Acquisitions
Photography about the history of Surinam

PIETER ECKHARDT

Over the years the Rijksmuseum has actively acquired photographic material about the history of Surinam. These photographs present a picture of many aspects of colonial relationships: from the plantation economy and bauxite mining to the arrival of Surinamers in the Netherlands and the road to independence. The first photograph in this selection dates from the 19th century and is the earliest known photograph from Surinam. These acquisitions further the Rijksmuseum’s aim of presenting a complete record of the colonial past. The acquisition policy is consequently not restricted to photography. Unusual objects that have been acquired recently are the Surinamese resistance fighter Anton de Kom (1898-1945) and the diorama by the Surinamese artist Gerrit Schouten (1779-1839), which have been discussed in previous issues of the Bulletin. With the collection as it presently stands, it is possible to highlight the main features of the shared history of Surinam and the Netherlands, which began in 1667 and continues to the present day. Nonetheless there are still some gaps in the collection, so the museum will continue to seek more acquisitions in this area in the future.

1 JOHN L. RIKER OR WARREN THOMSON
[Further information unknown]
Portrait of Johannes Ellis and his Wife Maria Louisa de Hart
c. 1846
Daguerreotype, 80 x 45 mm.

This double portrait, a daguerreotype dating from around 1846, is currently the earliest photograph we know of from Surinam. The sitters are Johannes Ellis (1812-1870) and Maria Louisa de Hart (1826-1910), who married in Paramaribo in 1845. They are dressed in the latest fashion and are clearly of mixed race.

Johannes and Maria Louisa both came from well-to-do families, a small and select group in Paramaribo. Johannes was born in 1812 in Elmina in present-day Ghana, the centre of the Dutch slave trade on the African Gold Coast until the abolition of slavery. It is assumed that he was the illegitimate son of the Dutch governor of Elmina, Abraham de Veer, and a Ghanaian woman. De Veer became governor of Surinam in 1822. Johannes went with him and later became an official there. Maria Louisa was born on the Sardam plantation on the River Cottica in Surinam in 1826. Her father was Mozes Meyer de Hart Jr (1793-1845), who was Jewish and from Amsterdam, and her mother was the freed slave Carolina Petronella van de Hart (1801-1875). The immensely wealthy Mozes managed the Sardam, Bodenburg and Brouwerslust sugar plantations from his base in Paramaribo and owned some five hundred slaves.
The Ellises moved to the Netherlands in 1860 and lived with their five children at number 173 Herengracht in Amsterdam. By then, the forty-eight-year-old Johannes had amassed sufficient capital to be a person of independent means. He died ten years later in 1870. Maria Louise and her children then moved to Weesperzijde, and a niece from Surinam moved in with them. After four of her children had left home, she lived in Brussels for a while with one of her daughters. She died in The Hague in 1910. The couple’s eldest child and their only son, Abraham George (1846-1916), decided on a career in the navy. He was Minister of the Navy under Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper from 1903 to 1905, and was the first, and until now, the only Surinam-born Dutch minister. Shortly after his term as a minister, Queen Wilhelmina appointed him her special adjutant.

The photograph was taken by one of the itinerant daguerreotypists who went to Surinam in the years after the invention of photography in 1839. They advertised in the Surinam daily and weekly papers. The earliest known advertisement was placed by the daguerreotypist John L. Riker from New York. He arrived in Paramaribo in the spring of 1846 and was probably the first daguerreotypist to work there. Soon afterwards, another American daguerreotypist came ashore in Paramaribo, a man by the name of Warren Thompson. One of them must have photographed the Ellises, which means that the portrait was taken after their wedding and Maria Louisa was pregnant with Abraham George Ellis, who was born in August 1846.

LITERATURE:

PROVENANCE:
J. Ellis and M.L. de Hart, 1846; their descendants; long-term loan to the Rijksmuseum 2009 (RP-F-Br-2009-1).

2 ANONYMOUS
Construction of the Lawa Railway Viaduct c. 1910
Gelatin printing-out paper, 12 x 16 cm.

This photograph is evidence of a remarkable if short chapter in the colonial history of Surinam - gold mining. A railway line, the ‘Lawa railway’, had to be built to improve access to the gold fields situated deep in the interior. Some creeks had to be bridged. We still do not know exactly where this viaduct was built.

Gold fever raged in Surinam in the second half of the 19th century. Countless companies were hurriedly set up. When a French expedition found gold on the left bank of the River Lawa in 1885, it led to a border dispute between France and the Netherlands (French Guiana lies on the right bank), which was finally resolved in favour of the Netherlands after arbitration by the Russian Tsar Alexander III. The private Maatschappij Suriname then wanted to build a railway line to this area, but it proved too expensive. However the governor of Surinam, Cornelis Lely, was very much in favour of the Lawa Line and decided that this railway would be built by the government. According to the plan, the line was to be more than 350 kilometres long. Work began from Paramaribo in 1903. The first section was finished in 1906 and ran from Paramaribo via Republiek to Kwakoe gron on the River Saramacca. The section to Dam station near Sara Creek was completed in 1912. The railway was now 173 kilometres long and had cost 8.5 million guilders. By then, however, gold production in Surinam had already passed its peak and most of the companies had gone out of business so the plan to extend the line to Lawa did not go ahead. The enterprise had proved a disaster and the line never became the Surinam gold ‘artery’ that had been envisaged.

LITERATURE:
Hans Buddingh, Geschiedenis van Suriname, Utrecht, 1999;

PROVENANCE:
In this photograph planter Theodorus Johannes Brouwers (1875-1932) stands among the banana trees of the Accaribo plantation, which was situated on the left bank of the River Surinam. Bananas, known as bacoven in Surinam, were the staple diet of the workers on Accaribo. The donor of the photograph, a descendant of the planter, recalls that Brouwers always wore long boots to avoid being bitten by snakes.

Brouwers was born in Amsterdam in 1875. He went to Surinam at the beginning of 1900 and worked in the goldfields. Around 1910 he found work on the Accaribo plantation, became manager in 1920 and acquired it in 1928. In 1911 he married Helena Elizbeth van Lierop (1887-1964), daughter of Amsterdam-born Theodorus van Lierop, a director of the ‘Rust en Werk’ sugar plantation, and Henriette Bender from Surinam. Even though Surinam’s plantation economy went further into decline in the second half of the 19th century, and growing numbers of plantations were being given up and abandoned, things went well for Accaribo until 1930. Accaribo, originally a sugar plantation, was a coffee plantation in Brouwers’s time, and was known as an unusually productive business. On 12 November 1926 the front page of the Surinam newspaper ‘De West’ carried an article in praise of Accaribo, under the heading ‘a phenomenal output’. In that same year the governor of Surinam paid it a visit in order to see the successful plantation with his own eyes. After an inspection of the plantation in 1927 it was concluded that ‘Accaribo is a giant advertisement for Surinam’.

This photograph is part of a collection of 120 stereo-photographs on glass, a photograph album and around forty loose photographs that were acquired partly by donation and partly through purchase. The collection as a whole gives a clear...
idea of the everyday life of a planter’s family in Surinam between 1911 and 1932. Family visits to the plantation, the Surinamese house staff, boat trips on the river and outings to Paramaribo are just some of the subjects that in most cases were recorded by Theodorus Brouwers himself. At the same time the photographs give a good picture of the social relationships in colonial Surinam.

**LITERATURE:**

**PROVENANCE:**
T. J. Brouwers; his descendants; gift 2009 (NG-2009-37-8).

The photograph shows the family house of the Brouwers family on the Johanna-Catharina Plantation. Theodorus Brouwers worked there for some months around 1918, probably as the manager. The whole family made the temporary move from the Accaribo plantation to this plantation, which was situated on the right bank of the River Saramacca. On the left of the photograph a little girl is holding her hat. She is Doortje Brouwers, Theodorus’s daughter and mother of one of the donors of this photograph. The Johanna-Catharina Plantation was a coffee and cocoa plantation. Around 1920 it was affected by the decline in the general Surinam plantation economy. The buildings were demolished and the plantation was eventually abandoned. Now there is a cattle-breeding company on the site.

**LITERATURE / SOURCES:**
Hans Buddingh, *Geschiedenis van Suriname*, Utrecht, 1999; Surinam National Archives website: http://nationaalarchief.sr

**PROVENANCE:**
T. J. Brouwers; his descendants; gift 2009 (NG-2009-45-1).
ANONYMOUS

Worker's Dwelling on the Johanna-Catharina Plantation

c. 1918

Gelatin printing-out paper, 12 x 17 cm.

This photograph gives an idea of the life of the contract workers on Surinamese plantations. The Javanese woman on the left in the photograph worked on the Johanna-Catharina plantation. There were other shacks like this, which served as accommodation for the contract workers. After slavery had been abolished in Surinam in 1863 and government control—a period of ten years when former slaves had to continue to work on the plantations under government supervision—had also come to an end, it was decided to bring in contract workers to Surinam from India and Java. Many former slaves had left the plantations and the colonial administration was still convinced that the plantations were the most important cornerstone of the Surinamese economy. These new workers would enable the plantations to continue to operate. Contract workers were obliged to work on the plantation for a number of years. Initially the plan was to bring them to Surinam for a short period only, but a change in colonial policy led to their being encouraged to stay in Surinam after they had worked out their contract. They would be important in the further development of the small independent farming sector in the colony. Only a quarter of the 32,956 Javanese who were transported to Surinam between 1890 and 1939 went back, and around 21,000 of the 34,000 or so Indians who arrived in Surinam between 1837 and 1916 remained there. Following the abolition of slavery, the Johanna-Catharina plantation was also converted to contract labour. One hundred and sixty-four Hindustanis were recruited from India between 1873 and 1902 and eighty more Javanese between 1898 and 1918. Free Creole workers were also employed. The photograph dates from around 1918 and is part of a gift of some thirty photographs from a descendant of the Brouwers family. Nine photographs of workers and workers' dwellings on the Johanna-Catharina and Accaribo plantations in this gift are particularly interesting.
They provide a unique insight into the way in which communities like the Creoles, Javanese and Hindustanis lived on plantations at that time.

**Literature:**
Hans Buddingh, Geschiedenis van Suriname, Utrecht, 1999; Leo Dalhuisen, Maurits Hassankhan, Frans Steegh (eds.), Geschiedenis van Suriname, Zutphen, 2007; Surinam National Archives website: http://nationaalarchief.sr

**Provenance:**
T. J. Brouwers; his descendants; gift 2009 (NG-2009-45-2).

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**6 Augusta Curiel**
(Paramaribo 1873-1937 Paramaribo)
Panorama of Paramaribo
C. 1925-1937
Gelatin silver print, 13 x 60 cm.

This panorama of Paramaribo is made up of three separate photographs and shows the town from the River Surinam, the 'waterside' (Waterkant). We know that according to the donor's family tradition the photographer was Augusta Curiel. Although her name does not appear on them, the style and composition make it safe to assume that these photographs are her work. We know that Curiel took a number of panoramic photographs of Paramaribo during her career. In the Surinaams Museum in Paramaribo there is a glass negative that is very similar to the middle photograph (shown here together with the left-hand photograph). When Curiel did not mount her photographs on cardboard her name is generally lacking because, unlike her colleagues, she hardly ever put a stamp with her name on the back of individual photographs. These photographs are no exception.

The white statue of Queen Wilhelmina in the big square indicates that the panorama must have been taken after 1923, when the statue was erected on the occasion of her silver jubilee. The statue stands in front of the government palace, then the residence of the governor of Surinam, and now that of the president of Surinam. Behind the palace is the famous Palm Garden, recognizable from the large number of palm trees crammed together. The two towers of the Cathedral of St Peter and Paul rise above the town. The Dutch national flag flutters from the tower of the Department of Finance, the former town hall of Paramaribo.

In the first half of the 20th century Augusta Cornelia Petronella Curiel (1873-1937) and her sister Anna Jacoba (1875-1958) owned Surinam's leading photographic studio. Augusta was the photographer and her younger sister Anna was her assistant. From 1904 until Augusta's death in 1937 the two unmarried sisters lived and worked at 28 Domineeestraat in Paramaribo. The two of them would set off with the heavy wooden camera and they would drag it around with them everywhere they went. Once they had arrived at the right location and position, Augusta crawled under the black cloth of her plate camera, giving Anna her instructions about the light and directing the people who were going to be in the photograph. Augusta took her photographs using a wooden tripod that was always adjusted to her slightly stooping posture. She considered the composition of each photograph carefully. She placed what had to be photographed in the centre of the photograph and as a result her photographs generally have a static character and lack spontaneity. In 1929 Queen Wilhelmina granted the studio the Royal Warrant. Augusta Curiel thus became the first Supplier to the Royal Household ('Hofleverancier') in Surinam.

Augusta and Anna worked exclusively to commission and concentrated on portrait photography, the work on the plantations, bauxite mining, townscapes, building works, nature scenes, goldmines, buildings in Paramaribo and official events. In the main their photographs give a positive image of Surinam, an image that the well-to-do clients wanted to show to the outside world. We do not know who commissioned this panorama.

**Literature**

**Provenance:**
Gift from a private individual, 2009 (NG-2009-41).
Lived the American ‘ staff and built, few years Cottica Middle West.

This photograph shows the Dutch couple Mr and Mrs Guilonard with their infant son and a Creole servant and is part of a recently acquired photograph album about bauxite mining in Moengo. In view of the large number of photographs of the couple, the photograph album and the many loose photographs that accompanied it must have belonged to this family. Joop Guilonard (1901-1971) arrived in Moengo in September 1926 to work for the Surinam Bauxite Company. He was to remain there for more than thirty years and go far: he became the manager in 1958. He was married to Wilhelmina Ansems and they had a son named De in 1930. The exotic character of the colony and factory setting come together in this photograph. As well as family photographs, the album contains pictures of the bauxite industry and shows the development of Moengo into a modern mining town in the period between 1927 and 1931.

In 1915 the Aluminium Company of America (ALCOA) discovered a considerable deposit of bauxite, the raw material for aluminium, near the abandoned native village of Moengo. The Surinaamse Bauxiet Maatschappij was founded a year later as a subsidiary of ALCOA. Bauxite mining and the construction of the mining town of Moengo began in July 1917. ‘It may seem like a fairy tale that in distant Surinam, a place almost unknown in the Netherlands, where in recent years conditions were far from easy, a new village has risen from the ground ... a village in the middle of the wilderness, high up the Upper Cottica River, far from the civilization and the culture of the other part of the colony,’ wrote the West Indische Gids in 1920. Within the space of a few years three small residential areas had been built, with streets laid out in a strict grid pattern. Allocated along racial lines, they were the ‘Surinam Village’ for the Surinamese workers, the ‘Javanese Village’ for the contract workers from the Dutch East Indies and the more luxurious ‘Staff Village’ for the more senior Dutch and American personnel. The miners and the staff lived apart. In those pioneering days of Moengo the executives lived like modern-day expats with their own swimming pool, tennis court, servants and clubhouse.

Even though Moengo was plagued by malaria and economic setbacks in the early years, it developed into a modern mining village. ‘An ice-making plant provides the cooling and a modern farm with dairy cows imported from Holland supplies milk. A market garden with an orchard supplies the vegetables and the fruit. There is even a fully-equipped abattoir in the yard with a cold store, where cattle obtained from Venezuela are slaughtered twice a week,’ wrote a visitor in 1928. The little town got its own power station, school, fire department, and post office, and the foundation stone was laid for a hospital in 1929. The population rose to almost three thousand people.

**Provenance:**
The family of J. Guilonard; purchased in 2008 with the aid of the Maria Adriana Aalders Fund (NG-2008-37-35).

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8 **Anonymous**
*The Moengo plant*
c. 1927
Gelatin silver print, 5 x 16 cm.

The small three-part panoramic photograph taken around 1927 shows the new plant in Moengo for processing bauxite and came from the Guilonard family’s photograph album. In the foreground there are heaps of bauxite alongside the railway lines which carried the ore from the mine. The plant took just one year to build using almost exclusively Creole labour under American supervision and led to a significant increase in production. From then on the bauxite could be washed and dried before it was shipped to the United States. ‘The first building you come across [on arrival in Moengo] is a factory; but this prosaic building, shining in the glow of its newness, already has a very unusual character. Fantastic iron towers rise upwards and between
them there is a hall built of concrete and iron. Everything is kept in the colour of aluminium and unconsciously the thought arises of a strange mirage,' said a description of Moengo written in 1929. The Surinam press printed glowing reports about the plant. 'The plant is not only the largest in Surinam, but probably the most modern layout in the world for the processing of bauxite,' said the Surinam newspaper De West. 'There is life and movement everywhere! From time to time the ground rumbles with the tremendous explosions [bauxite was extracted using dynamite], locomotives whistle and the diesel engines in the power station run day and night,' wrote a clergyman in 1929.

From the 1930s on bauxite was the mainstay of Surinam's economy because of the increasing worldwide importance of aluminium. The true value of Surinam's bauxite was only really discovered during the Second World War, when the Americans were able to make good use of the aluminium for their aircraft industry. This gave the Surinam economy a boost that continued into the 1970s.

**LITERATURE**


**PROVENANCE:**
The family of J. Guilonard; purchased in 2008 with the aid of the Maria Adriania Aalders Fund (NG-2008-48-30-02).

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**FOTOPERSBUREAU**

**KERKHOFF & SCHERER**

**Surinamese Sailors**

1948

Gelatin silver print, 19 x 16.5 cm.

© Kerkhoff & Kees Scherer / Maria Austria Instituut, Amsterdam

The photograph shows two Surinamese sailors from the Dutch Royal Navy during a Surinamese celebration in the Frederiksplein in Amsterdam in 1948. Behind them is a large placard with a picture of a slave breaking his iron chains, with the caption 'Wan Juli kettie kotie' ('the chains were broken on 1 July'). In July 1948 the weekly magazine *Ons Vrije Nederland* published this photograph and a number of others with a full report of the festivities staged to commemorate the abolition of slavery in Surinam eighty-five years before. 'There were children's parties in the afternoon, and wild dancing in the open air in the evening, negro songs resounded, Surinamese folk songs were sung, women in wide, colourful, flowery dresses danced and sang and brought a little piece of Surinam to an Amsterdam square,' reported the magazine. A number of Surinamers living in the Netherlands had taken the initiative and organized the event. The photographs of the festivities are evidence of an increased Surinamese national awareness that had not been lost on the magazine's reporter. 'The party in the Frederiksplein (high-spirited, but well-organized) was not just a dance party, it was the expression of a growing nationalism among Surinamers.'

Until the 1960s there were only a few Surinamese immigrants in the Netherlands. They usually worked as sailors, labourers, clerks or musicians. A number of young Surinamers came to the Netherlands to study. These students made an important contribution to the development of post-war Surinamese nationalism. In 1946 the total Surinamese community in the Netherlands was estimated at around three thousand people; it had risen to thirteen thousand by 1966. It was only around the years of independence (1975) that the size of the Surinamese community in the Netherlands increased dramatically.

The photograph is one of a set of eight taken by the photographers Kerkhoff and Kees Scherer for *Ons Vrije Nederland*. In the nineteen-forties, after the Second World War, the two photographers had a press photo agency on Prinsengracht in Amsterdam. Almost nothing is known about Kerkhoff, but Kees Scherer (1920-1993) was later to become a famous photographer. The set comes from the photo archives of *Ons Vrije Nederland*.

**LITERATURE**


**PROVENANCE:**

*Ons Vrije Nederland* photo archives; Fotoantiquariaat icm, Haarlem; purchased 2005 (NG-2005-19-7).
Maria Austria (Karlsbad / Karlovy Vary (CZ) 1915-1975 Amsterdam) and Aart Klein (Amsterdam 1909-2001 Amsterdam)  
One of the Participants at the Round Table Conference: A. Karamat Ali  
1948

Gelatin silver print, 19.5 x 15.5 cm. © Maria Austria and Aart Klein / Maria Austria Instituut, Amsterdam, and Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam

This portrait of the Surinamese politician Asgar Karamat Ali (1907-1958) is one of a series of fifteen photographs of participants at the first
Round Table Conference between the Netherlands, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles. The portraits were taken by two photographers from the Particam studio in Paris, Maria Austria and Aart Klein, for the magazine Ons Vrije Nederland and published in 1948.

Karamat Ali was the founder of Surinam's first political party, the Muslim Party, in 1946. The conference was held in the Upper House of the Dutch parliament in The Hague from 27 January to 18 March 1948 and covered the future political links between the dependencies within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Among other things the conference resulted in universal suffrage for the men and women of Surinam and the Antilles. A number of amendments to articles of the constitution laid the foundations for more autonomy and a more proportional division of the political power in the overseas territories in the west.

LITERATURE

PROVENANCE:
Ons Vrije Nederland photo archives; Fotoantiquariaat ICM, Haarlem; purchased 2005 (NG-2005-19-10).

II WILLEM DIEPRAAM
(Amsterdam 1944)
Gelatin silver print.
© W. Diepraam, Amsterdam

This photograph shows a crowd celebrating the election victory of the Surinam National Party Alliance (NPK) in 1973 and radiates hope and confidence in the future of Surinam. The NPK's party leader, Henck Arron (1936-2000), was an advocate of an independent Surinam. Two years later, in November 1975, he was to become the first prime minister of the Republic of Surinam. The crowd surrounds the statue of Kwakoe in the centre of Paramaribo. He was a slave who broke his chains and symbolizes the abolition of slavery.

The photograph was published in the 1975 book Frimangron. Suriname, reportages uit een Zuid-
amerikaanse republiek with photographs by Willem Diepraam and captions by Gerard van Westerloo, the editor of Vrij Nederland. In 1973 and again in the spring of 1975 they travelled together to Surinam to record a complete picture of the country before it became independent. Their reports first appeared in Vrij Nederland before being published in more detailed form in Frimangron (a country for free people). The book, more than 220 pages long, paints a picture of a desolate and shattered country immediately prior to independence. Diepraam photographed a variety of situations and places throughout the country, including elderly people in a mental institution, dilapidated buildings, communities and street scenes, for the most part in coarse, grainy shots.

LITERATURE

PROVENANCE:
Gift of the photographer, 2009 (RP-F-2009-228).