

LEIGHTON HOUSE MUSEUM AND THE NEW CONNOISSEURSHIP

Introduction:

A friend and museum director once described opening a talk about his famous London institution, as containing three of the most despised words in the English Language ; Imperial, War and Museum. This amusing and deprecating observation hides a serious message; one which places the traditional image of the museum alongside the discredited concepts of a bygone era. Thus in seeking to address the changing needs and interests of new and more diverse audience, to be a museum and one devoted to high Victorian art might, therefore, be considered doubly unfortunate.

Leighton House Museum in London's Kensington is the foremost centre for the study and appreciation of the life and work of Frederic, Lord Leighton, the most prominent painter of the late Victorian period. In his role as President of the Royal Academy from 1878 to 1896 Leighton was highly influential within the Victorian art establishment in addition to being extremely successful in his own career, a unique position, recognised by his elevation to the peerage; Leighton was created Baron Stretton

shortly before he died. However his reputation experienced something of a steep decline commencing almost immediately after his death. Whilst this phenomenon might partly be explained by the dwindling demand for his highly polished but to some, drily academic, paintings much of his eclipse can be traced to the emergence of more experimental artists whose work better addressed the concerns of the new century. This is perhaps most amply illustrated by the contrasting fortunes of Leighton the painter and Leighton the sculptor where despite his producing only a limited number of pieces, the ambition and dynamism of Leighton's sculptural work and its adoption by the exponents of the 'New Sculpture Movement' led to this aspect of Leighton's oeuvre continuing to be an influence amongst a new generation of European artists.

That Leighton did not 'disappear' in the manner of many of his contemporaries; Marcus Stone, Val Prinsep, Luke Fildes, Hamo Thornycroft and others of the so-called "Holland Park Circle", is largely due to the establishment of the Museum that bears his name. The generous gift, by his sisters, of Leighton's house from the estate left to them and the commitment by his most staunch advocate and biographer, Mrs Emily Barrington, to ensure a fitting

memorial to the artist she so much admired, came together to create Leighton House Museum which opened in 1897, year after Leighton's death. Bereft of much of his important collection of paintings, ceramics and objet d'art (sold at auction in 1896 to pay for the numerous legacies and endowments Leighton bestowed) the Museum's principal virtues in its early years were found in its stunning interiors and the return, by a number of generous gifts, of the artists' drawings.

Leighton's home at 12 Holland Park Road was designed for him by his friend and fellow Academician, George Aitchison in 1864. Its principal functions were that of a working studio and as a place to both entertain his many friends and patrons and to display his work. This emphasis is re-inforced by the contrast between the relative poverty of Leighton's private spaces [Bedroom] and the sumptuousness of the "show" interiors. The Studio was considered "state of the art" upon its completion with the working spaces lit by large north lights and areas devoted to set dressing and the arrangement of models. Sophisticated means were developed by which these models could enter the House discreetly. In a typically Victorian paradox, the models, often the very substance of the finished painting were not considered to be

proper persons to be visiting the home of gentleman. Once inside the house the models could change in privacy unseen even by servants only to emerge unclothed into Leighton's studio.

Leighton's increasingly demanding work schedule led to the provision of a fully glazed Winter Studio which enabled him to continue to paint throughout the gloomy and smoke-filled London winters, made more irksome by his failing eyesight in later years. Of a different order again were the parts of the House devoted to public display social activities. Intimate friends were entertained in the dining room in numbers of up to 30 but on occasions when a new work was unveiled the numbers of visitors could exceed 100 at any one time . As a consequence Aitchison provided a number of spaces in which guests could be received before they were invited to ascend a sumptuous staircase lined with William De Morgan tiles to view the paintings. Outside the studio, the so-called "Silk Room" served as an ante-chamber and contained some of the most important possessions of Leighton's collections; the *Madonna of the Candelabra* by Antonio Rossellino, *Portrait of a Gentleman* by Jacopo Tintoretto and his own sculpture , *Needless Alarms*.

Back on the ground floor, the Drawing Room contained Leighton's most expensive purchase ; Corot's *Times of the Day*, the design of the room being specifically arranged to display the four paintings to their best advantage. At completion of the original House, the principal space was the *Narcissus Hall*. Elegantly decorated with rich De Morgan tiles the Hall is a fine example of architectural compression in which the arrangement of columns and cornices contrive to make the room appear far grander, spatially, than it is. However following extension of the House by the same architect in 1877, the function of the *Narcissus Hall* was re-configured to provide an appropriate introduction to Aitchison's *tour de force*, the *Arab Hall*. Modelled upon a Norman-Moorish Palace in Sicily, *La Ziza*, the Arab Hall communicated to Leighton's guests both his knowledge of and deep admiration for the art and culture of the Orient.

In many ways, the Arab Hall might be considered to be the most important part of Leighton's extensive collection of middle and near-eastern artefacts, many acquired during his extensive travels in the region. However Leighton was also a connoisseur of western classical painting and contemporary visitors would have admired the many examples of French and Renaissance art

collected by Leighton, a legacy of his training, alongside some of the best work of the emerging artists that he supported. This type of art would have been familiar to and appreciated by most of his contemporaries. The eastern work, in contrast, would have engaged different senses. To all but the aesthetic elite of the Victorian art world, the products of Muslim artists and craftsmen were alien, exotic objects, the creative language of which was little known or understood. In the years following the Great Exhibition of 1851 the British public were treated to a number of presentations of such material but usually its interpretation concentrated upon its assumed 'difference' from western art.

For Leighton and the small group of intellectuals who comprised the artist's 'inner circle', these artefacts were the logical products of a long and rich tradition of artistic endeavour. Leighton's interest in Moorish art can be traced to his early appreciation of Spanish work influenced by the middle eastern and north African conquerors who had ruled much of the Iberian peninsular for over 7 centuries. During a lengthy period of development following completion of his formal education at the Städelsches in Frankfurt Leighton travelled to Venice, where extensive trade with the Orient had a marked and visible impact upon Renaissance design, art

and architecture. Moving on to Paris he was drawn to the work of Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Auguste-Domenique Ingres who combined what became known as “Orientalist” subject matter with an understanding of the society and customs which underpinned it gleaned from their extensive travels within the Muslim world. Not surprisingly then as Leighton became more established and successful as an artist in his own right, he sought to visit for himself the lands and cultures that had so engaged him as a student. A short trip to Algiers in 1857 paved the way for more extensive journeys in 1858 and 1867, culminating with a voyage along the Nile in a steamboat provided by the Pasha of Egypt as a result of Leighton’s friendship with the Prince of Wales. On each occasion Leighton sketched intensively both the people and the buildings of the towns and landscapes he visited and developed a lifelong affection for the arab peoples he encountered,

(QUOTE)

“Eastern manners are certainly very pleasing, and the frequent salutations, which consist in laying the hand first on the breast and then on the forehead, making at the same time a slight inclination, are graceful without servility”

An inveterate collector, Leighton acquired many objects including ceramics, textiles and metalwork during his travels and as his appreciation of Islamic art broadened and became more refined he purchased items of greater quality. He was assisted in his endeavours by his close friend the explorer, Richard Burton, whose knowledge of the middle east was extensive. Significant acquisitions of Iznik tiles and decorative wares were brokered by Burton on Leighton's behalf and which were transported back to London for incorporation into the decorative treatment of Leighton's home. At the height of his powers as an artist and his influence as President of the Royal Academy, Leighton's collection of eastern art comprised several hundred items varying from ceramics to glass and textiles which provided an appropriate context for and complement to, the Arab Hall. It is significant to my argument however that despite the wealth of material and the studies and sketches at his disposal, Leighton made little use of them within his own work with only a handful of his canvasses expressing even vaguely "orientalist" themes.

The history of Leighton House following the artist's death may be considered as occupying three distinct phases. Almost inevitably given the high esteem in which Leighton, the man, artist, and PRA

(President of the Royal Academy) was held by his close friends and contemporaries, the establishment of a museum in his memory was not conceived in a spirit of critical re-interpretation of Leighton's career. The various committees convened by Mrs. Barrington set about returning as many of Leighton's works to the house as their limited budgets allowed, relying heavily upon the generosity of those who had benefited from Leighton's gifts of artworks. Of particular note was the success of the Committee for the return of a large proportion of Leighton's drawings which managed to acquire through purchase and donations some 80 % of the collection, which had been purchased as a single entity by the Fine Arts Society. Of considerable importance in explaining Leighton's meticulous working method the drawings remain one of the key assets of the museum to this day.

While Mrs Barrington and her friends were not without personal means the level of resources required to sustain the museum as a memorial to an artist whose reputation was somewhat in decline led to an almost continual search for sponsorship and ultimately, alternative custodianship. The rich interiors were rapidly deteriorating and in 1926 the decision was taken to hand the running of the Museum over to the Local Authority. At this point

Leighton House entered its second phase. Now funded by public money, the museum was re-focused to meet the needs of the local community, hosting a variety of concerts and art exhibitions unrelated either to Leighton or his home. As interest in the museum further diminished the local authority (in those days the Borough of Kensington) took the decision to adapt the building to provide a branch lending library with support offices in the basement and upper stories. Leighton House thus became something of a local curiosity and so it remained until a combination of circumstances and the artistic re-appraisal of Leighton's work (stimulated by Richard and Leonee Ormond's 1975 monograph on the artist) encouraged a review by the authority of the role of the building and its potential to contribute to the cultural life of the Borough.

This last phase of the history of the museum can be said to have focussed upon celebration of the centenary of Leighton's death in 1996. A programme of restoration of the interiors (which remains ongoing) and artistic events themed upon the work of Leighton and his contemporaries were the precursor to an explosion for interest in Leighton House during the centenary year; publicity

which cemented the reputation of the Museum as a major cultural venue both in London and abroad.

The fortunes of Leighton House collections can be considered as mirroring the three phases of the Museum. The imperative of Mrs Barrington and her colleagues to populate the fledgling museum with the products of Leighton's career was laudable and highly appropriate to an institution primarily concerned with preserving the memory of an important artist in a society increasingly indifferent to his talents.

The Committee was relatively successful in obtaining some of Leighton's major paintings including , *The Death of Brunelleschi, 1852* ; *A Noble Lady of Venice, 1865*. However there were some problems with this approach. As a commercially very successful painter Leighton, in general, did not retain his own work except for those studies, sketches, landscapes and experimental pieces which were used in the development of his canvases and which he did not consider suitable for public consumption. Visitors to Leighton House in its first incarnation would therefore, have been directed towards Leighton's finished paintings and more accomplished and developed studies. All the elements of his

personal collection that remained unsold at auction were, by implication, the least important pieces and would have provided a modest backdrop to the display of Leighton's art.

Under local authority control and as part of the 'improvement' of the working classes, the Museum adopted a more didactic mission, promoting the interiors of the House as a period piece and 'collecting' [I use the term in its broadest sense] Victorian art from the time of Leighton's greatest success, regardless of whether the artist was known to Leighton and (to a certain extent) of the quality of the work. In a more sympathetic vein, the pieces of William De Morgan decoration which remained in the house as part of the fittings were added to in 1927 by receipt of the Perrin Bequest - together with a sizeable extension in which to house it. The Perrin's extensive collection of De Morgan's eastern influenced ceramic forms and glazes were a fitting complement to the interior and very much in the spirit of Leighton's ownership of the House. Alongside this work the Perrins also bestowed some paintings by Evelyn de Morgan, ceramics by De Morgan's successor, Frank Passenger, and some sculptures by the Perrin's daughter, Maud reinforcing somewhat the lack of a specifically focussed approach towards the collections. During the period of

its operation as branch library the House attracted gifts by local and amateur painters, any significance of which substantially diminished in the years following their accession into the collections.

With the increasing awareness of the value of Victorian art and design which followed key events such as the founding of the Victorian Society in 1958 (at Leighton House's sister property, Linley Sambourne House) and the unsuccessful but highly publicised campaign to save the Euston Arch, Leighton House's collections entered a new phase. In concert with the drive to restore the House interior and to promote the importance and quality of Leighton's work, the collections policy was re-focussed to concentrate upon acquisition and development of the paintings and art objects that Leighton had owned and that had informed his painting. As a consequence key pieces such as "Portrait of a Gentleman" by Jacopo Tintoretto and Rosselino's, "the Madonna of the Candelabra" both of which reflected Leighton's deep attachment to the art of the Italian Renaissance, were acquired together with furniture and other artefacts either known or expected to have been owned by Leighton. Significant amongst these was the collection of Turkish Iznik ceramic wares dating from

the 15th and 16th centuries. Expanding the collection in this manner has permitted the Museum to more fully present Leighton House to the visitor in the manner it might have been appreciated in Leighton's own time.

The processes concerned with the re-statement of Leighton's importance as an artist, the restoration of his former home and the development of a collection that reflected Leighton's tastes and influences are continuing. Nevertheless, since the celebration of Leighton's centenary (now over ten years ago) Leighton House Museum has been developing initiatives and strategies to explore other facets of the House and the collections which open up previously hidden interpretations and relationships. The influence of eastern art and culture upon Leighton and his work is well documented and has been discussed earlier. One of the principal areas of investigation, therefore, has been to consider the significance of the objects - *in themselves* - which Leighton chose to collect, surround himself with and display within his home.

As a function of the appearance of its interiors and decoration, Leighton House gallery space, has, for a considerable time, been used to present the work of middle eastern painters. In exhibiting

the work of, amongst others, Khairat Al-Saleh, Fadwa Bizzari and Suad Al-Attar the House has provided a fitting backdrop for associated events such as private views and gallery talks.

Coverage of these events in the Arabic media has been valuable in broadening the visitor base and introducing the House to a new audience. In addition a programme of 'artist' in residence commissions has encouraged contemporary artists to produce original works inspired by elements of the collections, specifically addressing the eastern artefacts on display, with some surprising and valuable insights.

A significant indicator of the value of this new approach was the success of the exhibition *Arabian Nights* held in 1998 and a little over a year after the closing of the centenary exhibition. Conceived as a 'Christmas show' with all the pantomime elements that such an event would imply, the curators contrived to combine elements of fantasy , drama, camp and humour with a serious exploration of the means by which the Victorian public were encouraged to ignore the artistic connotations of eastern artefacts concentrating instead on the merely 'exotic'.

Together with a display of toy theatres, games and children's books the exhibition took as its central theme the translations of Arabian Nights tales by Leighton's friend Richard Burton in 1885 and how, by means of their "orientalist" and on occasion, sensationalist, interpretations they became the most widely read and by assimilation, the 'standard' version. Images and illustrations from the various tales presented the Victorian approach to the subject matter. In one example Walter Crane's somewhat extreme orientalisation in his illustration of *Aladdin (Aladdin or the Wonderful lamp)* mixed Japanese decoration with Chinese costume in the telling of an essentially Arabic tale. Similarly distorting the origins of the narrative was D.G. Rossetti's depiction of Princess Parizade in *The Golden Water* of 1866. In this case Rossetti's predilection for the Pre-Raphaelite nostalgia for the middle ages led to an Anglicized medievalism which whilst striking could hardly be considered to be in the spirit of the story.

Contrasting with such treatments were explorations both of the original work *Alf Layla wa Layla* and that of later translators influenced by the writings on orientalism of commentators who, like Edward Said, considered Burton's interpretation part of a "desire to denigrate the East in order to elevate Western values and

culture (quote from catalogue). Illustrations and book bindings were used to support the argument of the literary historian Muhsin Jassim Ali which compared the episodic structure of the Arabian Nights with “the intricate arabesques painted by medieval Islamic artists”. A programme of supporting events included storytelling, for both adults and children, of texts faithful to the originals and illuminating the tales from an Arabic perspective.

In a one-day symposium developing themes arising from the exhibition, eminent writers and historians presented and elaborated papers on a variety of topics such as; *Persian, Arabic and English Ceramics*, *Panoramas for Armchair Travellers* and *The Arabian Nights in English literary responses to Empire*. Robert Irwin, celebrated author of *The Arabian Nightmare* and *A Companion to the Arabian Nights*, delivered a memorable lecture entitled *Hollywood Baghdad* in which he detailed how Victorian notions of orientalism had remained alive well into the 20th Century through mainstream cinematic treatments of the tales.

Set within the context of Leighton House and its wealth of orientalist detail the exhibition succeeded in capturing the need to examine the sources of eastern art and culture to truly understand

its value and impact upon Victorian England and by implication, how the work is appreciated today.

The positive responses to *Arabian Nights* and solid sales of the catalogue after the exhibition had closed confirmed - if proof were needed- the interest of visitors to Leighton House in learning more about the creative context of the eastern art on permanent display. Following questions reported by guides conducting tours of the House, text panels and captions were revised to include more information regarding the makers of the pieces in addition to the standard data as to how Leighton had acquired them. This was a small but highly significant step.

In pursuit of their aim to promote a wider appreciation of Leighton's collecting of oriental art, the Curators were aware of the limitations of the collection that remained or had been returned to the House over time. Whilst rich in quality the pieces represented only a fraction of the material that Leighton had once owned but which had been sold at the 1896 auction. Furthermore, by far the largest portion were the Iznik and Syrian tiles that formed part of the lavish decoration of the House. Their status as fixed ornament made

interpretation and comparison with similar objects somewhat difficult and it was therefore decided to promote an exhibition of a major collection of Islamic art within the House and in doing so, providing an appropriate context for Leighton's own pieces. After some negotiation Leighton House Museum was honoured to host part of the internationally renowned Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art in (2003) entitled, *Ornaments de la Perse* , a reference to one of the earliest compendia of Islamic decoration (dated 1883) compiled by the French ceramic artist Eugene Victor Collinot and Adalbert de Beaumont. Their influence and that of the pottery they founded in 1860 was profound and can be seen in the work of younger French ceramicists such as Theodore Deck and Emile Samson and (of particular relevance to Leighton House) in the designs of William De Morgan and the English Arts and Crafts movement. Dr. Khalili's collection traces the revival of interest in eastern crafts stimulated for example by archaeological excavations including that of Susa in Persia (1884-1886). The degree to which Islamic precedent became embedded within contemporary production of 'exotic' ceramics and glass is most notably illustrated by the appearance of Arabic calligraphy in the decoration of glassware designed by Gustave Schmoranz (?) for the Viennese company of J&L Lobmeyr. From the richness and

variety of the Khalili collection the exhibition was able to place this revivalist work in direct comparison with the original Persian lacquer, Ottoman Iznik pottery and Mamluk metalwork and enamelled glass that had inspired it.

The final part of the exhibition dealt with a little known aspect of Revivalism in the means by which the economic circumstances of Western interest in eastern art stimulated the return to production of these artefacts in the countries of origin. Thus the pottery of Ottoman Iznik was revived at Kutahya western Turkey and later in Jerusalem. Safavid pottery and tilework, lacquerwares and the damascened steelwork of Isfahan were again made in Qajar, Iran. Egypt and Syria saw the manufacture of pieces influenced by the best pieces of Mamluk inlaid metalwork. What was most significant in the products of eastern revivalism was the lack of reference to the more widely publicised work of the Western copyists. These factories took as their point of departure the glories of their own national pasts; be it the eras of Suleyman the Magnificent, Shah Abbas I or the Mamluk Sultans of 14th C. Egypt. Emboldened by renewed national pride in the quality of their own design and craftsmanship these eastern nations were able to take their place, to considerable international acclaim,

within the halls of the great exhibitions of Europe and the USA. By placing the work of eastern revivalists alongside their western counterparts and by illustrating, in many cases, its superiority to the better known products of, say, Louis Comfort Tiffany, the Khalili collection makes an important statement regarding the quality of 19th Century eastern art, the strong connection it has to its medieval originators and by inference, the politics by which this work is so seldom known and understood today.

Expanding upon this background of opening-up Leighton House to new interpretations, the ALM (regional Museums agency for London archives, libraries and museum) London project, “Revisiting Collections: revealing significance”, provided the museum with an ideal opportunity to develop the process to a new level. The aims of the project, which had evolved from London Museums Agency research in 2003 into the failure of museum’s “traditional collections” to reach out to culturally and ethnically diverse audiences within the capital. The project was to address this failure and to improve museum’s collection documentation as a “genuinely democratic tool for access.” In discussion with ALM the Leighton House Museum curators elected to focus upon the “jewel” in the Museum’s collection; the Arab Hall. Due to funding

constraints it was necessary for the Museum and ALM's consultants to work quickly and effectively together over a limited period in early 2005 to implement elements of the "Revisiting Collections Toolkit". Accordingly to support independent research into the cultural links of the Arab Hall and its potential to be re-interpreted for a culturally diverse audience, a series of community focus groups were established. Working with these small groups the consultants developed "the stimulation and recording of individual viewers' responses to single or grouped objects as a key focus of the project". Thus original early 17th C. tiles from north western Iran which form part of the Arab Hall's decoration were considered alongside the 19th century revivalist work of Walter Crane and William De Morgan which are similarly displayed on adjoining walls.

Supplementing and informing the ALM research was the House's artist in residence during the period 2005/6, Karimah Bint Daoud who "found a wealth of starting points" for her work in the new interpretations. The material delivered by the study was further developed within the Museum's website allowing virtual visitors to focus upon individual aspects of the Arab Hall and download a variety of data concerning the makers' cultural and historical

significance, examples of similar designs and details of method and manufacture. In its published report into the project, dated October 2005, the ALM acknowledged that the work of Leighton House Museum (which was its featured case study) owed a significant degree of its success to the initiatives undertaken previously and which allowed “Revisiting Collections” to be seen by the Museum’s visitors as part of a continuum stretching back over a number of years. The experience of these projects, exhibitions and studies allowed, in the words of the report, “all services within the museum, ie. curatorial, educational and front of house, to work together and link with external focus groups in meeting an identified target. The target in this instance being the appreciation of the house and its collections as products of culturally diverse exchanges and not merely the legacy of a narrowed vision of art history.”

Building on the valuable lessons of the “Revisiting Collections” project, the Museum sought to address the UK wide *Festival of Muslim Cultures 2006* with a programme entitled, *Shared Heritages*. This was a learning initiative intended to use Leighton House Museum and its collections to connect individuals of diverse backgrounds in an understanding of each other’s cultures. Having

secured a *Heritage Lottery Fund grant*, the project was able to link communities currently with no ties to each other via a series of workshops delivered by a team of artists from Leighton House Museum. This process was made more effective by the establishment of an extensive range of community and school-based partnerships with the expressed aim of fostering greater community cohesion and participation within the array of heritages that live side-by-side in London. In addition valuable discussions were undertaken with the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre in West London. In practical terms Leighton House met its programme objectives through; updated material (in written and IT formats) both within the Museum and the creation of a ground-breaking website and virtual tour entitled *Leighton and the Middle East*, education packs, loan boxes and teacher (INSET) days for primary and secondary schools and an extensive outreach programme directed towards diverse communities in London. Groups were given the opportunity to visit each other and the museum forming links made possible by the museum as a central point. By these means new visitors to the Museum were able to appreciate Leighton House not only as an historic resource but also to realise that multiple cultural influences were part of its creation. In one of the key successes of the project, a panel of local young people

from diverse backgrounds was formed to assist in the development of “cultural trails” trialling a pilot hand-held PC for the Museum.

To celebrate its participation in the *Festival of Muslim Cultures*, Leighton House Museum has recently (June 2007) hosted a series of events based upon the key themes and successes of the Festival. A one-day conference entitled *Islam Today, Rich Past Progressive Future*, brought together leading academics in the field of Islamic and cultural scholarship; Dr. Nader El-Bizri, Dr Dina Kiwan, Professor Robert Hillenbrand and Professor Mona Siddiqui, to debate both the legacy and future of Islam within the realms of art, architecture, science and philosophy. Dr. Kiwan focussed upon her views on *Educating for Inclusive Citizenship* where the British Government agendas to promote the teaching of citizenship in schools are balanced with the need to ensure heterogeneity and diversity remain vital aspects of British society. In a programme of artists' talks Hanna Mal Allah addressed her responses to the fate of her home city Baghdad. A fascinating paper by Rashad Salim explored the cohesive influences that successful cities play in society. As he says “bonding and bringing together is what a great city does when in good hands. It is what London is and what Baghdad was famous for”. Finally an

afternoon of Middle Eastern music combined the folkloric traditions of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine with Houria Niata's fusion of the Arab and Spanish music of Al Andalus; a perfect synthesis of western and Islamic traditions working in harmony.

Whilst recognising that there is much work to be done Leighton House Museum can look back on what might be considered as the first phase of its major project to re-interpret the House and its collections for a modern (read "diverse") audience with some satisfaction. In continuing to offer its traditional mixture of learning and cultural events alongside a largely new and progressive development programme, it is succeeding in bringing its "old" and "new" audiences together towards a common vision that respects the Leighton House heritage whilst simultaneously giving credit to the diversity responsible for its richness. Ultimately though, the future of Leighton House lies with the young people that are being encouraged to visit museums, often for the very first time. In continuously gathering the data established by the ALM "Revisiting Collections" project Leighton House intends to remain at the forefront of the "re-interpretation debate". By meeting with its new audience on common ground unexpected synergies are being created . In 2006 the annual Notting Hill Carnival procession

witnessed an award winning float designed by a local community group and celebrating the rich Islamic art of Leighton House. For a 19th century orientalist interior to be interpreted through its eastern precedents at a festival of Caribbean Culture by a multi-cultural arts group is an indicator of the power of diverse interpretation of a Museum collection and an endorsement of the enthusiasm of the wider community that Leighton House has begun and will continue to engage with.