Durban behoor het in 1862, het vroeër „Paul Fry’ en ander vermaarde koetse bestuur” in Engeland, tussen Londen en Worcester.

Die genotsugtige Regentskap-periode en die patrisiese smaak van ligsinnige goewerneurs, invloedryke offisiere en koloniale deftige burgery, die snobisme en die bevoorregting, het ’n swak indruk geskep gesien in die lig van die destydse ontevredenheid van die Boere, die bedreigde grense en die wesenlike ontberings en telcurstellings van die Albanie Setlaars. Wat die kuns aanbetref, sou hierdie weelderige genotsug gemakliker oor die hoof gesien kon word, as dit sou gelei het tot ’n lewende tradisie van Suid-Afrikaanse sportskilderye. Sportliefhebbers het egter „konservatisme tesame met perdesport tradisies oorgeërf”, en in ons land blyk housterige portrette van bekende resiesperde of vrugbare aanteel-merries te voldoen, terwyl die Britse perdesportkunstenaar hom ten volle inleef in die formalisme, prag en praal en die opwinding van die jag. Dit was inderdaad in die grootwildjag of in die grensoorloë dat die 19de eeuse dokumentêre kunstenaar in Suid-Afrika na aksie gesoek het.

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HOOF VAKKUNDIGE BEAMPTTE

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