

EASTERN PROMISE



tour of different coloured and priced pearl earrings, necklaces, bracelets and pendants (N). “Look what I’ve got!” She held up a necklace of huge, expensive, grey-toned pearls. “I bought myself some ‘fuck you’ pearls. I can’t wait to get back to New York to show my friend, who bought herself a ‘fuck you’ Jag car.” (O — *Goose and Wolf, China*; painting.)

At the airport, Danni showed us fake bags: “You get the best imitations in China”. She purchased six of these bags and one enormous one to put them all into. Next morning, our Hong Kong hotel, soundproofed, scented and soft, looked down on layer upon layer of spaghetti-viaduct roads (P and Q). Breakfast was laid out, with

fruits, croissants and coffee, which some of us carried into the large conference room (R) ... “We’re entering into a new era of globality where borders are blurred and the very idea of foreignness is foreign.” The screen on the stage showed a woman from Pakistan saying, “Business without borders, competing with everyone, from everywhere, for everything.”

After lunch, Poppy and I took a tram that seemed to go vertically up to the sky, to look down at the city and waters of Hong Kong. Poppy was to dine with other guests up here, while 11 of us were invited by Janet De Silva to the famous China Club (S), full of Thirties paintings and photographs, to be served bamboo shoots in a private library.

The last meeting was one of the best; a laugh. We nearly didn’t go, as the subject was ageism. “Remembering a name nowadays is as good as an orgasm,” said Dr Kanwaljit Soin, the first speaker. The whole room was abuzz with laughter and comments. “As you age, you rage.” Up leapt Lucy, a glamorous woman of 92. “I think I am an illustration of what you’re talking about. I haven’t retired — I have re-tyred, like a car. At the moment I am making a film about artists who are still working over the age of 80.” “Hey, I’m going to floor 300. The witty and wonderful Irish contingent are having a party,” said the deep-voiced Canadian journalist Ann Medina.

We visited the Nan Lian Garden (T),

manicured and still, surrounded by the tall Hong Kong buildings. This wonderful garden inspired *Asleep With Koi Carp* (U — painting). We took the plane to Beijing. Turquoise masks and Chinese eyes (V). Our temperatures taken. “What if I’m having a hot flush?”! One of our group was, in fact, drawn aside because of her temperature; previously a lecturer had been quarantined in Tokyo.

Beijing was like landing in a shiny kitchen. People were cleaning between railings and on top of ledges. The flat-paved Tiananmen Square was our first tour. Mao, looking down on us, his portrait backed in red. Straight-backed soldiers stood in rows, a frightening atmosphere, which seemed to lift