

Past Made Present: Dutch Shadows in the Black Atlantic, September 3, 2022-August 6, 2023

This exhibition explores the long but relatively unacknowledged shadow cast by Dutch industry, culture, and colonialism during the early modern period (ca. 1500–1700). During that time, the global expansion of the Dutch commercial empire provided a newly created merchant class the means to buy and commission vast amounts of art and consumer goods. Museum collections continue to reflect that legacy today—especially in the realm of portraiture. Europe’s immense wealth was generated in part by profits from the transatlantic slave trade, in which the Dutch were major players. This includes trafficking more than 500,000 enslaved Africans to the Americas and the establishment of Nieuw Amsterdam, later known as New York City. Harlem, now an iconic cultural and artistic mecca for the Black diaspora, was once a Dutch colonial outpost.

Some of these works highlight this largely forgotten Dutch influence in the Americas, while others collapse the past and present of Black experience to help us think about the future. Many of the artists featured have regularly refused linear notions of time and national boundaries. In the spirit of the Afro-diasporic intellectual tradition, *Past Made Present* invites us all to challenge established notions of time, space, and history. Three sections ask us to consider: How do power and wealth affect how we present ourselves? What historical narratives remain unrecognized? How have Black artists critically engaged with the aesthetic practices of Dutch artists from the 1600s, held up as a pinnacle of Western European artistic achievement?

Jane’a Johnson-Farnham

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CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

James Van Der Zee

American, 1886-1983

The Heiress, Harlem, 1938

From the portfolio *James Van Der Zee: Eighteen Photographs*, 1974

Gelatin silver print

18.4 x 23.6 cm (7 3/16 x 9 5/16 inches)

Museum purchase with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 80.232.17



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James Van Der Zee

American, 1886-1983

Miss Suzie Porter, Harlem, 1915

From the portfolio *James Van Der Zee: Eighteen Photographs, 1974*

Gelatin silver print

18.7 x 15.7 cm (7 3/8 x 6 3/16 inches)

Museum purchase with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 80.232.5



James Van Der Zee

American, 1886-1983

Garveyite Family, 1924

From the portfolio *James Van Der Zee: Eighteen Photographs, 1974*

Gelatin silver print

24.1 x 19.7 cm (9 1/2 x 7 11/16 inches)

Museum purchase with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts 80.232.8



For four decades of the 20th century, James Van Der Zee documented Harlem, a vibrant center of African American culture that was once the Dutch settlement Haarlem. While *Miss Suzie Porter* and *Garveyite Family* depict Black middle-class subjects in Harlem, *The Heiress* portrays a domestic worker who recently inherited the home, furnishings, and art collection of her wealthy white employer.

Van Der Zee photographed important figures from Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) to artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988), but his main subjects were ordinary people, many of whom had come to Harlem from across the US, the Caribbean, and Africa in search of opportunity.

Chinese for export

Pardie Al Myn Actien Kwyt (*By God, Lost All My Shares*) Plate, 1720–1725

Porcelain with underglaze blue, enamels, glaze, and gilding

21.3 cm (8 3/8 inches) (diameter)

Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.454



This plate, one from a set of six made in China for export, warns the Dutch to not repeat the mistakes of the British. It is thought to

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satirize the South Sea Bubble, a financial crisis that ruined a number of wealthy British investors in 1720. Founded in London in 1711, the South Sea Company traded enslaved Africans in the Spanish-occupied Americas, working on the assumption that a treaty with Spain would provide more favorable trade conditions. Instead, the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 imposed a high tax on imported slaves. Still, the success of the company's limited voyages drove stock speculation without profits until the bubble burst in 1720.

Kara Walker (RISD MFA 1994, Painting/Printmaking)
American, b. 1969
Freedom—A Fable: A Curious Interpretation of the Wit of a Negress in Troubled Times, 1997
Pop-up laser-cut book
Gift of Lasse Antonsen 2020.68.11



In this volume, Kara Walker uses laser-cut pop-up silhouettes to tell the story of N—, an African American enslaved woman freed in the 1800s. The book begins with a ship and ends with a surreal childbirth scene, suggesting the ship as an important starting place literally and metaphorically for African American identity. Walker writes, "This ship, with its uncertain destination is much like a woman's sex," serving as a kind of "birth canal" that refashions human beings into slaves, comparable to the way that perpetual slavery was enshrined in colonial America by legally tying the status of newborns to the status of the mother. Even after N— is freed, she is still reduced to her ability to reproduce. This book asks: is freedom achievable for Black women, or is it an American fable?

Attributed to Jan van Huysum
Dutch, 1682–1749
Still Life with Flowers, ca. 1715–1730
Oil on canvas
35.6 x 27.9 cm (14 x 11 inches)
Gift of D. Berkeley Updike in memory of Elisabeth Bigelow Updike
36.018

The English term *still life* was adopted from the Dutch *Stilleven*, a painting genre depicting inanimate objects. Still-life painting peaked in the Low Countries—now the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg—in the 1600s.



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This painting is attributed to Jan van Huysum, an Amsterdam artist who primarily produced floral still lifes. Like other Dutch still-life painters, Huysum catered to a European audience who expected abundant, exquisitely detailed depictions of rare flower specimens. The striped tulip at the upper right serves as an example. In the 1630s, tulips became a Dutch national obsession. Because still lifes often featured flowers that did not bloom at the same time of year, a single painting could take several years to produce.

Dutch
Plate, 1650–1675
Earthenware with tin glaze and enamel
Diameter: 34.3 cm (13 1/2 inches)
Gift of Theodora Lyman 19.312

Dutch potters produced tin-glazed earthenware decorated with cobalt blue to imitate Chinese porcelain. Although foreign traders were forbidden to engage directly with Chinese artisans, knowledge of how to produce porcelain was eventually developed by Europeans in the early 1700s.



Dutch
Ring, ca. 1600
Gold and citrine
2.8 x 2.2 x 1.2 cm (1 1/8 x 7/8 x 1/2 inches)
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 09.088

During the early modern period, like today, jewelry fashioned out of precious metals and gemstones signified wealth and status. For Europeans of the time, these materials recalled the far-flung places of empire and were thought to bestow special powers. This Dutch ring is made of gold (associated with cleansing) and a form of yellow quartz called citrine (associated with warmth). Prized for its resemblance to the rarer topaz, most citrine is mined in Brazil. From 1630 to 1654, the Dutch maintained a colony in northeastern Brazil, where they still hold interests in mining, cattle farming, and other Brazilian industries today.



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Roy DeCarava
American, 1919–2009
Hallway, 1953
Gelatin silver print
Plate: 32.9 x 21.8 cm (12 15/16 x 8 9/16 inches)
Jesse H. Metcalf Fund 84.222.2

Roy DeCarava's painterly photographs typically depict people in his native Harlem and explore their relationship to light. Though this photograph has his characteristic attention to gray tones and formal composition, *Hallway* is unique. In a 1981 interview, DeCarava described this work:

It's about a hallway that I know I must have experienced as a child. Not just one hallway; it was all the hallways that I grew up in. . . . They were poor, poor tenements, badly lit, narrow and confining; hallways that had something to do with the economics of building for poor people. The ambience, the light in this hallway was so personal, so individual that any other kind of light would not have worked. . . . It was frightening, it was scary, it was spooky, as we would say when we were kids. And it was depressing. And yet, here I am an adult, years and ages and ages later, looking at the same hallway and finding it beautiful.



Reinier Nooms, called Zeeman
Dutch, 1623 or 1624–1664
The Roowaensche Quay, ca. 1659–1662
From the series *Views of Amsterdam*
Etching on paper
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 52.211.4



This etching depicts the burgeoning Dutch fleet on the Roowaensche Quay in Amsterdam. Known for his precise representations of maritime scenes and ships, Nooms went by Zeeman (seaman) in homage to his previous work as sailor, a profession that took him all around the world as the Dutch commercial empire expanded.

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Justus Brouwer, designer
Dutch, 1716–1775
De Porceleyne Bijl (The Porcelain Axe) Factory, Manufacturer
Dutch (Delft), 1657–1803
No. 6, Een Zee Schuijt op de Nering (*A ship over fishing grounds*)
Plate, 1764–1775
Earthenware with tin glaze and enamel
Diameter: 23.2 cm (9 1/8 inches)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.423



This delftware plate, one from a set of twelve, is made of tin-glazed earthenware decorated with cobalt blue. It depicts a typical Dutch fishing ship, or *haringbuis*, which caught and processed fish at sea. Grain, fish, and ceramics formed the economic backbone of the northern Netherlands in the 1600s. Developed to copy Chinese porcelain, Delft's earthenware industry declined in the late 1700s, when the herring market also collapsed.

Rembrandt van Rijn
Dutch, 1606-1669
Self-Portrait in a Velvet Cap with Plume (state iii/iv), 1638
Etching on paper
13.7 x 10.5 cm (5 3/8 x 4 1/8 inches) (plate)
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Arthur B. Kern 85.096



Rembrandt van Rijn
Dutch, 1606-1669
Self-Portrait in a Velvet Cap with Plume (state iii/iv), 1638
Etching on paper
13.5 x 10.3 cm (5 5/16 x 4 1/8 inches) (plate)
Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.1269



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Rembrandt van Rijn
Dutch, 1606-1669
Self-Portrait in a Cap and Scarf with Face Dark: Bust (state ii/v), 1633
Etching on paper
13.5 x 10.5 cm (5 5/16 x 4 1/8 inches) (sheet)
Bequest of Frederick Lippitt 2007.98.3



Rembrandt van Rijn
Dutch, 1606-1669
Self-Portrait in a Fur Cap: Bust (state iv/vi), 1630
Etching on paper
6.3 x 5.2 cm (2 1/2 x 2 1/8 inches) (plate)
Museum Works of Art Fund 49.458



Rembrandt's early self-portraits focused on technique—the rendering of light and facial expression. As he aged, the artist became more concerned with his own identity, using fantasy to explore his individuality. He often represented himself in period clothing from the previous century or vaguely ancient garb, and sometimes in clothing associated with Asia. Made in Rembrandt's early 30s, the two versions of *Self-Portrait in a Velvet Cap with Plume* show him dressed in an entirely imaginary costume.

Flemish
Lace Collar; created late 1600s, reworked ca. 1810
Linen bobbin lace with added picot stitches, restyled into a bertha collar
114.3 x 20.3 cm (45 x 8 inches)
Gift of Edward and Cassandra Stone 1993.011.9



Flemish fragments incorporated into Italian lace
Lace Collar; fragments created 1600–1615, reworked ca. 1690s
Linen bobbin lace (Flemish) and needle lace (Italian)
35.6 cm (14 inches) (length)
Gift of William McCue 1988.082.21



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Italian (Venice)

Venetian Point Needle Lace (*Punto a Relievo*), ca. 1620s

Linen worked in the Venetian point; raised-stitch technique

49.5 cm (19 1/2 inches) (length)

Gift of Richard Greenleaf 49.330



In the 1600s, Flanders (now northern Belgium and part of the Netherlands) and Italy were the centers of lacemaking. Flemish lace is dense, and made following a pricked pattern from many threads wound on bobbins. Venetian lace is looser, and worked using a needle and a single thread.

Lace was once largely reserved for religious garments, altar clothes, and shrouds, but in the 1600s it became an everyday luxury item of adornment for the Dutch, who were flush with capital from the global trade of goods and enslaved people. Domestic and exemplary Italian lace was used to trim clothing, celebrate the birth of babies, and decorate Dutch households.

Alanna Airitam

American, b. 1971

Queen Mary (The Queen), 2017

Color inkjet print with hand-applied varnish

Sheet: 91.4 x 61 cm (36 x 24 inches)

Courtesy of Alanna Airitam

The photograph *Queen Mary (The Queen)* depicts a woman flanked by a dazzling bouquet of flowers. Both the flowers—which burst forth—and the offering of fruit emphasize the abundance, richness, and beauty of Black culture. The photograph belongs to a series of portraits called *The Golden Age*, which recalls aspects of Dutch still-life paintings. However, rather than highlighting Dutch Golden Age of the 1600s, Airitam's portraits were created in homage to an African American golden age of the early 1900s: the Harlem Renaissance.



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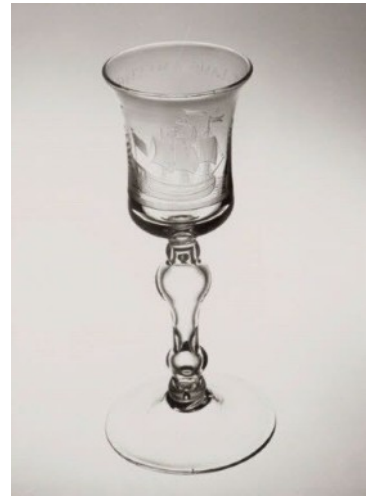
Maxine Helfman
American, b. 1953
Hoodie XVI (Keith Grant, Dallas, TX), 2016
From the series *Hoodie*
Color inkjet print
76.2 x 114.3 cm (30 x 45 inches)
Gift of the artist 2022.37

In mood and composition, this pensive photograph recalls painted portraits of Flemish monks from the 1500s in hooded robes. Here the hooded knit sweatshirt, or hoodie, as it has become known, is laden with symbolism. A worker garment in 1930s, the hoodie became the uniform of hip-hop, skaters, and teenage rebellion. Most recently, it conjures images of the murder of teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012, and of the activism that followed his untimely death.



Dutch
Stemmed Goblet, 1740–1760
Glass; blown and engraved
25.4 cm (10 inches) (height)
Bequest of Mrs. Hope Brown Russell 09.644

This commemorative goblet features a ship and the inscription “Het lands weldvaaren” (To the prosperity of the country). Considered luxury objects, engraved glasses were often given by the Dutch as gifts. Shareholders, ship captains, and shipmasters commissioned glasses to toast their successes. Merchants pooled their resources in 1602 to form the Dutch East India Company, and again in 1621 to create the Dutch West India Company, trading goods and enslaved people in the Indies, Americas, and Africa. By the 1700s these ventures had generated immense wealth, celebrated here in glass.



English plate with Dutch decoration
Plate, ca. 1795
Earthenware with glaze and enamel
18.4 cm (7 3/16 inches) (diameter)
Gift of Phillip and Jane Johnston in honor of the Museum staff
2003.59

Dutch king William V of Orange (1748–1806) and his wife, Princess Wilhelmina (1767–1806), are shown in profile on this creamware



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plate. Though the plate was produced in England, it was decorated in the Netherlands.

To escape a popular revolution backed by French forces in the Netherlands, William V went into exile in London in 1795. His London court included Cupido and Sideron, enslaved Africans taken as children to his court at The Hague.

Carrie Mae Weems
American, b. 1953
Lenox, Inc., manufacturer
American, 1889–present
Commemoration Plate, 1992
Porcelain with transfer-print, glaze, and gilding
Gift from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Barnet Fain 2001.80.30



Commemoration plates (like the historical examples at right and left) typically celebrate or satirize the achievements of the powerful and wealthy. In her *Commemorating* series of ceramic plates, Carrie Mae Weems spotlights the unsung cultural contributions of Black Americans. This example highlights the impact of African American music and foodways on American culture.

Nike, manufacturer
Eugene, Oregon; 1964–present
Maharam, textile manufacturer
New York, 1902–present
Hella Jongerius, textile designer
Dutch, b. 1963
Moss, retailer
New York, 1994–2012
Nike Sportswear I World AF1 by Maharam Limited Edition Men's Shoes, 2009
Wool, nylon, and polyester upper with rubber sole
Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 2009.99



Known commonly as Uptowns because of their popularity with street basketball players, rappers, and youth of color in 1980s Harlem, the Air Force 1 is Nike's bestselling shoe. Dutch industrial designer Hella Jongerius created these sneakers in collaboration with textile manufacturer Maharam. Jongerius's version features 14 pieces of a

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pecially designed wool felt textile that was made with embroidery equipment and hand-cut to create patterning.

Tia Blessingame (RISD MFA 2015, Printmaking)
American, b. 1971

Settled: African American Sediment or Constant Middle Passage, 2015
Artist's book of original poetry letterpress-printed on Nepalese lokta paper

24.8 x 38.7 cm (9 3/4 x 15 1/4 inches)

Artist Development Fund Print Purchase Award 2015.84



Settled contemplates the relationship between captive Africans during the Middle Passage and the contemporary African American experience of racism in the United States. Blessingame's book honors and mourns the enslaved people who perished in rebellion on the *Sally*, a ship owned by the Brown family of Providence, as well as modern icons of the Black Lives Matter movement, such as Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Relisha Rudd. On the key theme of dehumanization, Blessingame offers, "The disruptive and mournful effects that death, kidnapping, abuse, or assault have on a person and a community transcend the borders of distance and time."

G-Star RAW, design label

Amsterdam, 1989–present

Anne Marika Verploegh Chassé, wearer and mender

Jeans, ca. 2005

Cotton twill weave; indigo-dyed, patched, and mended

Inseam: 76.2 cm (30 inches)

Gift of Anne Marika Verploegh Chassé 2018.43



These jeans are at the intersection of luxury and workwear. The Dutch designer jean company G-Star RAW was founded on the concept of raw denim, producing high-status garments sewn from unwashed denim fabric.

In the 1800s, American slave owners clothed enslaved people using inexpensive fabrics such as raw denim. Densely woven, durable, and easily mended, this cloth was often indigo-dyed by enslaved people who brought with them from Africa generations of knowledge about

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growing this plant and making it into dye. Dutch colonists in New Amsterdam and English colonists in Jamestown, Virginia, had previously tried growing indigo, but Southern enslaved people were the first to do it successfully in what is now the US.

Until the 1930s, denim was worn in the US by laborers of all ages and races. Jeans later become global fashion garments, most recently through the explosion of the designer jean market in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Kennedi Carter

American, b. 1998

Shahqeel, 2020

From the series *Flexing/New Realm*

Color inkjet print

Sheet: 101.6 x 74.9 cm (40 x 29 1/2 inches) (sight)

Walter H. Kimball Fund 2022.31

This photograph evokes the lavish world of the 17th century, but it takes much of its inspiration from 1980s and 1990s hip-hop culture, creating a portrait where contemporary flamboyance and historical extravagance overlap.

Carter said of the concept in a 2021 talk,

Flexing seems like one of those things that we have as Black people that we're able to control. You're able to control your appearance . . . in a world that everything—so many things—are unknown. It's unknown what laws are going to be passed . . . , unknown what unjustness I might encounter the next day. But if I have control over how I can showcase who I am in the world, I'm going to do that.

