



Editorial

This Bulletin features objects that represent the time of European explorers – or should we perhaps say, time of colonizing traders. After all, Europeans were utterly ambitious when it came to participation and dominance in the international trade in spices and other Asian luxury goods. From the fourteen nineties onwards, it was the Portuguese who sailed the Indian Ocean. But by 1580, the year in which Philip II of Spain seized the Portuguese throne, the Dutch trade with Portugal was in stagnation, prompting initiatives in the Republic to establish autonomous trade connections in Asia. The subsequent founding of the Dutch East India Company in 1602 marks the beginning of a Dutch colonial era that would endure for centuries.

When the Dutch merchant ship the *Eendracht* set sail for the island of Java, embarking from the Cape of Good Hope, it deviated from its intended longitude crossing the Indian Ocean. In October 1616, captain Dirk Hartog and his crew landed on an island some fifty kilometres off the Australian mainland. As would later become common practice when laying claim to ‘new-found’ land, members of the ship’s crew left behind a sign: a flattened pewter dish, inscribed with the date, their names and destination. To ensure its visibility, they nailed the plate high on a wooden post. Upon its discovery by a Dutch expedition of explorers and mapmakers in 1698, the so-called Hartog Plate was brought back to the Netherlands. Tamar Davidowitz and Gijs van der Ham have researched the history of the plate, kept in de Rijksmuseum since 1820. In their extensive article, they describe the narrative of the plate’s reception in the Netherlands and its role in Dutch relations with Australia, as well as the history of its conservation and the effects of the efforts to preserve it. By examining its current physical state, the authors let the Hartog Plate tell its own story, in which every relevant perspective is addressed.

An integral part of colonization was the mapping, both literally and figuratively, of a region. In the footsteps of Columbus, the Americas were charted in maps by venturing cartographers, with the native flora and fauna described and drawn by early botanists and zoologists. Back in Europe, these drawings were copied and distributed, serving as the basis for albums such as the *Historia Naturalis*, produced between 1595 and 1610 by the Fleming Anselmus de Boodt for Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II and today preserved in the Rijksmuseum. In her short notice, Deniz Martinez shows how two drawings of coatis, mammals related to raccoons, came to be misidentified by Europeans, as part of the tentative gathering of knowledge regarding ‘new’ creatures from foreign lands.

Suriname was an important Dutch colony, with its main settlement, Paramaribo, serving as a crucial node in local, regional and transatlantic shipping routes. The young Boston artist John Greenwood spent six years portraying the town’s inhabitants and visitors. In a portrait now in the Rijksmuseum, painted in Amsterdam after the artist moved there in 1758, we see the Dutch sea captain Dirk Simonsz with a monocular and a map showing the coastline of Suriname. Simonsz, whose identity was previously unknown, was the captain of the ship on which Greenwood travelled to Amsterdam. In her short notice, Eveline Sint Nicolaas advances this new identification based on a notebook kept by Greenwood, in which he detailed his artistic activity.

Wayne Franits, in his short notice, also shows that artists’ notes often provide a valuable source of information. In determining the identity of a woman portrayed in a painting by Hendrik van Limborch from 1711 recently sold at auction, the painter’s detailed records, preserved in a manuscript in the collection of the Rijksmuseum, reveal that there could only be one of two possibilities for that year. The manner in which the sitter is depicted leaves no doubt that Maria Adriana van der Heim is the woman in question. In the marital context of the painting – a pendant to her husband’s portrait – the orange in Maria’s hand was understood as a reference to fertility. Nevertheless, at this time, citrus fruit was still an extraordinary luxury: imported from China by the Portuguese and the Italians from the fifteenth century onwards, it also signified the then ongoing globalization.