

# *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach*

Catalogue of the virtual exhibition  
*Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach*  
Museum of Equality and Difference (MOED)

*Rosemarie Bulkema,  
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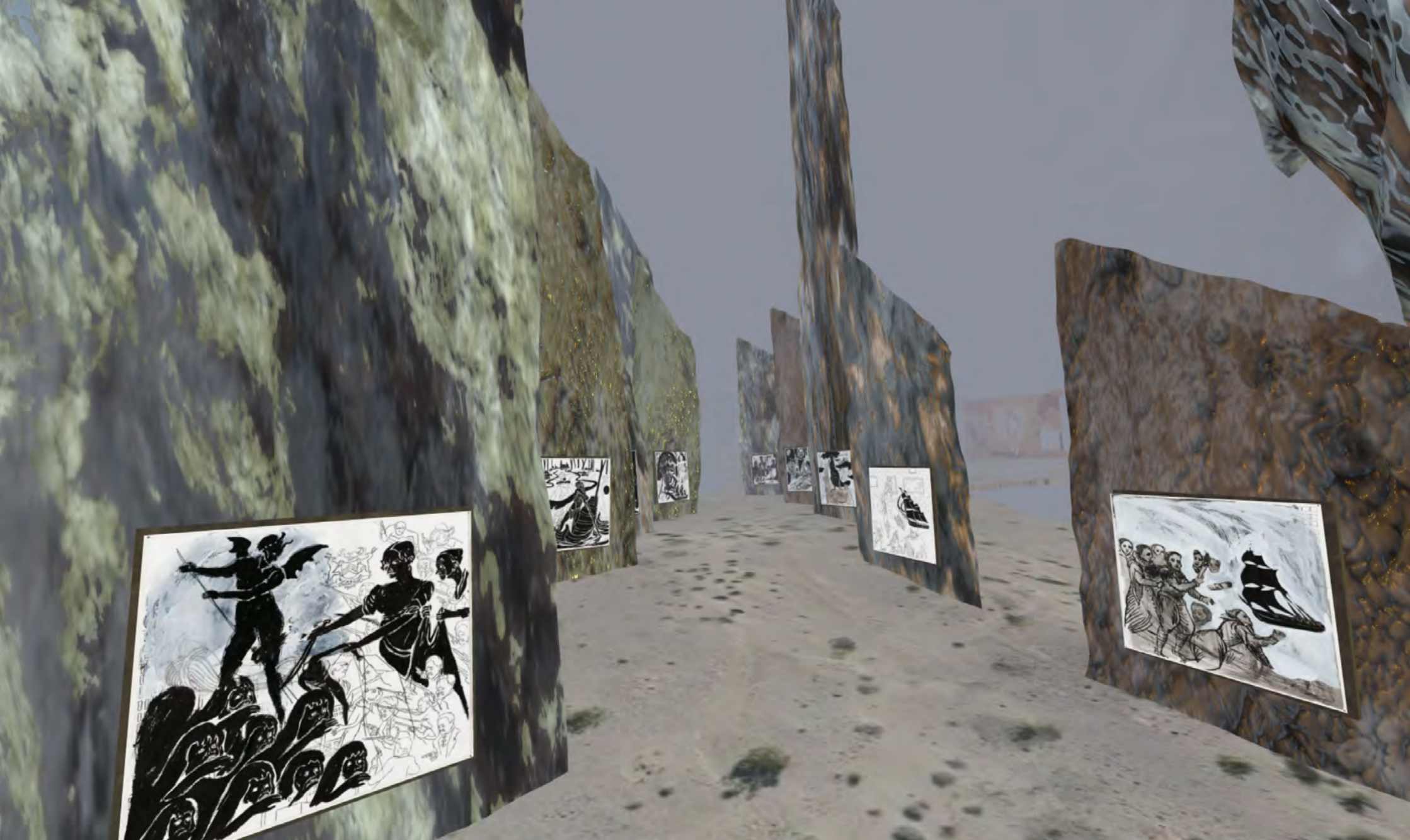
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## Introduction

From June 2021 until February 2022, Amsterdam Museum is holding an exhibition to mark the restoration of the Golden Coach. The Golden Coach ('De Gouden Koets' in Dutch) is considered to be a gift from the people of Amsterdam to Queen Wilhelmina – the first woman to ascend the Dutch throne in 1898. For over a hundred years, the coach fulfilled a ceremonial role: in royal inaugurations, royal weddings, and the State Opening of Parliament. Cherished by some, contested by others, the Golden Coach became a symbol of Dutch

tradition, the Constitution, and the Dutch royal family.

However, from the start, the coach has been the subject of protests, almost always related to the discrepancy between its original intention – to unite the nation by means of tradition and symbols – and the divide it inevitably epitomises between the rich and the poor, the royalists and the republicans. The latest such protests, however, concentrated more specifically on the way in which the coach was perceived as a symbol of systemic racism.



Nicolaas van der Waay,  
*Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Side panel of the Golden Coach  
Courtesy Amsterdam Museum, photo by René Gerritsen.



The Golden Coach is decorated with four panels painted by Nicolaas van der Waay. One of the panels, entitled *Tribute from the Colonies* (*Hulde der Koloniën* in Dutch), depicts a seated white woman being presented with gifts by people of colour. The panel is an allegory that points to the ties between the Netherlands and its former colonies in the East (Indonesia) and the West (Suriname and the former Dutch Antilles, including Curaçao and Aruba). With the exhibition, the Amsterdam Museum aims to stimulate public debate related to a variety of aspects connected to the history and the appearance of the coach (Schavemaker 2021). The reigning monarch, King Willem-Alexander, agreed to support this public revision of the history of the coach, and cooperated by loaning it to the museum. As of January 2022, the King announced that after another restoration period the Golden Coach will no longer be used by the royal family due to the controversy around the panel.

*Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* marks the end of the Amsterdam Museum exhibition and takes the form of a virtual dialogue between the *Tribute from the Colonies* panel and contemporary artists of colour. Our aim is to build upon the work of our colleagues from Amsterdam Museum (Schoutens et al. 2021) and add nuance to both the exhibition and the panel, through the work of prominent contemporary artists. Our goal is to highlight some of the iconographic stereotypes and narratives that still reverberate to this day – both in the systemically racist make up of some of our national institutions, and in collective modes of thought. Simultaneously, *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* aims to provide the spectator with alternative views and imaginaries by means of a dialogic trajectory in which artworks speak to each other, evoking a non-linear and non-unitary conversation concerning the subliminal messages conveyed through the iconography of *Tribute from the Colonies*.

Although designed in the late nineteenth century, the panel inevitably fuels contemporary debate, contesting not only the myth of benevolent colonialism and white innocence, but also the socio-political position of immigrants and the nexus between colonialism, capitalism, and environmental destruction. *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* first addresses how the left side of the panel evokes the rhetoric of colonialism as a 'civilising enterprise'. Here, we aim to highlight the image of the Dutch as the 'gentle coloniser' – a discourse that frames colonialism as fundamentally based on benevolence and altruism. By juxtaposing the iconography on the left of the panel with the work of the contemporary Dutch artist Natasja Kensmil (1973, Amsterdam, Netherlands), we ask how such tropes reverberate throughout contemporary debates.

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Nicolaas van der Waay, *Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Close-up from *Tribute from the Colonies* (centre panel).  
Courtesy Amsterdam Museum, photo by René Gerritsen.

Moving to the right of the panel, we examine its reverberant evocations of the 'noble savage' via the work of Nomusa Makhubu (1984, Grahamstown, South Africa) who, in her series *Self-Portrait* (2007-2013), is hauntingly attuned to contemporary echoes of this stereotype. In *The First Turk Immigrant or the Nameless Heroes of the Revolution* (2018), Suat Ögüt (1986, Diyarbakir, Turkey) literally provides a pedestal, presenting a tribute to the migrants who were forced to flee Turkey in the 1960s because of their political views. Meanwhile, the murals by Hedy Tjin (1985, Vierlingsbeek, Netherlands) and Dewy Elsinga (1992, Amsterdam, Netherlands) commemorate the victims of violence against people of colour, acknowledging how the defacing of their murals and the many attacks directed at the addresses of anti-racism activists clearly demonstrate that the Netherlands still has a long way to go in reckoning with its own history of violence, slavery, and colonialism. In a further intervention, as if counteracting the neglect of systemic racist phenomena in Dutch society, the mystical figures in Shertise Solano's (1982, Rotterdam, Netherlands) collages have bright, wide eyes that stare straight back at the viewer, clearly observing, looking through, and interrogating, creating feelings of discomfort and smothering.

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Nicolaas van der Waay, *Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Close-up from *Tribute from the Colonies* (right panel).  
Courtesy Amsterdam Museum, photo by René Gerritsen.





Nicolaas van der Waay, *Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Close-up from *Tribute from the Colonies*  
(centre panel).  
Courtesy Amsterdam  
Museum, photo by  
René Gerritsen.

Finally, we focus on the central area of the panel and the image of the Dutch Maiden, to whom indigenous peoples are apparently so happy to 'humbly' offer the resources and treasures of their homelands. Juxtaposing the vibrant works of Hestu Setu Legi (1971, Yogyakarta, Indonesia) and Zico Albaiguni (1987, Indonesia) with the Golden Coach's central

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part of the *Tribute from the Colonies* panel, allows us to reveal the hidden costs of these colonial 'gifts' and resources. By exhibiting *Take Care of This Land* (2014) and *The Archipelago of the Day Before* (2019) in a dialogue with the panel, we force the nexus between colonialism, capitalism, and the environment to become tangible and impossible to overlook.

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Last, but by no means least, we need to briefly mention the digital environment we have created as both context and facilitator of the virtual dialogue we aim to initiate between traditional colonial views and narratives, and the contemporary critique and alternative iconographies outlined above. The chosen format has been influenced by the several lockdowns we have all experienced, which forced museums to close their doors to the public and to find new ways of exhibiting their collections.

There is nothing that can replace the physical encounter with a work of art – something felt by many art-lovers during this difficult time. The contemplation, the suspension of time, and the possibility of being moved and surprised cannot be transposed to a digital environment. Therefore, we decided not to replicate the context of the museum as it is, but to turn instead to a different format that could enable a new experience whilst also raising an awareness of the deeper meaning conveyed by the exhibited works. The dystopian character of the online environment, designed by Louisa Teichmann and Noémi Biró, captures the urgency of the many intersecting humanitarian, climate, and health crises that define our present. As such, the artworks function as seeds in a deserted landscape, making the soil fertile again, starting anew.

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Visit the Virtual Exhibition by scanning the qr code or [click here](#).

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Schoutens, Esmee, Dutton R. Hauhart (Reitz Ink), Pepijn Reeser, Annemarie de Wildt, and Margriet Schavemaker (eds). 2021. *The Golden Coach*. Zwolle: WBOOKS. Organized in conjunction with an exhibition of the same title, organized by and presented at the Amsterdam Museum, June 18, 2021–February 27, 2022.





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## *Tribute from the Colonies* and the Invention of Benevolent Colonialism

On the left corner of the central section of the Golden Coach panel *Tribute from the Colonies*, a barely clothed child is handed a book by a white man dressed in Roman style drapery, while a man by his side encourages him to accept the gift, and a woman looks with gratitude at the gesture. In this short essay I take as point of departure the symbolism contained in this vignette to engage with the rhetoric of colonialism as civilising endeavour, gesturing towards the reverberations of such trope in contemporary debates. I sat down with contemporary Dutch artist Natasja Kensmil (1973, Amsterdam, Netherlands) to talk about her drawing series *Floodland* (2007) featured in *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach*. By juxtaposing the iconography of the panel with her work, this essay picks apart the image of the 'gentle coloniser' present in *Tribute from the Colonies*, revealing how the ideological stances underlying the contested painting persist and seep through present-day discussions around commemoration and cultural heritage in The Netherlands, including arguments around the Golden Coach itself.

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### *Tribute from the Colonies* and Dutch Colonialism

Scholars Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen (2011) have noted how in the Dutch context, national narratives around colonialism were defined by benevolence since its inception. Dutch 'slave traders' in the seventeenth century prided themselves on treating the African captives more humanely, therefore claiming moral superiority over other settler colonial countries. At the end of the nineteenth century such discourses even entered the administrative language with the so-called 'Ethical Policy', an "enlightened" mode of colonial rule" (Nimako and Willemsen 2011, 39) that was introduced in



Nicolaas van der Waay, *Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Close-up from *Tribute from the Colonies* (centre panel).  
Courtesy Amsterdam Museum, photo by René Gerritsen.

the Indonesian region. At this time the rhetoric around the occupation of the Indonesian archipelago shifted from that of alliance to that of "an enormous modernization project to complete before [The Netherlands] could leave the East Indies" (Oostindie 2011, 136). The occupation of the area in this framework became an ethical duty, as reflected by a famous speech delivered in 1949 by Cabinet member

J.H. van Maarseveen, who, looking back at that time, stated “[t]he East Indies were our pride. We governed the Dutch East Indies in a way that provoked admiration everywhere [...]. We had a job to do in Indonesia and we are ethically bound not to abandon this task” (Oostindie 2011, 136). The scene represented in the left panel can be seen as encapsulating such image of the Dutch as ‘gentle coloniser’, a discourse that frames colonialism as fundamentally based on benevolence and altruism. As suggested by curator Ghanima Kowsoleea, who co-curated the Amsterdam Museum exhibition *The Golden Coach*, in fact, the book handed to the child in the aforementioned vignette could stand for either the Bible or the ‘Book of Knowledge’ (Kowsoleea 2021, 146), therefore hinting at the two moral justifications for the colonial enterprise, namely religion and modernity.

This self-proclaimed moral superiority and the narrative of the ‘we were there to help’ still permeate national debates, in particular around commemoration and cultural heritage (Balkenhol and Modest 2019). Cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker has famously identified such narratives as being a defining sentiment of Dutch identity, constituting what she has labelled as ‘white innocence’. As Wekker puts it, “[w]e are a small nation, innocent; we are inherently antiracist; moreover, we do not have bad intentions’ is a shorthand to sum up this white sense of self” (Wekker 2016, 166). Wekker argues that innocence is at the heart of the image that the country has carefully constructed of itself “as free, emancipated, tolerant, a beacon of civilization” (Wekker 2016, 108). An image according to which the Dutch were only *reluctant* colonisers, almost unwillingly going along with an agenda set by other countries, and doing so with compassion.



No. 1  
Natasja Kensmil, *Floodland* (2007),  
Indian ink and conté pencil on paper,  
39 x 39 cm,  
Series of 18 drawings,  
Private collection





No. 15  
Natasja Kensmil, *Floodland* (2007),  
Indian ink and conté pencil on paper,  
39 x 39 cm,  
Series of 18 drawings,  
Private collection

## *Floodland*

Natasja Kensmil is a Dutch painter whose work explores the relationship between myth and history, as well as the contrast between the tolerant image of the country and its colonial past. The series *Floodland* (2007) we have chosen to be displayed in *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* is particularly salient in addressing the role of Christianity in the colonial project. Although the drawings are not related to the Golden Coach, this series seems to talk back to the panel *Tribute from the Colonies*. The imagery found in *Floodland*, in fact, could not be farther from the peaceful and idyllic scene portrayed in the panel, or from the mythical figures of the 'gentle coloniser' and the 'happy slave' that the latter conjures. Where the panel lays out a quasi-utopian idea of society, in which everyone happily fulfils their assigned roles towards a 'common good', Kensmil's drawings confront the viewer with haunting and tormented figures, messily crowding the frame. The calming and muted tones of the panel, as well as the hopefulness offered by the landscape, have no place in *Floodland*, in which the stark contrast of black and white constitute the only setting.

As Kensmil explains, the series was born as the result of a commission to retell the myth of *Zwaar Beladen met Zielen*<sup>1</sup>.

*N K : Drawing and painting is a way for me to look critically at the past and historiography. In my work I examine the power relations and their consequences for historical imagery. History solidifies in myth and culture. I am fascinated by the hidden, the enigmatic and the dark. In Floodland I refer to the ancient myth as universal themes. I have looked for different connections with human conditions that relate to contemporary society, religion, nature, and to oneself. The individual drawings in this series are associated with the spread of belief in myth, legend, saga and the relationship between history and how it was passed down.*

G C : Were the kind of romanticised and distorted representations of the colonial project that we see in the Golden Coach panel, and common across European painting of the time, in your mind when creating the series?

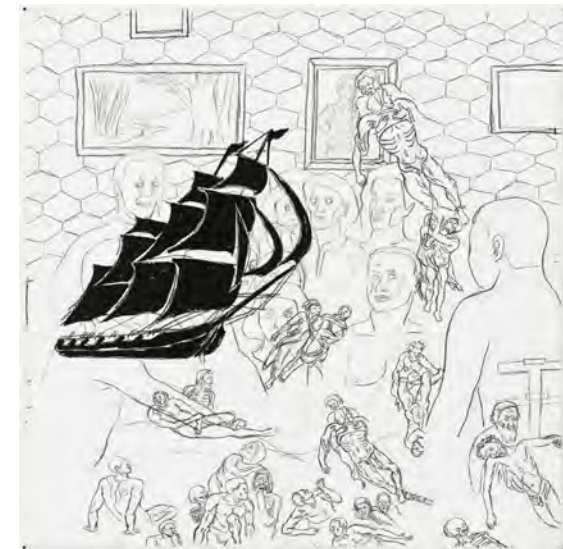
N K : Yes, during the making of this series I was also working on the theme of colonialism and migration. In the myth *Heavily loaded with souls* the ship or boat plays an important role. In my drawings I use it more as a metaphor. It can represent human travel between life and death, cross-pollination between different cultures, but also trade, exploitation, and plunder overseas. In this series I tried to highlight the romanticized but also the critical comments.

G C : The drawings also seem to hint to the juxtaposition of religion and modernity referred to by Kowsoleea, as we see in the drawing No. 2, for example, in which the figure of a high priest rises against a Vitruvian man. Is that correct?

N K : Dutch churches played an important role in the colony: they introduced (medical) care and education, but also contributed to maintaining and legitimizing slavery. In the drawing I was intuitively looking for a dark authority of religion and I thought about whose legacy in the form of misconceptions and incomprehension pervades.



1.



2.

1. Translates literally as "heavily loaded with souls".

1.  
No. 2  
Natasja Kensmil, *Floodland* (2007),  
Indian ink and conté pencil on paper, 39 x 39 cm,  
Series of 18 drawings, Private collection

2.  
No. 7  
Natasja Kensmil, *Floodland* (2007),  
Indian ink and conté pencil on paper, 39 x 39 cm,  
Series of 18 drawings, Private collection



This is something that also historian Karwan Fatah-Black explains, “[t]he justification of slavery and slavish colonial subordination as the path for heathens to civilization and progress is a recurring theme which has existed since the beginning of transatlantic slavery” (Fatah-Black 2021, 128). Through religion, “the slave trade could be interpreted as an act of charity; the white Christian as bringer of Christianity to the black heathens, not in spite of, but thanks to slavery” (Fatah-Black 2021, 126). The scene depicted in the Golden Coach panel *Tribute from the Colonies* described above then, can be understood precisely as representation of such framework. The topos of the child receiving education, epitomises the very essence of the colonial project. The child stands in for the native who is moulded through colonial occupation. As Sarah Ahmed notes, “[t]he education of the native became a matter of morality, of teaching the natives the path to happiness as the path to civilisation” (Ahmed 2010, 129). As Ahmed concludes, the “Empire is evoked as bringing good things to indigenous peoples of the world—law, unity, self-government, liberty, and so on. Indeed, the language of empire is that of a gift” (Ahmed 2010, 131).

### *Myth, History and Culture*

If we understand national narratives around the country's compassionate colonial rule as forming the background of contemporary debates on cultural heritage, we see how these act as shields against processes of reckoning with past injustices and their present declinations. The continued denial of the racist connotations of *Tribute from the Colonies*, and the tone-deaf and dismissive positions assumed by public officials in response to calls to stop using the Golden Coach, clearly illustrate this. By continuing to use the carriage, the tropes discussed above are restated and kept alive, becoming part of the “cultural archive” (Wekker 2016) of the nation. The story told by *Tribute from the Colonies* is re-told, normalised

and presented as part of Dutch culture with each ride of the carriage in events that mark key moments in Dutch national identity. Every such ceremony acts precisely as solidification of the myth of benevolent colonialism.

Giorgia Cacciatore, curator and researcher MOED

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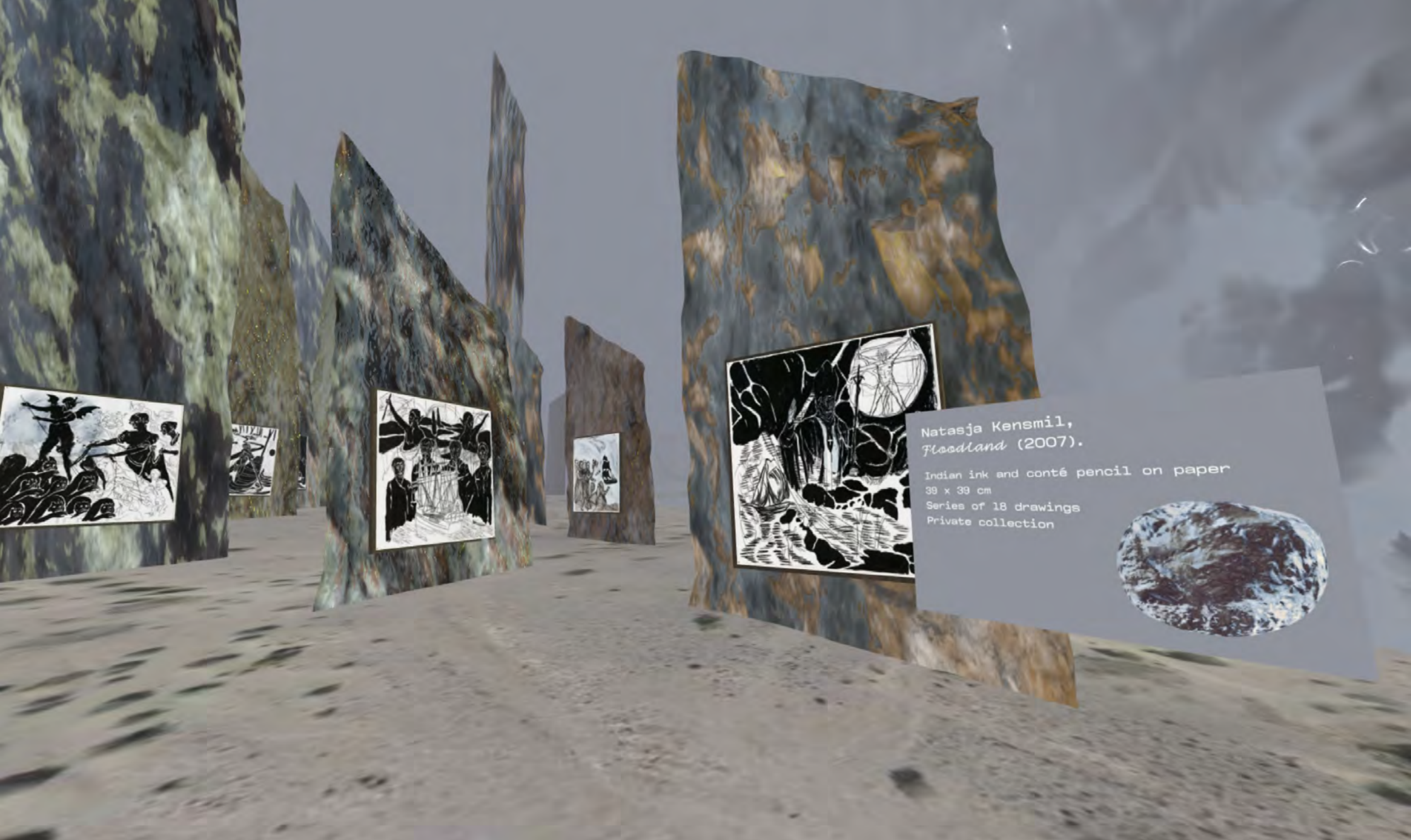


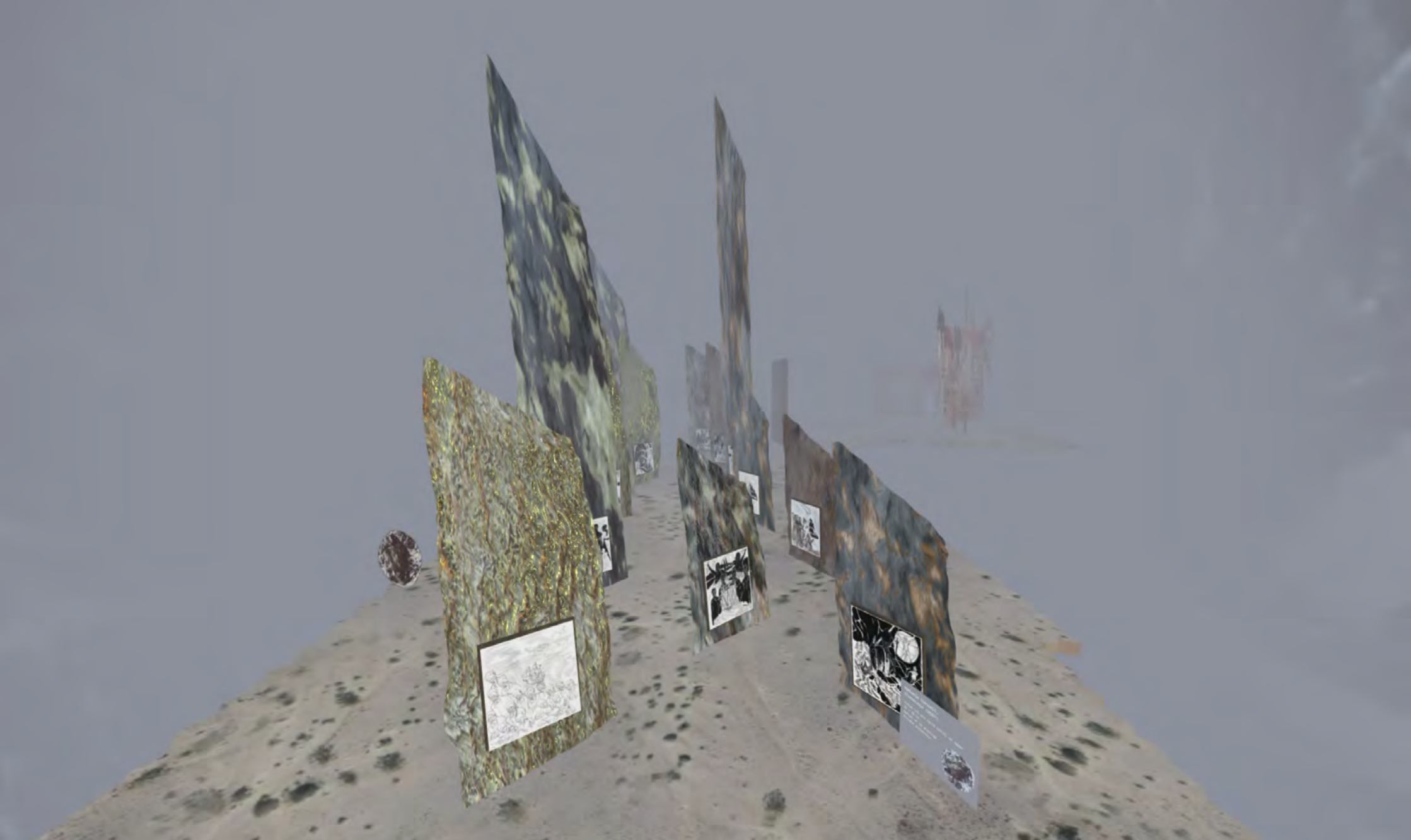
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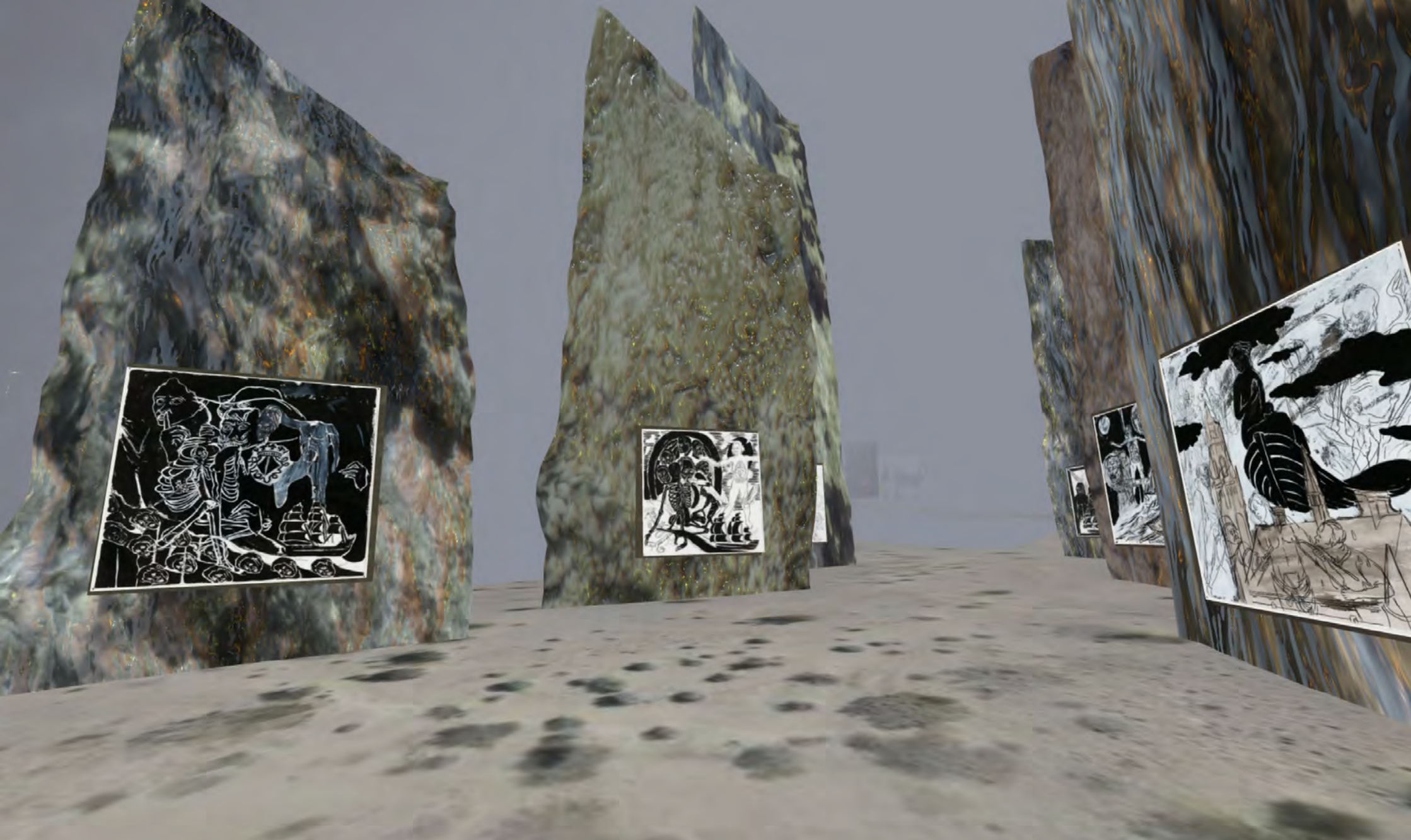






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## Tribute from the Colonies and the Noble Savage

*Vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?*

– Haraway 1988, 585

On the rightmost part of the panel, three young, bare-chested men from the Dutch East Indies are depicted, carrying boxes and goods of commerce. Their posture is bended, suggesting the heaviness of the material they carry. Their appearance stands in stark contrast with the four white persons standing behind them, who are carefully observing the work performed by the young men. Dressed in what appears to be Roman style drapery, they are the ones giving out the orders. Most notably, the elderly man and the woman behind him force the young men to continue their chores. They represent the 'Protection Against Mistreatment and Arbitrary Acts' which the Netherlands allegedly brought to the East Indies (Rey-Lamslag and De Wildt 2021). When zooming out of this scene and looking at the rest of the panel, similar depictions occur: the colonized subjects are dressed in nothing more than cloths<sup>2</sup>, carrying trading goods to the feet of the Dutch Maiden, bringing her offers and sacrifices. They are depicted significantly shorter than the colonizers, often bended, occupying positions of subordination and servitude, obeying to the orders given to them. The colonizers on the other hand are tall, dressed in Roman style drapery, standing up straight, radiating an aura of confidence and strength, and are the ones giving out the orders.

2. This is except for one scene depicted on the panel: on the right side of the Dutch Maiden's throne a Javanese ruler is depicted with his retinue. They wear court dresses made of valuable batik materials and bear personal gifts. For a further unpacking of the panel, see page 30-31 from the exhibition catalogue "The Golden Coach" (2021) by the Amsterdam Museum.



Nicolaas van der Waay,  
*Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Close-up from *Tribute from the Colonies* (right panel).  
Courtesy Amsterdam Museum, photo by René Gerritsen.

When carefully considering these differences in the portrayal of subjects in the panel and while taking into account the opening quote of this essay by Donna Haraway, the panel evokes the question what it means to depict colonized subjects in positions of subordination and servitude in nationalist symbols, and how these depictions echo through in present day society. What material histories and cultural meanings does the panel encode when paying specific attention to the submissive and subordinate portrayal of the colonized subjects, and how do they work through in the present? *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* intersperses the work of contemporary artists with the Tribute from the Colonies panel, resulting in a dialogic trajectory in which artworks are placed next to each other, invoking a non-linear and a



non-unitary reading of the meanings hidden within the *Tribute from the Colonies* panel. The panel, whilst created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, puts forward a discourse that remains so topical that awakens ideas and sensations that speak to the present, in this essay focusing in particular on the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the socio-political position of immigrants in the Netherlands. How do contemporary artists remake and revisit the meanings attributed to the colonized subjects in the panel?

The depictions of non-Western subjects as deviant and inferior from the Western subjects in the panel are not unique and incidental. Instead, these types of portrayals can be placed in a larger Euro-American tradition that has conceptualized the non-Western subject as 'the noble savage': as backward, primitive, the outsider, fit to be ruled, animal-like, standing in close relation to nature and the origins of the human race. This stereotypical portrayal can be traced back to European imperial and colonial missions in which the non-Western subject was imagined and depicted as deviant, undeveloped, and inferior. Within this tradition, the Western subject on the other hand was depicted as developed, civilized, and superior. The violent stereotype of the noble savage can be found in many influential cultural practices and theories, such as continental philosophy (i.e. Jean-Jacques Rousseau), art historical movements (i.e. the work of Paul Gauguin and the movement of 'Primitivism'), literature (i.e. Charles Dickens), travel literature (i.e. Mungo Park), and national symbolism (not only in the Netherlands, but for example also the Denmark Royal Coats of Arms). Not only does this image of the noble savage feed into a violent stereotype of the non-Western 'Other' that needs to be disciplined, but as importantly, it installs an idea of the Self. Prominent feminist and postcolonial scholars have pointed out the relational nature of this Western invention of 'the Other' (De Beauvoir 1949; Said 1978), namely that by constructing the Other, the Self is automatically defined as its contrasting image, idea,



Nomusa Makhubu, *Asasibambe Ngani? (Still Binding?)* (2007/2013)  
Digital print on archival Litho paper  
From the *Self-Portrait* (2007/2013) project

and/or experience. This relationality is strikingly present in the panel, as it renders the colonizers as the justified bringers of civilization, development, and progress by portraying the colonized subjects as backward and primitive.

The stark contrast between the constructs of the Self and the Other and the effects of the racialized stereotypical imaginaries of non-Western subjects as noble savages are numerous and its traces can be felt still today. The work of Nomusa Makhubu (1984, Grahamstown, South Africa) attunes to these echoes of the past in the present in a haunting way. In her series *Self-Portrait* (2007-2013), she connects past and present South Africa by inserting her own portrait on several colonial-type photographs, with the archival photographs seeping into the artists' transparent body. Her work speaks to the power structures behind archival and visualizing prac-

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tices in the shaping of history, memory, and identity. Through the portrait of Makhubu, the viewer receives an unsettling glimpse into South Africa's colonial past and into the ways in which black subjectivities were produced within and through these racist and colonial photographs. In line with the stereotype of the noble savage and the Tribute from the Colonies panel, these types of photographs infantilized Africans, and depicted them as standing close to nature, putting them against a background of flora and fauna. By combining both her own image and the archival photographs, Makhubu's translucency not only addresses the ghosts of the past, but also addresses a sense of generational alienation and invisibility.

This theme of (generational) alienation and invisibility is also put forward by Suat Ögüt (1986, Diyarbakir, Turkey). His work *The First Turk Immigrant or the Nameless Heroes of the Revolution* (2018) pays tribute to the migrants who were forced to flee Turkey because of amongst others their political views in the 1960s. They became guest workers in post-war countries like the Netherlands where they made significant contributions to their reconstruction and recovery period after the war. However, once their job was fulfilled, instead

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Suat Ögüt,  
*The First Turk Immigrant or  
The Nameless Heroes Of  
The Revolution* (2018)  
Credit Vera Duivenvoorden  
Framer Framed Molenwijk  
2018

This project is realised  
between 2012 to 2018 with  
the support of HISK (Higher  
Institute for Fine Arts),  
SAHA Association, Stichting  
Stokroos and Framer  
Framed.

of being treated as Dutch citizens, they were pushed to the periphery of society. To honour these immigrants, Ögüt's work literally places them on a pedestal, while simultaneously questioning and problematizing the structural peripheral position of non-Western immigrants within Dutch society. The position of immigrants within Dutch society, and more broadly speaking northern-Europe as well, is determined by various socio-economic and political factors that demanded from immigrants to assimilate and integrate to a specific idea of a pre-existing 'national identity'. This includes amongst others to be loyal towards what has already been established as the 'national idea', to work hard, to not complain or articulate critique to sociopolitical structures, and to be the scapegoat of socio-economic issues at hand within the country (Ahmed 2010; Çinkaya 2020; Essed 2008). Together, these characteristics make up for the notion of 'the good immigrant', a figuration that allegedly grants one access to Dutch identity. This process of assimilation is not new and can be traced back to the colonial regimes in which the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is defined by the need for the colonized subject to assimilate into the order of the colonizer, a process in which they lose their own sense of self, which results in their lives coming to stand in service of their colonizers (Ahmed 2010; Mbembe 2001; Yancy 2008). The figurations of the noble savage and the good immigrant thus show many resemblances in the sense of the allegedly necessary non-Western subject's subordination to discipline, their servitude, and gratefulness.

The work of Hedy Tjin (1985, Vierlingsbeek, Netherlands) foregrounds on the one hand the dangers of what happens when one doesn't comply to the notion of the good immigrant, whilst on the other hand also attuning to the impossibility of assimilation. Both her murals have been made in response to brutal murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020. This killing, along with the countless other Black lives lost to police brutality, ignited a global #BlackLivesMatter movement

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standing up against structural racism, white supremacy, police brutality, and the ongoing colonial order. The mural made in Amsterdam Noord (2021) started with portraits of five victims of colour who fell victim to police brutality. Paying tribute to not only the deathly victims in the USA but also in the Netherlands, the mural makes strikingly clear that racism is not 'something that only happens elsewhere', as is often articulated within the Netherlands that upholds a position of innocence in issues around race and racism (Wekker 2016), but that similar structural inequalities reside within Dutch society. Portraits of Mitch Henriquez, Kerwin Duinmeijer, Tomy Holten, and Sandra Bland, placed next to portraits of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Philando Castile, directly links the Dutch racist police violence to the police brutality in the USA.

The other mural (2021), made in collaboration with Dewy Elsinga (1992, Amsterdam, Netherlands), was painted at the Black Archives as a tribute to Surinam and Black heroes Anton de Kom, Perez Long Joy, Cindy Kerseborn, Dr. Sophie Redmond and Hugo Kooks, who played important roles in the struggle for Surinam independence. The defacing of this mural, accompanied by many other attacks towards the addresses of anti-racist activists, show how the Netherlands still has a long way to go in reckoning with its own history of violence, slavery and colonialism.

To return to the opening quote of this essay by Donna Haraway, who posed the thought-provoking question "with whose blood were my eyes crafted?", *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* seeks to unravel how the supposedly innocent symbols of the Dutch colonial past echo through in present-day issues around immigration and identity formation. Understanding and interpreting the contemporary artworks put forward in the exhibition in relation to the panel hands us a lens through which to consider the connections between the stereotype of the noble savage and its present-day figurations as the good immigrant. It is perhaps the work of

Shertise Solano (1982, Rotterdam, Netherlands) that is in this sense the most evocative and affective. While deploying a limited spectrum of three colours (black, bright red, and white) in her collages, mystical figures appear. Her work is simultaneously enigmatic and suffocating, creating a sense of eeriness. Her figures have bright, wide eyes, looking straight back at their viewer, clearly observing them, even seeing through and interrogating them, rendering feelings of discomfort and smother. Solano's work, in relation to the exhibition's visual dialogue between the past and present and the many ways in which the dynamics of colonialism still work through today, almost hangs over the panel as a tight, suffocating and heavy blanket.

Astrid Kerchman, Junior Lecturer and Research Assistant Graduate Gender Programme UU, project coordinator MOED

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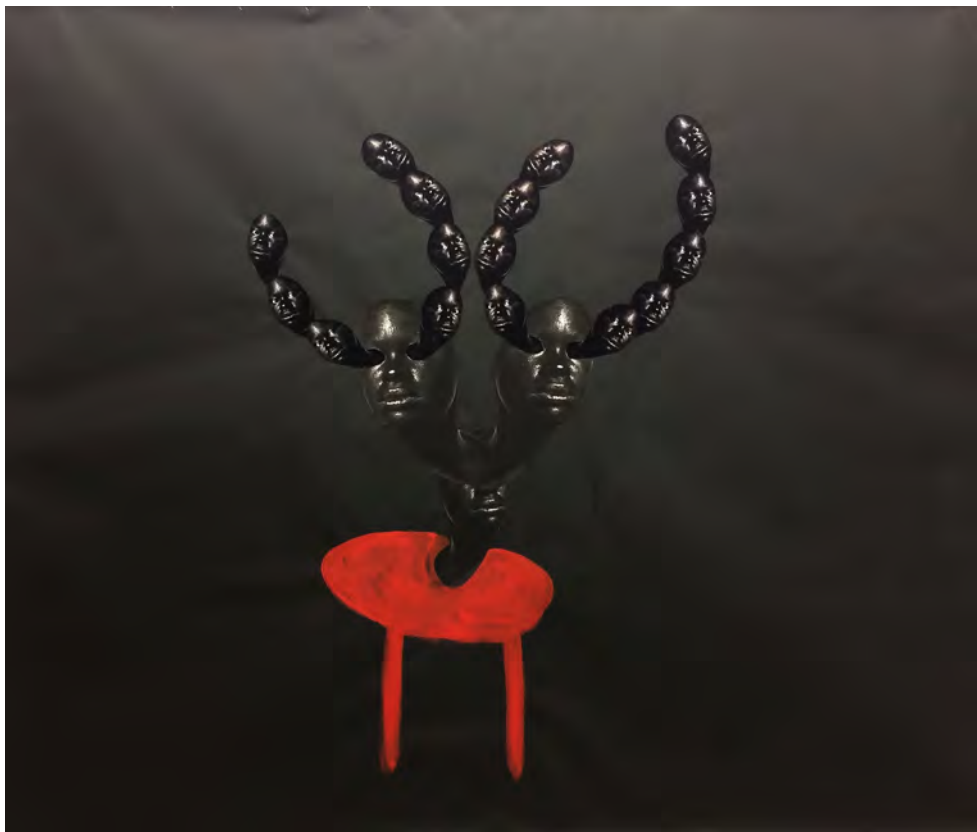
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Shertise Solano, *Untitled* (2020)  
collage on paper, acrylic paint, gesso  
254 x 228,60 cm  
Courtesy JOEY RAMONE, Rotterdam





Shertise Solano, *Untitled* (2020)  
collage on paper, acrylic paint, gesso  
270 x 239 cm  
Courtesy JOEY RAMONE, Rotterdam



Shertise Solano, *Untitled* (2020)  
collage on paper, acrylic paint, gesso  
275 x 239 cm  
Courtesy JOEY RAMONE, Rotterdam





1.



2.

1.  
Hedy Tjin & Dewy Elsinga, *Mural The Black Archives* (2020)  
Part of the full mural

Left to right: Cindy Kerseborn, Dr. Sophie Redmond & Hugo Kooks  
Credits go to Hedy Tjin, Dewy Elsinga & Mitchell Esajas (The Black Archives)  
The full mural also depicts Anton de Kom and Perez Long Joy.

2.  
Hedy Tjin, *United Painting & Verdedig Noord* (2020)  
Part of the full mural of victims of anti-black violence at Tolhuistuin, Amsterdam

Left to right: Mitch Henriquez, Kerwin Duinmeijer, George Floyd, Tomy Holten & Sandra Bland  
Credits go to Hedy Tjin, Mitchell Esajas (The Black Archives), Massih Hutak, United Painting en Verdedig Noord  
The full mural also depicts Breonna Taylor and Philando Castile.





Suat Ögüt, *The First Turk Immigrant or The Nameless Heroes Of The Revolution* (2018)  
Credit Vera Duivenvoorden  
Framer Framed Molenwijk 2018

This project is realised between 2012 to 2018 with the support of HISK (Higher Institute for Fine Arts), SAHA Association, Stichting Stokroos and Framers Framed.



Suat Ögüt, *The First Turk Immigrant or The Nameless Heroes Of The Revolution* (2018)  
Credit Vera Duivenvoorden  
Framer Framed Molenwijk 2018

This project is realised between 2012 to 2018 with the support of HISK (Higher Institute for Fine Arts), SAHA Association, Stichting Stokroos and Framer Framed.



Nomusa Makhubu, *Umqela Nombhaco (Beautification Scar)* (2007/2013)  
Digital print on archival Litho paper  
From the *Self-Portrait* (2007/2013) project



Nomusa Makhubu, *Asasibambe Ngani? (Still Binding?)* (2007/2013)  
Digital print on archival Litho paper  
From the *Self-Portrait* (2007/2013) project



Nomusa Makhubu, *Omama Bencelisa (Mothers Breastfeeding)* (2007/2013)  
Digital print on archival Litho paper  
From the *Self-Portrait* (2007/2013) project





*Decolonial Dialogues  
with the Golden Coach (2022)*  
Virtual Exhibition



*Decolonial Dialogues  
with the Golden Coach (2022)*  
Virtual Exhibition



## Tribute from the Colonies and the Destruction of Ecologies

As well as contesting the depiction of benevolent colonialism and the noble savage, the panels of the Golden Coach's homage to colonialism urge us to explicitly address another colonial icon: that of the paradisiacal nature of 'Mooi Indie' (Beautiful Indonesia) and the inexhaustible resources of the colonial soil. Upon the coach's central panel resides the image of the Dutch Maiden, to whom the indigenous people are apparently so happy to humbly offer the resources and treasures of their homelands. Juxtaposing the work of Zico Albaiguni (1987, Indonesia) and Hestu Setu Legi (1971, Yogyakarta, Indonesia) with the Golden Coach's central panel allows us to reveal the hidden costs of these colonial 'gifts' and resources.

It is crucial here to zoom in on the calm and peaceful blue ocean painted at the top of the panel's central scene. This ocean smoothly connects the colonies to the 'homeland'. However, as both Albaiguni and Setu Legi thematise, the arrival of Europeans, both in the East and the West, had a profound impact on local ecological systems. Not only were forests cleared so that the land could be used for agriculture, the hitherto isolated habitats of indigenous species were also overrun by rats and other pests carried on ships. That very same ocean also served as the medium over which colonial treasures and the enslaved were carried to their destinations. Considered from such perspectives – those of profit and (the slave) trade – the coach's central panel reveals how indigenous workers and natural goods and resources form part of the same visual sphere as depicted at the bottom of the panel, which visualises how those enslaved lose their homes, their bodily integrity, and their political status. As Achille Mbembe (2016) would say, they are the living dead, excluded from the human species, existing only in a kind of shadowland. Spectators of the Golden Coach thus witness how indigenous

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Nicolaas van der Waay, *Tribute from the Colonies* (1898)  
Close-up from *Tribute from the Colonies* (centre panel).  
Courtesy Amsterdam Museum, photo by René Gerritsen.

people and natural resources are equally situated as materials serving the economic interests of the colonial regime. Colonialism and slavery thus not only refer to the history of how people treated other people, but also of how people treated the environment. Unveiling this nexus of slavery, capitalism, climate change, and global environmental destruction (Brown et al. 2019) motivates the work of both Zico Albaiguni and Hestu Setu Legi. Both Setu Legi's and Albaiguni's work makes tangible the effects of the changing geographies of production and consumption as well as the shifting profile and intensifying nature of the global pollution caused by colonial and capitalist regimes.

Setu Legi questions the idea of progress and man's drive to bend nature to his or her own needs. His work highlights how colonialism initiated the homogenisation of life on planet Earth and how the world consequently became bound to one and the same global economic system. His work epitomises a condemnation of the global pollution caused by large industries. He advocates how land and water, rather than oil and coal,

form the most important components of life. In *Take Care of This Land* (2014), he emphasises the importance of protecting the environment, rather than asking what it can bring us.

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Hestu Setu Legi, "Hujan Emas Dinegri Orang, Hujan Batu Dinegri Sendiri" (Gold Rain Abroad, Stone Rain at Home) (2014)  
Material: Jute Fiber Fabric (Hessian cloth), woodcut print on paper.  
Technique: Silkscreen printing, spray paint stencil on Jute Fiber Fabric (Hessian cloth)  
Front object: Woodcut print on paper and woodcut board master  
300 x 240 cm  
©SetuLegi  
Private collection: John Cruthers, Sydney Australia

In his work, Setu Legi offers a beautiful reflection on the socio-political circumstances in Indonesia today by means of a statement accompanying his contribution to the *Decolonial Dialogues with the Golden Coach* exposition—a reflection that we quote here in its entirety:

*"Hujan emas dinegri orang, hujan batu dinegri sendiri"*  
(Gold rain abroad, stone rain at home)

*When the last tree has fallen,  
The jungle turned flat,  
Replaced by shoots of industrial plants,  
Marking a generation that has been lost,  
Their beginning of life been broken,  
When blood has rimed the ground full of anger.*

...

In this work, I want to tell stories about nature: From the environment endangered by production and consumption systems based on plantation industry, land exploitation, forest encroachment – to the destruction of whole ecosystems, the extinction of plant species, medicinal plants and animals as well as the loss of livelihood of indigenous peoples. Every day more of our tropical forests are taken over by oil palm plantations, hundreds of years old plants are removed from the soil, thousands of plant species are uprooted, hundreds of animals have no place to live anymore. This diversity will be replaced by a uniform pattern of monoculture, since nothing else can live beside them. Therefore, plantation companies carry out land clearing, which is nothing else than cleaning by killing (Genocide). These methods are a form of expanding human power over one-sided interests, the arrogance of the power of capital.



Monoculture... became a method of uniformity, the reason for prosperity, modernity and commodities. Monoculture, better known as a model for empowerment of nature, but by eliminating all other existing life, by burning to cut the food chain and destroy other creatures. Everything is done by force and violence.

Let's walk together into the forest, there are thickets, big trees, stilt roots, sharp thorns, streaking the temples, fingers and arms, ears feeling bruised, nose hairs starting to vibrate, damp smelling of earth, wet leaves seeming to occupy the lungs, touching the neck, combing the eyelashes. Partridges are running after grasshoppers, woodpeckers busy making nests, tree trunks are swayed by the wind, dry leaves fall from twigs, grasshoppers struggle in a spider's web. Simple life going the way it is – the faint sound of a chainsaw splitting the silence, crushing the soul, terminating life...

What happened! It's time for us to re-read what diversity means, the elementary characteristic of our universe...

*Every man needs land, for life he needs water,  
Where there is no water, there will be no life,  
When there is no water, all will be drowned  
Homeland is the birthplace of life...  
A nation, a civilization"*

*Setu Legi 2014*



Hestu Setu Legi, "Hujan Emas Dinegri Orang, Hujan Batu Dinegri Sendiri" (Gold Rain Abroad, Stone Rain at Home) (2014)  
Material: Jute Fiber Fabric (Hessian cloth), woodcut print on paper  
Technique: Silkscreen printing, spray paint stencil on Jute Fiber Fabric (Hessian cloth)  
Front object: Woodcut print on paper and woodcut board master  
300 x 240 cm  
@SetuLegi  
Private collection: John Cruthers, Sydney Australia

Zico Albaiguni's work springs from the Javanese belief that art, religion, spirituality, and the environment are inseparable. His remarkable colour palette arises from pigment combinations drawn from earlier traditions of colonial painting. Whilst referring to the representational formulas of earlier traditions, Albaiguni visualises the commodification of the South Asian landscape and contemporary environmental issues in Indonesia caused by colonisation, capitalism, and global consumerism. In *The Archipelago of the Day Before* (2019), the landscape represents a view of fossil fuel and waste in the ocean as opposed to the idealised imaginary of 'Mooi Indie'. By exhibiting these works together with the panel, we trust the nexus between colonialism, capitalism, and the environment cannot be overlooked anymore.

Rosemarie Buikema, Professor of Art, Culture and Diversity,  
project leader MOED

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Zico Albaiguni, *The Archipelago of the Day Before* (2019)  
Oil and giclee on canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
Private collection. Courtesy of the artist and Yavuz Gallery





Hestu Setu Legi, "Hujan Emas Dinegri Orang, Hujan Batu Dinegri Sendiri" (Gold Rain Abroad, Stone Rain at Home) (2014)  
 Material: Jute Fiber Fabric (Hessian cloth), woodcut print on paper  
 Technique: Silkscreen printing, spray paint stencil on Jute Fiber Fabric (Hessian cloth)  
 Front object: Woodcut print on paper and woodcut board master  
 300 x 240 cm  
 @SetuLegi  
 Private collection: John Cruthers, Sydney Australia



Hestu Setu Legi, "Hujan Emas Dinegri Orang, Hujan Batu Dinegri Sendiri" (Gold Rain Abroad, Stone Rain at Home) (2014)  
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Decolonial Dialogues  
with the Golden Coach (2022)  
Virtual Exhibition



# Colophon

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Dewy Elsinga  
Natasja Kensmil  
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Shertise Solano  
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