**The Dutch Global Age: Worldly Images and Images of the World in Netherlandish Art**

1. Scientific summary

Our present-day world is characterized by a global imaginary: the shared awareness of individuals of living on a world of interconnected civilizations. When and where did this imaginary originate, how did it develop over time, and which ideologies inflected it? This research program will demonstrate that the first global imaginary took place in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. This region’s unique visual culture ensured that prints, paintings, maps, and globes circulated widely among different social classes and also outside Europe. We will show how these arts made a larger impact on the global imaginary than any other media, only to be rivalled by photography two hundred years later. In this respect, Abraham Ortelius’ world map of 1570 can be compared to the famous *Earthrise* photo of 1969.

We will examine how global consciousness was rooted in images of the world, images from the world, and images for the world. In interconnected subprojects, we will 1. Identify and decipher the iconography used to represent the world and how this shifted to meet global audiences. 2. Determine how the use, representation, and imitation of foreign artistic materials resulted in new knowledge of the world. 3. Study global patterns of distribution and consumption of images and art materials and 4. Assess the continuing relevance of Netherlandish art in museum collections outside Europe. These subprojects will be synthesized in a critical inquiry on how artistic meanings, materials, and monetary aspects have impacted a global imaginary in a long-term, postcolonial perspective.

The program will include a knowledge valorization project to demonstrate that the Dutch Golden Age was rather a Global Age. Our exhibition will highlight the non-Western elements of artworks and how they contributed to global consciousness: from the Islamic scarf of *Vermeer’s Girl with Pearl Earring* to Rembrandt’s Chinese porcelain.

Public summary

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| **The Dutch Global Age** |
| *Prof.Dr. M.A. Weststeijn, UU, History and Art History* |
| The art of the Dutch “golden” age has many non-Western elements, from the Islamic scarf of Vermeer’s *Girl with Pearl Earring* to Rembrandt’s Chinese porcelain. The project examines how Netherlandish art has contributed to a global worldview and demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Netherlandish Old Masters in a globalizing world. |
| Word count: 50 |

2. Research proposal

**INTRODUCTION: Netherlandish Art and the First Global Imaginary**

The origins of globalization have often been associated with Columbus’s travels of 1492 (Mann 2011, Gunn 2003). It took longer, however, for **a global imaginary, or the awareness of living on a polycentric sphere of interconnected civilizations**, to take root among different layers of society, within and outside Europe. This program will demonstrate to what extent the Early Modern “conquest of the world as picture” first happened in the visual arts of the 17th-c. Netherlands. Following Portugal and Spain as one of the world’s most interconnected regions, the Low Countries (Northern and Southern Netherlands) also harbored Europe’s most accessible visual culture, in terms of their printing industry, cartography, illusionistic oil painting, material experimentation, emblematic symbolism, and collecting. Conversely, Netherlandish prints, maps, and globes circulated outside Europe – from Beijing to Cuzco – with a greater accessibility and broader impact than that of literature or the sciences, only rivalled by photography two centuries later. Whereas recent scholarship (Ramachandran 2015, Schmidt 2015) has explored the issue of “how the extent of the known world was to be described” in books, this program breaks new ground by focusing on artworks.

In the past decade, art historians, building on the vast scholarship on the logistics of the Dutch East and West India Companies, have begun to explore global dimensions of the uniquely ubiquitous visual culture of the Netherlands. Case studies have been collected in edited volumes (Weststeijn a.o. 2016, DaCosta Kaufmann/North 2014), and individual studies have focused on the trade and diplomatic exchange of rarities (Swan 2021), illustrated books and maps (Dijkstra 2019, Sutton 2015), the reactions of Netherlandish artists to materials from beyond Europe (Baadj 2016, Weststeijn 2014, Hochstrasser 2007), and on the export of Netherlandish paintings and prints (Massing 2017, Ginhoven 2015, Braat 1998, Gerson 1942). This program will weave these strands together for a pioneering analysis of how exchange between the Low Countries and the world beyond Europe (East and West Indies) resulted in the first global imaginary, using a threefold methodology: iconography, technical art history, and economic art history. This will allow the program to answer the overarching question, “**In what ways did the visual arts of the Netherlands contribute to the shaping of a global imaginary?”,** in terms of meanings, materials, and patterns of trade as well as their intellectual impact. In other words, global consciousness is understood as originating in images of the world that can be parsed in terms of their content, form, and trajectory:

Subprojects 1-3 are organized around specific methods that are guided by the following questions:

**1) Iconography:**How did Netherlandish artists represent the world symbolically and devise a global framework for understanding meaning?

**2) Technical art history:** How were non-European materials used and imitated by Netherlandish artisans and what do these uses and imitations reveal about knowledge of these materials?

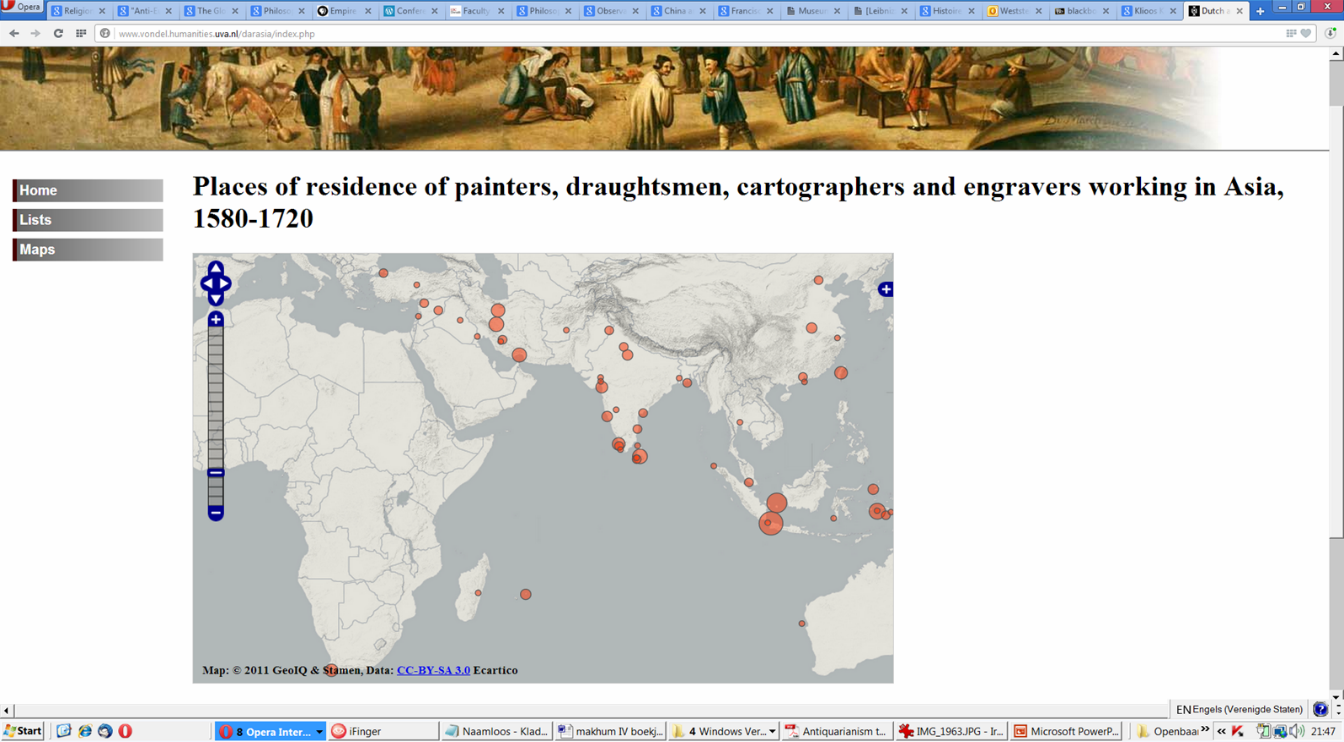
**3) Economic art history:** What were the routes, volumes, and prices of artefacts and art materials that resulted in the global availability of images?

Two additional subprojects take transhistorical approach to connect these historical questions to the continuing relev-ance of Netherlandish art in a globalizing world:

**4) Museology:** What were the strategies for collection and curating 17th-c. Netherlandish painting in museums in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the period 1975-2022?

**5) *Longue durée* synthesis:** How are meaningful, material, and monetary aspects of the first global imaginary related and what is its continuing relevance in a postcolonial world?

The program thus proposes a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary approach towards the global imaginary. It argues that in the 17thc., images *of* the globe, images *from* the globe, and images *for* the globe all contributed to consciousness of the global condition. This awareness was not monolithic but was inspired by, and contributed to, different ideologies of globality. It was in the Netherlands that the global imaginary took hold for the first time in low and high culture among different social strata, in terms of intellectual understanding (meanings), hands-on experience (materials), and sheer availability (money). In addition, the program highlights reciprocal elements of the exchange: individuals beyond Europe were confronted with aspects of global consciousness when some of the images made in the Netherlands started to circulate.



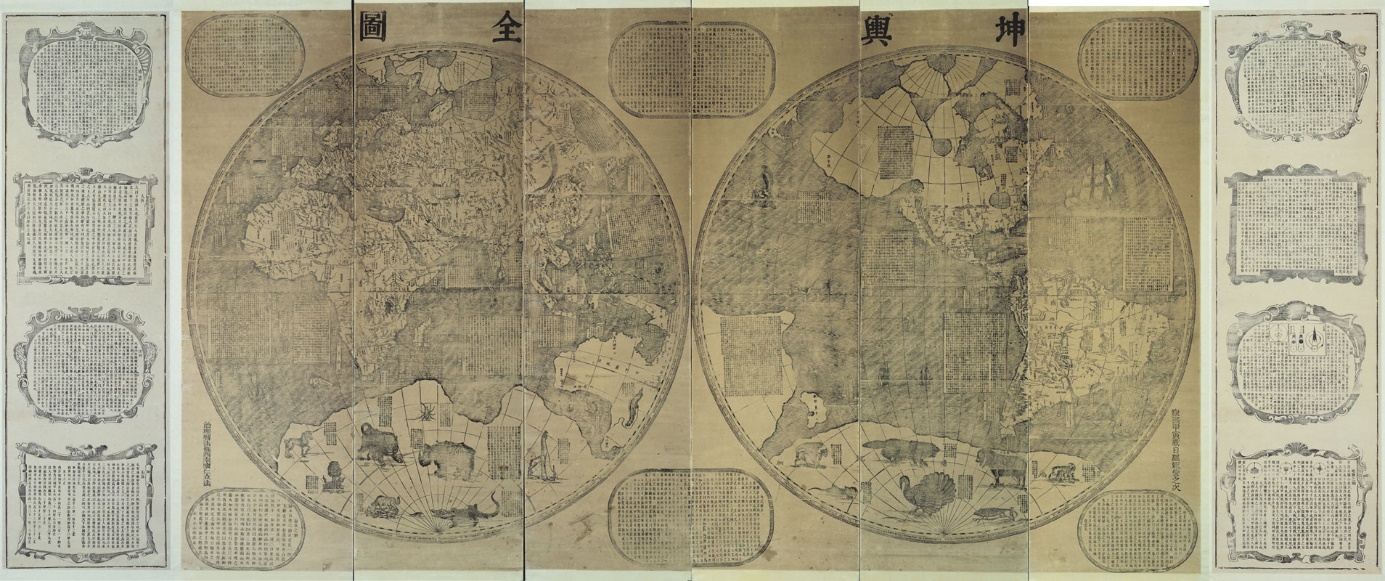


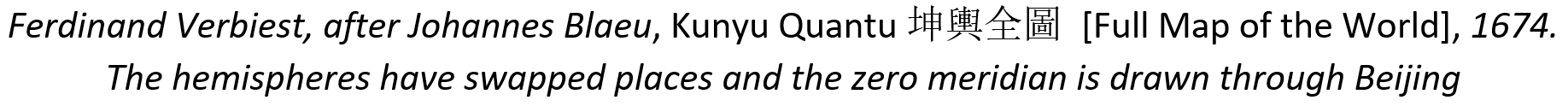
**Originality of the topic: the Low Countries versus China, South Asia, and Brazil**

The art of the Golden Age is arguably the Netherlands’ most successful cultural export on the world stage. Featured in major collections in Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Africa, it attracts visitors whenever the major names are displayed. Scholars and museum publics generally recognize it as one of two main schools of Early Modern European art, the oth­-er being the Italian Renaissance. Purportedly, its accurate representation of contemporary life tied it closely to the rise of the urban bourgeoisie in Antwerp and Amsterdam. The *Dutch Global Age* breaks new ground by replacing this “national school” model with a global one: the spectacular growth of the art market cannot be understood without taking into account the contemporary maritime expansion. Many artworks resulted from, and contributed to, the extraordinary interconnectedness of the Low Countries with the rest of the world: from the Islamic scarf of Vermeer’s *Girl with Pearl Earring* to Rembrandt’s Chinese porcelain. What was the role of the visual arts in fostering the new views Netherlanders held of the world and of themselves that came with an extending geographical horizon? The nature and accessibility of this visual culture set the situation in the Low Countries apart from the preceding Portuguese and Spanish encounter with the Indies. For the first time, a variety of people from different social strata could acquire different kinds of intellectual and material knowledge of foreign worlds, on a larger scale and at lower prices than was previously possible. Some of this imagery also circulated outside Europe.

Although in the past few decades, many individual works and masters have been studied in a global light (notably in the Rijksmuseum’s 2015 exhibition *Asia in Amsterdam*), as yet there lacks a comprehensive and analytical approach of Global Netherlandish Art. This program will, for the first time, explore artistic exchanges between the Low Countries and the wider world, understood here as the East and West Indies, in an integrated fashion, addressing their intel-lectual, material, and economic dimensions. It will foreground reciprocal exchange between the Low Countries and China, South Asia, and Brazil. In incidental cases the program will engage with relevant outliers of the flow of artistic exchange such as Peru and Japan. China was the horizon of the Dutch’ colonial expansion, from where they imported tens of millions of pieces of porcelain in 1600-1700, and which in turn was the destination of maps and prints from the Low Countries. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) was even more successful in South Asia from 1605 on. This resulted in the colonization of Ceylon and a lively reciprocal exchange of artefacts and creative imitations of Netherlandish prints in Mughal painting. On the other side of the globe, Brazil was a colony of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in the period 1630-1654. It became a destination for a few accomplished artists and a source for hybrid artworks featuring feathers and tortoiseshell.

The program will demonstrate that the central position of the Low Countries in global exchange rested on intricate trade and artisanal networks rooted in the Northern and Southern Provinces (present-day Netherlands and Belgium). Older scholars have tended to emphasize the uniqueness of the Dutch Republic and its colonial project, as separate from the Southern Provinces that were politically part of the Spanish Habsburg world. We, by contrast, recognize that North and South were engaged in the same struggle with globalization processes. The Habsburg Empire’s worldwide overstretch, which led to increased taxation at home, inspired the founding of the Dutch Republic and its rivalling trade with the East and West Indies. The Low Countries’ position thus straddled the major political, religious, and cultural fault lines of the age (Catholic/Protestant, Republican/absolutist) and made it into a crucible of incipient global consciousness. The complementary global imaginaries of Catholic and Protestant missions and of the Houses of Habsburg and Orange offer inroads for productive comparative analysis. Furthermore, the logistics of exchange reveal that the (largely Protestant) trading companies and the (mostly Catholic) missionary companies often played sup-portive rather than antagonistic roles (Hertroijs 2014, Weststeijn 2020a).





**METHODS AND TECHNIQUES:**

To chart and analyze Netherlandish art as the first global imaginary, we will combine insights from recent trends in the field in an interdisciplinary fashion, from the time-honored approach of iconography to innovative additions from technical art history, economic history, museum studies, and critical postcolonial theory. The subprojects have been organized according to method, rather than geographical region, to ensure that their approaches demonstrate a trans-cultural perspective (pp. 8-12):



*Pieter van Roestraten (attr.),* The Paston Collection, *1665 (Norwich).*

*A globe shows East Asia and the Americas; other objects reference China, South Asia, and Africa.*

**Subproject 1: Iconography (PhD1)**

**How did Netherlandish artists represent the world symbolically and how did they engage with meaningful elements from beyond Europe?**

Iconography, the study of meanings in artworks by connecting them to image traditions and literary texts, is a mainstay in the study of themes from Christianity and the (Western) Classical Tradition. These include the much-debated “disguised” symbolism of Netherlandish still life and landscape paintings. This subproject will advance iconography and apply it to global dimension. Not only did the 17thc. witness an unprecedented popularity of symbolic representations of the globe and global comprehensiveness, images also migrated on a global scale, to new contexts where their in-tended meanings were unknown.

Globes, maps, prints, and paintings that represented the world were not neutral representations. Rather, they expressed aspects of global consciousness, often by means of meaningful symbols and attributes relating to foreign ethnicities, animals, commodities, or products. The world itself was represented allegorically as “Lady World” and the Four Continents were personified as women named Europa, Asia, Africa, and America, sometimes based on portraits of actual foreigners. Whereas the popularity of these works demonstrates to what extent the concept of the globe had become part of popular and elite visual culture, their meaning was unstable. Globe symbolism could refer to Habsburg or Orange imperialism, to the remit of Catholic or Protestant Christianity, or even to the universal language of the visual arts themselves. Globe symbolism from the Netherlands also migrated to the art of Mughal India (in relation to the representation of Mughal imperialism: Koch 2012, Ramaswamy 2007) and China. This can be seen in world maps by Ortelius and Blaeu that were adapted to the self-image of the Chinese Middle Kingdom, with the hemispheres swapped and the central meridian drawn through Beijing. While some artefacts portray globality in light of the transience of all sublunar affairs, for example in *vanitas* still life or the attractive yet deceitful Lady World (Jongh 2009), they also express early unease with and even **resistance to globalization**.

A second iconographical challenge was posed by the descriptions, reproductions, and samples of Asian art provided by VOC employees with the help of local informants. These include the first European discussion of Hinduism (Angel 1657, ed. Stolte 2012) and translation from Sanskrit (Rogerius 1651). The imagery of Hinduism and Buddhism was illustrated and discussed in travelogues and related documents (Hoornbeeck 2018, Rogerius 1651, Baldaeus 1672, Dapper 1678, Nieuhof 1665, Cuper/Witsen). The subproject will explore how these visual and written engagements with Asian religious art centered around the notions of **idolatry** and **antiquity***.* The former will include Protestant and Catholic sensibilities towards image worship and the latter, the greater antiquity of traditions in China and India that threatened to modify or upend Eurocentric positions (Gommans/Loots 2015).

Idolatry was not only the main lens through which Europeans approached religion and art outside Europe (Farago 2011); it also fundamentally marked the visual culture of the Low Countries since the Iconoclasm of 1566. The sensibility of artists towards idolatry may have played a role in the dominance of Netherlandish engravings in European proselytization , adapting Christian iconography to its new audiences in Asia and the Americas. On the basis of a wealth of recent secondary literature on individual artworks (for China: Jennes 1943, Standaert 2007, Oliveira Lopes 2017; for South Asia and Latin America: Weststeijn 2005, Miegroet/Marchi 2010, Porras 2016), subproject 1 will explore how engravings were adapted to different contexts and inspired local reproductions in woodblock printing (China), miniat-ure painting (India), and sculpture and oil painting (Latin America). Whereas in China, for instance, elements of suffering and violence such as the Crucifixion were de-emphasized, they were highlighted in Latin America. They were also appreciated in Japan where the Dutch’ positive attitude towards iconoclasm ultimately explains their commercial success, even sparking the production of bespoke Catholic imagery for the ceremonial apostasy demanded by the Shogun.

**Subproject 2: Technical art history (PhD2)**

**How were non-European materials used and imitated by Netherlandish artisans and what do these uses and imitations reveal about knowledge of these materials?**

At the forefront of the recent “material turn” in the humanities, art historians and conservation scientists are now focusing on reconstructing artisans’ technical knowledge (Fowler 2019). Material knowledge has increasingly been institutionally and educationally linked to the study of Netherlandish art. This subproject breaks new ground by adding an intercultural dimension: how did artisans in the Low Countries (painters, potters, joiners) handle and imitate artificial and natural materials from beyond Europe? Imported objects made **hands-on contact** possible with foreign cultures, even for people from different social strata who never travelled (McCants 2015), and were thus essential in the fostering of global consciousness.

Subproject 2 will reconstruct material encounters via artefacts that engaged with the foreign materials: oil paint-ings representing exotica, ceramics that imitated unknown substances, and applied artworks ostentatiously construct­ed from non-European wood, stone, mother-of-pearl, or tortoiseshell. Product innovation resulting from this overseas exchange was tied up with new ideas, and attempts at imitating the foreign materials were often ideologically charged by the desire to understand them (Weststeijn 2015, Baadj 2016). Reconstructing artisans’ attempts at material mimesis will reveal to what extent they succeeded in acquiring material knowledge (Ajmar 2016). The subproject will thus contrast the intellectual understanding of the global world (subproject 1) with the **tacit knowledge**that came from the experience of touching, handling, examining, and recreating the foreign materials. It also confronted Europeans with the artistry of peoples beyond Europe.

Artefacts and their technical documentation will serve as primary source materials. In addition, written sources such as travelogues (Dapper 1668, Nieuhof 1665) describe the materials in terms of their sensory effect (*sinnelick-heden*). Artists’ treatises (Mander 1604, Hoogstraten 1678, Beurs 1692) offered practical guidelines as well as a critical vocabulary for qualities such as sheen (*reflexykonst*)and surface texture (*veranderlickheydt*) that tried to capture newness in traditional terms from art theory. Working in Utrecht University’s ARTLAB space and the UMAKE center (see **Host institute**), subproject 2 will combine the written sources with technical data and actual hands-on reconstructions (such as the polishing of shells, the mixing of pigments, and glazing of ceramics) to establish what this new, hands-on knowledge of the foreign entailed. Thus, the subproject does not primarily aim to uncover the works’ material constitution but rather to reconstruct how 17th-c. users handled, used, and understood foreign objects. The material knowledge this entailed was based on autopsy and experiment, but it was certainly not always accurate (e.g., the Dutch attempts at reverse-engineering the Chinese technology of porcelain was mistakenly associated with eggshells). Often form and content were closely associated: for example, the ultramarine pigment made from Indian gemstones was used to represent Asian objects; Brazilian wood was used for the representation of dark-skinned figures, and tortoiseshell literally supported a portrait of Stadhouder Frederik Hendrik to underscore his global political pretentions.

Subproject 2 will compare and contrast **European and non-European bodies of material knowledge**. It acknowl-edges that many Old Masters effectively worked with materials found, produced, and prepared by individuals from Asia, Africa, and the Americas, and descriptions of the relevant techniques were sometimes based on expertise of local native speakers. We will explore to what extent these attempts to integrate bodies of material knowledge from different cultures inspired, and were inspired by, the ideal of a global knowledge society. When material experiments from the Low Countries (such as imitations of Chinese porcelain) were shipped to the Americas and East Asia, the exchange became truly circular.

**Subproject 3: Economic art history (PhD3)**

**What were the routes, volumes, and prices of the artefacts and art materials that circulated between the Netherlands and the world beyond Europe?**

Economic history has become a mainstay – and one of the attractions – of the study of Netherlandish art. Painstakingly detailed analysis of collection archives and sales catalogues has complemented traditional qualitative studies with quantitative analysis and illuminated the evolution of free trade in art (Montias 2002, Rasterhoff 2017 a.o.). What has been understudied, however, is to what extent the spectacular growth of markets in Antwerp and Amsterdam was a function of their key positions in global networks. Paintings were exported internationally, and art materials, applied artworks, and precious rarities were imported. When the market overheated, many painters migrated, some as far as Batavia (current-day Jakarta), including Rembrandt’s daughter Cornelia and the sons of Frans Hals (Gerson 1942, Bok 2014).

Earlier research into art collecting has primarily focused on oil paintings, while ignoring objects (mostly the applied arts) from outside Europe that are also listed. Thus this subproject will revisit archives in Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, Haarlem, Louvain, The Hague, and Utrecht. In addition, the DELPHER database of digitized Dutch newspapers will provide a rich source for identifying the sale of goods shipped by the VOC, including advertisements and cargo lists in several languages. We will identify quantitative patterns of distribution and consumption and the contextual factors that may explain them. On the basis of new archival work and published research (Duverger 1984-2004, Fabri 2010, Ginhoven 2015, Veen 2016), this subproject will combine four categories of commodities: 1. the export of Netherlandish **prints** to China, South Asia, and Latin America (IJzerman 1926, Braat 1998, Massing 2017); 2. the export of Netherlandish **paintings**, including small works on copper and watercolors (mostly to Latin America, occasionally to East Asia: Gerson 1942, Miegroet/Marchi 2000); 3. the import of **exotica** from beyond Europe to the Netherlands (from ordinary households to cabinets of curiosities: Bergvelt a.o. 1992, McCants 2015); and 4. the import of **art materials** from beyond Europe to the Netherlands(e.g., indigo blue, cochineal red, and tortoiseshell were sourced from the Americas; ultramarine blue, shells, and ivory came from South Asia: Vermeylen 2010, Hamann 2010).

In a pilot study of Chinese objects documented in collections the Netherlands (Weststeijn 2020b), the PI found evidence of rich archival material in an assembly of manuscripts, printed and digitized records, cargo lists, auction cat-alogues, collection inventories, and advertisements. The analysis here, therefore, will be comparative and analytic rather than exhaustive. What makes it feasible is that often a single merchant traded in prints, paintings, exotica, and art materials on routes that went from the Netherlands to overseas and back. The research will carefully negotiate uncertainties in the terminology regarding the nature and geographical origin of the artefacts (often denoted with the generic term “Indian” ), whereas the information on numbers and prices is sometimes very specific.

In relation to the global imaginary, subproject 3 will answer an overarching question: how was the rise of markets for art related to the institutions of the Dutch Republic’s “first modern economy” and the concomitant **ideologyof free trade**? As free markets for art and luxuries originated in Antwerp and Amsterdam, at the same time, the VOC flourished as the first joint stock company with tradable shares. These two developments may have contributed to the transition from a world of fragmented and unregulated economies to an integrated system of corresponding markets subject to trade regulations, with wealth accumulating among a small group of Europeans (Wallerstein 1980, Pomeranz 2000). This implies that even the ubiquitous Delftware tiles in Dutch homes, modelled on Chinaware, can be interpreted as marker of a global development that, although sparked by the confrontation with Asia, resulted in European supremacy. The research will therefore, where relevant, highlight the role of forced labor and slavery in the establishment and upkeep of global trade. The feasibility of connecting the macro level of economics to the micro level of individual artefacts is evident in the fact that Hugo Grotius based his authoritative theory of free trade on the Dutch capture of a Portuguese ship with mostly Chinese porcelain in 1603 (Swan 2016, Ittersum 2003).

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