



Geheelzwaard van Pieter Decker, Schiedamschen dijk, 1700-1710

Acquisitions

Department of History

• JAN DE HOND AND EVELINE SINT NICOLAAS •

I GERRIT SCHOUTEN (1779-1839)

Diorama of a Carib Camp, 1810

Wood, paper, glass, 49 x 69 x 22 cm

Signed and dated lower centre: Geboetzeerd van Papier Door G. Schouiten fecit 1810

Over the years the Rijksmuseum has built up an extraordinary collection of dioramas by the Surinamese artist Gerrit Schouten. A diorama of a Carib camp was recently added.

Dioramas are peep shows that consist of a wooden outer box with a composition inside made entirely of paper. The back wall of the box is usually covered with a painting of trees and a blue sky with clouds.

Dioramas of Indian camps (Carib or Arawak), paired with a diorama of dancing slaves, were often sold to travellers or expatriates returning home as souvenirs of their time in Surinam. Although these peep boxes were rather more mass-produced than the topographical dioramas of a specific plantation or a view of Paramaribo, all the Indian camps and slave dances are unique in their staging and design. This depiction of a Carib camp is the oldest Indian camp by Schouten that we know of, and the only known diorama in which a painted glass plate has been used to suggest a river.

The diorama shows various aspects of the life of the Caribs in a settlement on the river consisting of two large huts and a small hut that is under construction. There is a dug-out with three figures on the riverbank. The men are

building the new hut or returning from hunting while the women look after the cooking and the children. The processing of cassava into bread is shown in and around the largest hut on the right. We can see the trough-shaped vessel that is being used to contain the grated cassava tubers. On the right in the hut two women are busy pounding cassava into flour. The flour is sieved into a pot. Then the bread is baked on a round plate over a fire. The final result is shown on a sheet beside it. We are able to see all stages of the process of turning cassava into bread in the diorama. This documentary style of composition is typical of Schouten and provides an image that is both attractive and educational.

LITERATURE:

- C. Medendorp, *Gerrit Schouten (1779-1839). Botanische tekeningen en diorama's uit Suriname*, Amsterdam 1999.
C. Medendorp with contributions by E. Sint Nicolaas, *Kijkkasten uit Suriname. De diorama's van Gerrit Schouten*, Amsterdam 2008.

PROVENANCE:

Van Ogtrop Family (1810-present). Purchased in 2010 from L. van Ogtrop, Oegstgeest
(inv. no. NG-2010-4).

2 ADRIANUS CANTER VISSCHER, AUTHOR AND COMPILER;
MINIATURES BY UNKNOWN INDIAN ARTISTS

The Canter Visscher Manuscript, written and compiled c. 1750-55
17th and early 18th-century Indian miniatures
Paper, ink and bodycolour, 33 x 21.5 x 3 cm

From 1731 until 1744, Adrianus Canter Visscher worked as a junior merchant and later as a legal clerk for the Dutch East India Company (voc) in Mazulipatnam, the oldest branch of the voc at the Coromandel Coast (the east coast of India). Between 1750 and 1755, after his return to the Netherlands, he wrote a history of the Mogul emperors and the voc branches in India. To this he added a lengthy memorandum about the economic situation of the voc in Coromandel, probably intended for the Heren xvii, the seventeen directors of the Dutch East India Company. At the back of his manuscript he included 28 Indian miniatures and two maps of places in Coromandel to illustrate his story.

The majority of these Indian miniatures are 17th and early 18th-century copies of Mogul court miniatures. They were made for the European market and reflected Western tastes. This explains the large number of portraits of princes – sets of portraits like these were very popular with European collectors – and the more exotic subjects, such as harem and hunting scenes. The hunting scenes were particularly sought-after if they had wild animals in them, like the miniature of a *Mogul Prince Hunting, Pounced on by a Tiger* made by an unknown artist from the Deccan around 1700.

The importance of this acquisition lies not so much in the individual miniatures as it does in the manuscript as a whole. It is a unique source for our knowledge of Indian miniatures in the West. In the 17th and 18th centuries Amsterdam was the most important trading and distribution centre for Indian miniature art. Collectors from all over Europe bought their miniatures there. Many of the paintings were originally placed in albums, but we usually only find them now as separate sheets. Many of these sheets still bear 17th- and 18th-century inscriptions in Dutch. The Canter Visscher Manuscript is a rare example in which the miniatures have survived in their original context. The only other example of an original album is also in the Rijksmuseum's collection: this is the Witsen Album, which contains portraits of Indian princes and was once in the famous collection of the Amsterdam burgomaster and collector Nicolaas Witsen.

PROVENANCE:

Feikema Family (c. 1750-present). Purchased in 2009 from J.D. Feikema, Amersfoort (inv. no. NG-2008-60).





3 *Javanese Market Place*

Java, c. 1850

Rice dough (figures), glass, wood, paint and metal (market stalls and furniture),
91 x 81.5 x 81 cm

No fewer than 154 figures populate this model of a Javanese market place. They are placed in and around the two long market buildings (*pendopos*). At the end of the market there is a smaller building: the house of the Chinese market superintendent, whose job it was to oversee what was going on. The little figures were made with a great feeling for detail. They represent people from all walks of life from different regions. Alongside the market traders with their merchandise we can see, for example, Chinese customers, an Arab merchant, dancers and even a gamelan orchestra. A European couple and their servant stroll among the stalls, while on the other side of the market a Javanese dignitary advances with his retinue.

The figures were made from a type of rice dough that was coloured all the way through, so they were not painted later. This market place was made by a Javanese workshop. Judging by the clothing of the Europeans and the wooden case, which is original and was specially made for this model, it dates from the mid-19th century. We know of two similar models of market places that have the same layout, but differ in the details and the number of figures (Wereldmuseum Rotterdam and Museum Bronbeek, Arnhem). This example is the largest and the best preserved. The same Javanese workshop also made models of large wedding and funeral processions that likewise contained a hundred or more figures.

These models were intended for the European market: wealthy private collectors, special exhibitions and museum collections. A market place like this was on show at the 1883 World Exhibition in Amsterdam. Though often strikingly accurate in the details, this model provides anything but a realistic idea of a Javanese market. It is more like a sampler of all the occupations and population groups that made Java so attractive and exotic to European visitors. This model certainly says much more about the European, colonial image of Javanese society than about its reality.

PROVENANCE:

French private collection. Purchase in 2009 made possible
by Antiquariaat Forum BV
(inv. no. NG-2009-134).





4 *Five Javanese Court Officials*

Java (?), 1820-70

Oil on paper, 197 x 74 cm

These man-sized depictions of five Javanese court officials are not portraits in the literal sense of the word; they are 'types'. The artist was not concerned with making individual likenesses, and both faces and bodies are quite roughly depicted. He devoted far more attention to getting the clothes right. The axiom 'clothes make the man' was certainly true in Indonesia. The accurately painted garments and batik motifs not only tell us which region these men came from, they also provide information about their rank and status. Almost certainly from Northeast Java or from Madura, a little island off the east coast of Java, they represent the various members of a noble court. They are probably (from left to right) a regent (*bupati*), a district head (*wedono*), a high official (*mantri*), an officer and a bodyguard.

These portraits are unique. We know of no other comparable works, certainly not in this medium and size. The paintings were most likely made by a non-western artist, but for western customers. Sets like this with a cross-section of the members of a court and sets depicting different population groups were popular with European collectors and answered the 19th-century western need for classification. Similar sets we know of are mainly of wooden dolls. The closest they come to this is a set of dolls from the collection of the British governor-general Thomas Raffles, which is now in the British Museum. These dolls not only wear similar clothes, they even stand on an identical tiled floor.

The five life-sized court officials stand resolutely and self-confidently. And that is perhaps the most extraordinary thing about them: Indonesians in 19th-century western portrayals are usually depicted as adversaries, subjects or examples of 'innocent' primitive societies. For this reason this acquisition is a very welcome addition and correction to the Rijksmuseum's 19th-century colonial history collection.

PROVENANCE:

Private collection Copenhagen; sale Museumsbygningen Kunstauktioner, Copenhagen, 1 March 2001, lot 72; sale Christie's, London, 22 May 2008, lot no. 50 (not sold); Niall Hobhouse Collection, 2010. Purchased in 2010 with the aid of the BankGiro Loterij and the Mondriaan Foundation. (inv. nos NG-2010-37 to 41).





