

EXOTIC MIRROR: IN THE EYE OF THE OTHER, AND OTHER STORIES.

Alexis Renard, 15 to 23 March

Exotic can sometimes be misunderstood as something 'other' in such a way as to be problematic – at worst, even appropriated. But in this exhibition, Renard aims to show the power of the exotic, and its ability to bring together worlds for the better. Indian and Asian pieces depict European subjects, known widely as *firangi*, or foreigners. The images of the Europeans hail mainly from the 18th century. Notable among them is a Portrait of a Dutch gentleman, with his striking moustache, offset by ships coming into port in the background. He clutches a porcelain cup near his face, complementing the blue of the ocean with the foreground. But perhaps the most scandalous image is that of an erotic scene featuring a European couple, circa 1700, in Rajasthan. Nude and locked in a full-body embrace, four female figures dressed in European clothes frame them and look on. However, the women also have *bindis* and dark hair, marrying the aesthetic ideals of both cultures in this surprising scene. It is this in-depth look at cross-cultural perspectives throughout history that proves to be so fascinating, layering in precious objects from the past with



*Portrait of a Dutch Gentleman,
pigments and gold on paper,
North India, probably Jaipur,
late 18th century, 39.8 x 31.9 cm,
Alexis Renard*

images of 'exotic' foreigners to tell so many tales of travel, discovery, and (without pretence) lust.

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