COLLAGE REPORTAGE

* Friday Late 31 March 2006
Tippoo's Tiger

Musical automaton, carved and painted wood, with metal fittings.
Mysore
1790s

The life-sized automaton of carved and painted wood represents a tiger devouring a prostrate European in 1790s dress. A crank handle operates two mechanisms to move the man's joint arm and simulate roars and groans. A flap in the animal's flank reveals an organ keyboard, stops and pipes. The casing suggests South Indian workmanship, while the works are of European origin. Musical toys were popular in contemporary Europe and many Indian rulers also collected them.

The model belonged to Tipu Sultan, "the Tiger of Mysore", and inveterate enemy of the British, who knew him as Tippoo Sahib. It came into the possession of the East India Company following his death in 1799 at the battle of Seringapatam.
Container in the form of a sacred bird
Gold, set with stones
Burma
19th century

Presented by the Government of the Union of Burma in generous recognition of the
Victoria & Albert Museum's safekeeping of the Mandalay Regalia (1886 – 1964)

Chic + K + (-P)en = Chicken
Evening Coat
Velvet with silk embroidery and applied felt flowers
Probable Paris
About 1900

Dramatic stems of hemlock cover this elegant evening coat. It was probably made in one of the Paris couture salons and features a modish high collar and sweeping skirts. The embroidery technique and the design reflect Arts and Crafts influences, showing how couturiers adapted styles from current art movements.

Given by Mrs A. Poliakoff

Hem + (-C)lock = Hemlock
Screen panel
Tapestry woven silk (kesi), with phoenixes among rocks and flowers.
About 1600, Ming dynasty
A wooden frame on legs would have supported this panel. It might have stood across an entrance way or behind a seating area in a room for receiving guests.

P(-ear) + (-S)hoe +N+ (-S)ix = Phoenix
Traditional Japanese costumes had no pockets, so everyday objects such as seals, inkstone, and medicine were carried in pouches or boxes. These were hung from a cord which passed behind the wide belt (obi). The net (obuse) was tied to the other end to prevent it from slipping down and allowing the box or pouch to fall. Netsuke were short axes with the miniature medicine containers called inro.

Most of the netsuke shown here date from between 1700 and 1870.

Tyson gift

Dandy +L+ I(-r)on = Dandelion
Vase
Porcelain vase with underglaze blue painted decoration
1800 – 1850, Choson Dynasty
This royal dragon vase was used in court ceremonies in Korea around 1800. Two identical dragons are painted chasing each other round the body of the vase.

Dr(-um) + (-B)ag + On(-e) = Dragon
Richard Gray
In association with Anna Piaggi Fashion-ology
2 February – 23 April 2006

For Barthes, words and objects have in common the organized capacity to say something: at the same time, since they are signs, words and objects leave the burden almost to appear natural to their consumer, as of what they say is eternal, true, necessary, instead of arbitrary, made, contingent.

— Edward Said

Collage Reportage coincides with the exhibition Anna Piaggi Fashion-ology. The exhibition is both a survey of and highlights from Anna Piaggi’s extraordinary personal archive, which spans the length and breadth of her working life. She appears as both fashion reporter and muse, and her descriptions of dress, their reinterpretation through styling and redescription through word association are central to the exhibition.

The penultimate section of the exhibition, *Morpho-illogical*, is a tableau. Huge black and white paper cut-outs create an imaginary habitat for a selection of objects linked by their relationship to flora and fauna. They build an idea (in paper and wood) of what Anna Piaggi’s attitude to her collection might be. Stories and themes connect disparate cabinets, and standing next to the cabinets are Gray’s life-size collages. The cut-outs as visual descriptions raise questions about the nature of captions, which are at the heart of the museological project. They concentrate our attention, tell us what to look at and make sure we do not stray. Roland Barthes suggested in a 1967 interview published in *Le Monde* why ‘photographs in newspapers are always captioned: to reduce the risk engendered by a multiplicity of meanings’.

Richard Gray redescribes what we can, in a sense, already see – he translates decoration into more decoration. Hyper-superficiality is a very contemporary way to be the point, not the problem: it is where the sophistication of fashion shines through.

Judith Clark
Curator, Anna Piaggi Fashion-ology