

A Fascination with the Unknown: The Work of Albert Eckhout in Dutch Colonial Brazil

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Abstract

Within the last forty years, a significant amount of research has been completed about the artistic works of Albert Eckhout (c. 1610-1665) and his connection to Dutch colonialism in Brazil. This paper will explore the paintings created by Eckhout during his seven-year stay in Brazil. To European eyes, the landscape of Northeast Brazil would be described as beyond comparison. With its natural waterfalls, forests, and winding rivers, Brazil was like an exotic paradise to its colonial settlers. The native peoples that inhabited the Brazilian coast had utterly different languages, cultural values, clothing styles, and familial systems, and governing structures than the Dutch. The native population was completely unfamiliar and foreign. Fortunately, Eckhout was hired to create images of costumes and customs he observed, and thus today, we have access to some of the first formally painted images of the Viceroyalty of Brazil and its inhabitants. The work of Eckhout contributes to the larger understanding of Dutch colonialism and the value of intercontinental travel and representation of the exotic in Baroque-era Europe. Using early modern taxonomic frameworks and practices along with visual analysis and interpretation this investigation demonstrates Albert Eckhout's profound impact on the understanding of race and ethnicity in the early modern world as well as representation of the New World through visual culture.

Keywords: Albert Eckhout, Dutch, Colonial Brazil, Colonialism

1. Introduction

The artistic works of Baroque era artist Albert Eckhout (c. 1610-1665) have largely been studied by scholars as supplemental documents to the study of Colonial Dutch Brazil. This thesis will explore the paintings created by Eckhout during his seven-year stay in Brazil. To the eyes of his European contemporaries, the landscape of Northeast Brazil was beyond comparison. With its natural waterfalls, forests, and winding rivers, Brazil was an exotic paradise to its colonial settlers. Contributing to this exotic setting, the indigenous peoples that inhabited the Brazilian coast had utterly different languages, cultural values, clothing styles, familial systems, and governing structures than the Dutch. The native population was completely unfamiliar and foreign. As a result of motivated leadership, Eckhout created images of costumes and customs he observed, and thus today, we have access to a few of the first formally painted images of the Viceroyalty of Brazil and its inhabitants. During his stay in the port of Recife, Eckhout (a portrait artist), created images of the New World. This thesis highlights how his work contributes to the larger understanding of Dutch colonialism and the value of intercontinental travel as well as the representation of the exotic in early modern Europe.

In 1637, Eckhout was hired by Holy Roman Empire (modern day Germany), Count Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen to travel with him to the colonial Dutch Brazilian port of Recife and paint their surroundings and the people they encountered.¹ Prior to the colonial expedition, Count Maurits was hired by the West India Company to be the governor of the recently seized Portuguese territory.² Besides Eckhout, Dutch artist Frans Post was also hired to join

Governor Maurits on the trip and create images of the Brazilian landscape. Dutch physician William Piso and natural historian Georg Marcgraf were also brought to Brazil under the employment of Governor Maurits and were instructed to take copious notes and sketches of the wildlife and vegetation they observed.³ In a letter written in 1678 to King Louis XIV of France in regards to his patronage of artists and the work they produced while in Brazil, Maurits wrote that the artists “created a portrait of that country’s peoples, animals, birds, fish, and fruits.”⁴ As the first Dutch colonial governor of Brazil, Maurits advised Post and Eckhout to portray the wonders of the new colony and its riches and resources. While the works of both Post and Eckhout are regarded today by scholars as some of the best early European rendered visual images of Brazilian indigenous, African, *Mestizo* and *Mulatto* peoples, as well as the country’s landscape, the two artists were originally hired to create images that would hang in the governor’s palace. Eventually, this purpose changed and much of their work was ultimately used as visual scientific evidence of the New World.⁴

As a political figure and a cultural trendsetter in European society, Maurits wanted his trip to Brazil to be regarded as a profound event in European history. Due to his ambitious attitude and success, he is often referenced by scholars as one of the most well qualified individuals to be sent to control and manage a European colony.⁵ Governor Maurits was considered a prince and favorite son of Count Johan VII of Nassau-Siegen, and it was surprising that the risk was taken to send him to the New World as the first colonial governor of Dutch Brazil. The journey to the Americas was often a dangerous one, which did not end when the expedition had arrived on land, but continued with the threat of disease and conflict when encountering the native populations. Despite potential peril, Maurits planned from the very beginning that his time in Brazil would be one that contributed to great scientific and cultural studies and that he would be named its benefactor. Maurits understood that European nobility valued knowledge, which supported his desire to compile his and his crew’s discoveries into a book.⁶

With this goal in mind, Georg Marcgraf and William Piso, the naturalist and physician on the trip, published in 1648 the *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (Brazilian Natural History), a book that detailed the plant life and topography that they had observed while in Brazil. Sketches and drawings by both Post and Eckhout were used as prints in the book. While Maurits expected all artists and scientists to be as objective and realistic as possible, he allowed Eckhout and Post more artistic liberty when it came to oil paintings. Sketches and drawings could easily be turned into prints and distributed to the masses, but easel paintings were less accessible to the general public and could only be viewed by select individuals. The oil paintings produced by Post and Eckhout were made purely for the decoration of the Governor’s mansion, while their less formal works were reserved for scientific and cultural studies.⁷

In addition to economic interests, curiosity played a monumental role in colonization. The unfamiliar and strange were exciting to Europeans and these early descriptions and images of the New World peaked their interest and inspired further exploration. Regarded as the first European explorer to reach the New World and to come into contact with the indigenous people of modern day South America, Amerigo Vespucci describes the indigenous people he encountered in the Americas in his influential pamphlet *Mundus Novus* (New World), 1504:

The people are thus naked, handsome, brown, well shaped in body, their heads, necks, arms, private parts, feet of women and men are a little covered with feathers. The men also have many precious stones in their faces and breasts. No one also has anything, but all things are in common. And the men have as wives those who please them, be they mothers, sisters, or friends, therein they make no distinction. They also fight with each other. They also eat each other even those who are slain, and hang the flesh of them in the smoke. They live one hundred and fifty years. And have no government.⁸

This description by Vespucci was one of the first descriptions read by Europeans in regards to the New World. It should be noted that Vespucci’s understanding and interpretation of the appearance and behavior of the indigenous people of South America impacted the expectations for all future explorers.

Governor Maurits not only wanted to explore and study the new Dutch port, but also wanted the colony to emulate the great capital cities of Europe. He called the capital of the port Mauritsstad (City of Maurits) and commissioned elaborate building projects that included his main palace, Vrijburg, and his pleasure palace, Boa Vista. He sponsored the building of bridges, public parks, and zoological parks. In addition, he funded the installment of botanical and pleasure gardens that contained both indigenous wildlife and plants as well those from other parts of South America. When he returned to Europe in 1644, Governor Maurits gifted the works of Post and Eckhout to Danish, German, and French kings as objects that reflected an exotic new world. Many of these images along with native Brazilian plant and animal specimens were ultimately housed in curiosity cabinets, also known as *Kunstkammers*.⁹

The European elite in the seventeenth century highly valued the exotic and with the rise of colonialism, influx of goods from the New World satisfied this interest. Among the objects that were brought back by early settlers and given as gifts to the European nobility were specimens of rocks, minerals, plants, rare and precious stones as well as shells, taxidermy animals, and mementos of the indigenous peoples. The owners of these objects would then display

their wares in a cabinet or room, which was later known as a *Wunderkammer* or *Kunstammer*. Scholars typically regard the *Kunstammer* as the prototype of the museum, as it housed objects that were intended to inform as well as fascinate the viewer.¹⁰ Some *Kunstammers* held images of the New World, and in fact, many of Post and Eckhout's paintings ended up in the *Kunstammers* of various noble and royal families across Europe. Maurits had commissioned the two artists to portray the "exotic, the different, the new, the surprising, that would excite the curiosity,"¹¹ and as a result their work was favored for its aesthetically pleasing presentation and inclusion of the bizarre and colorful plant life, animals, and indigenous peoples of Brazil.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, before and during the discovery and exploration of the New World, the distinctions made by twenty-first century scholars, between race and ethnicity today had yet to be considered. During the early modern period indigenous groups of people were regarded as inferior on the basis of their behavior especially when compared to that of the "civilized" Europeans, rather than their skin color or physical appearance. Religion, morality, type of government, material culture, manner of making war, and the cultivation and preparation of food determined a nation's civility. Europeans compared their behavioral practices and belief systems, especially that of Christianity, to those of the indigenous people in the New World. In the eighteenth century, employing religion as the primary divider between European and indigenous culture, European slave traders justified taking slaves from Africa by claiming that Africans were less human because of their non-Christian values. Slave traders speculated that indigenous peoples were less intellectual as a way to rationalize their actions. By the early 1800s ethnicity did come into play. Writers began to describe non-Europeans by their physical appearance especially physiognomy, as a further way to designate specific differences they considered crucial between the civilized and uncivilized, or indigenous, African, and European.¹² Artists attempted to define cultural and racial groups in their work.

Created in 1571, the engraved frontispiece designed for Flemish cartographer, Abraham Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Theatre of the World) (Fig. 1)¹³ is the first known image "to represent the personifications of the four parts of the world as a unified group."¹⁴ This image was created during the late Renaissance period, an era that was characterized by advances in art, science, and global exploration. The wealthy nations of Europe were all clambering to gain a foothold in the New World and discover the riches and exotic flora, fauna, and peoples it had to offer.

Ortelius' book is considered the first modern atlas and its frontispiece not only represents the four known continents of the world at the time, but also suggests a hierarchy of civility.¹⁵ At the top of the work is the female personification of Europe. She is enthroned and crowned and sits above the other continents as ruler of the world. In her right hand is a staff and to her left is a Latin cross representing the sovereignty of Christianity. She sits between two globes, one representing the celestial world and the other the physical world, implying that the European continent rules the physical world and even perhaps the heavens. Immediately to her right is the personification of Asia, which is considered the second most cultured to Europe. Asia wears elaborate jewels and clothing and holds an incense burner, emphasizing the importance of the spice trade that originated in Asia. Directly across from Asia is the personification of Africa, wearing less clothing than the other two figures described and holds a tree branch as an object of trade. In contrast to the European and Asian figures, Africa is topless and dons elaborate jewels and fabric unlike her counterparts. Her hair in flames represents the hot weather associated with the continent. Finally, at the bottom of the image is the personification of America who sits completely naked holding a sphere and a severed head, implying her barbarism and cannibalistic behaviors. At her feet is a bow and arrow set. A bust to her left represents *terra incognita*, the undiscovered continents of the world. As a whole, this frontispiece outlines the understood level of civility of each continent, with refined and sophisticated Europe at the top and savage and hedonistic America at the bottom.¹⁶

Eckhout's work directly reflects the first stages of defining race and ethnicity based on behavioral practice to one focused on physical appearance.¹⁷ His work is categorized by scholar, Peter Mason as representative of the artistic tradition of ethnographic portraiture. For Mason, ethnographic portraiture can be defined as a portrait of an individual which features objects that are "themselves ethnographically identifiable" which ultimately "introduces ethnographic distinctiveness to the composition as a whole."¹⁸ Furthermore, he contends that the distinct cultural artifacts that are on display in an ethnographic portrait lend itself to specifics thus in the case of Eckhout's portraits, utilizing a "relatively unspecific form which becomes increasingly specific through the addition of further detail."¹⁹ In another sense, ethnographic portraiture can be described as a way to represent an entire nation or group of people through one individual surrounded by very specific and carefully selected ethnographic objects.

Eckhout's portraits *Tapuya Man* (1641), *Tapuya Woman* (1641), *Tupinamba Man* (1643), *Tupinamba Woman* (1641), *African Woman and Child* (1641), *African Man* (1641), *Mameluca* (1641), and *Mulatto Man* (1643) tend to be interpreted by scholars as "authentic ethnographic records rather than works of art."²⁰ Through their inclusion of specific cultural artifacts, clothing, and landscapes, these eight large-scale portraits by Eckhout are readily accessible via the visual rhetoric of ethnographic portraiture. However, it is important to consider the implications of this definite categorization. By valuing the portraits as purely ethnographic their artistic value is diminished and as a result their interpretation disregards artistic liberties. Mason briefly notes the tradition of *disguised symbolism* in early modern

Dutch art.²¹ He cites that *disguised symbolism* manifested itself in a variety of artistic mediums in the early modern period, from genre scenes, landscapes, to portraiture. In essence, a scene had the potential to be embedded with a variety of symbols, many of which tended to be moralizing.²² For example, a dog featured in a domestic scene where both a husband and wife are present could easily represent fidelity and loyalty between the spouses. Considering that Eckhout was a trained artist and also a consumer of images in the early modern world, it would not be surprising if he employed *disguised symbolism* in his Brazilian portraits, which this author holds to be a form of artistic liberty. In turn, it is also important to acknowledge Eckhout's other uses of visual rhetoric from the 17th century.

All eight of Eckhout's portraits are rendered in larger than life scale utilizing oil paint on canvas. At first glance, a few commonalities between the portraits are revealed. Four of the portraits feature men as their central figure, while the other four detail women. The majority of scholars have included that the portraits are in fact pairs of male and female counterparts that represent a specific ethnic group that inhabited the colony. Engaging with the conclusion that Eckhout's portraits were designed to be in pairs further aids in the exploration of their commonalities. All eight figures stand in an upright position with one foot forward and look directly out at the viewer. Their pose is reminiscent of *contrapposto*, an artistic technique that was used as early as the Greeks in the fifth century BCE to help portray movement and engaged muscles in depictions of individuals by employing a subtle weight shift. Building from this revered artistic tradition, European painters of the 17th century displayed their portrait subjects in classical conventions. By rendering the portraits in a standardized and familiar form, Eckhout's contemporary viewers would have promptly been able to interpret and understand the images of the alien New World presented to them. As Mason has suggested, it is not the physical stance or positioning of the figures that made Eckhout's work categorized as exotic, but the specific ethnographic objects that were included in each portrait. The backgrounds in each portrait also lend themselves to traditional European landscape painting of the 17th century. There is a clear foreground, middle ground, and background, which are simply there to provide a contextual understanding of space for the central figure. Eckhout's use of European conventions was key to its interpretation in the early modern world. While Mason has claimed Eckhout's work has "always attracted interest and admiration for their ethnographic accuracy rather than any intrinsic worth," it is imperative that his work also be considered for its artistic value.²³ An analysis of his work should include interpretation via the lens of ethnography and through the investigation of *disguised symbolism* as a mechanism of artistic liberty.

2. The Work of Eckhout

The portrait entitled *Tapuya Man* (Fig. 2)²⁴ is life-size oil on canvas painting, which details a nearly naked man with brown skin. Wearing a vibrantly colored feathered headdress composed of red, yellow, and blue feathers. Embedded in his cheeks are thin white wooden dowels, in his right ear he wears a plug, and below his lower lip he wears a green stone installed in a small hole.²⁵ The *Tapuya* man grasps a spear thrower or atlatl in one hand, carries four spears against his shoulder, and in his other hand holds a club of black wood.²⁶ Around his torso is a string that secures a bustle of feathers on his back. Other than the bustle, the vegetal matter that secures his diminutive genitals and the minimalistic sandals he wears on his feet, the man is completely naked. In the background of the portrait are lush flora and fauna as well as local wildlife. Next to the man's left foot is a tarantula and to his right a dead boa constrictor.²⁷

If analyzed utilizing the perspective of ethnographic portraiture and *disguised symbolism*, *Tapuya Man* conveys an illustration of a man who is a warrior holding multiple weapons. He is almost completely naked, which is made even more pronounced by the little he wears. His petite and flaccid penis suggests emasculation and a lack of virility, implying that in comparison to his European conquerors he is far inferior in his masculinity. The local flora and fauna as well as the wide expanse in the background promote an idea of utter wilderness. There is small grouping of equally brown and nude natives off in the distance to the left of the main figure, who appear to be participating in some sort of dance or ritual, perhaps suggesting a barbarous tone in the work. Violence and savageness is implied by the dead boa constrictor that lays defeated at the feet of the warrior. The portrait *Tapuya Man* represents the opposite of the European definition of a civilized individual.

In comparison, the related portrait, *Tapuya Woman* (Fig. 3)²⁸, is also depicted in *contrapposto*. Her skin is brown and she stands naked expect for a small bunch of leaves tied by a string covering her genitals and buttocks. On her back she carries a straw basket, which contains a severed foot. She holds a disconnected hand in her right hand, presumably from the same individual whose foot she carries on her back. The detached hand she holds is gruesome with its long gray fingernails and protruding bone. In her left hand she clutches a bundle of twigs close to her breast. The woman stands wearing sandals with one foot in the water and the other on the shore. Her body is sporadically covered in green patches. She wears a passive and indifferent expression as she looks out at the viewer. A large tree

looms over her and passion fruits grow from its branches. Between her feet, a wild dog licks water from the bubbling stream. An untamed rolling landscape dotted with nude indigenous men holding spears acts as her background.²⁹

When interpreted employing the concept of ethnography *and disguised symbolism*, the portrait of *Tapuya Woman* can be explained similarly to its partner portrait of the *Tapuya Man*. Here one could construe that the woman is a cannibal as she holds a severed foot and hand without any obvious signs of purpose or remorse. The untamed landscape behind her is free of settlements or signs of commerce and adds to her portrayal as uncivilized. Analogous to the portrait of the *Tapuya Man*, her nakedness is accentuated by her lack of apparel. The wild dog lapping water at her feet further underscores the savagery, and by coexisting in the same rugged landscape as a wild dog, the woman's animalistic tendencies are also highlighted.³⁰ The green patches that smatter across her skin seem to emphasize her connection to the native and feral vegetation that surrounds her; she too is part of nature, so much that she blends in.

Another set of works painted by Eckhout for the palace of Governor Maurits are two portraits entitled *Tupinamba Man* and *Tupinamba Woman*. When compared to those of *Tapuya*, these portraits convey a picture of civilized society and refinement. The portrait entitled *Tupinamba Man* (Fig. 4)³¹ presents a man who, like the *Tapuya*, stands in *contrapposto*. He has brown skin similar to the skin tone of the images of the *Tapuya*, however, he wears short white European pants made of cloth. Tucked into his waistband is a knife with a wooden handle. He holds a bow and arrows and faces the viewer directly.³² In the background is a long and lazy river in which people are bathing themselves and washing their clothing, and across the river are outlines of houses. During the time, Europeans regarded bathing and laundering to be a civilized practice that promoted self-respect and cleanliness. By including an image of natives bathing in the background, Eckhout suggests that the *Tupinamba* people were far more cultured than their *Tapuya* counterparts. Similar to the depictions of the *Tapuya*, vegetation is present, but presented in a controlled and maintained manner. A manioc, a root vegetable native to the New World, lays on the ground cut in half, and to the man's right is a land crab.³³ The restricted vegetation and chopped vegetable suggest discipline and a taming of wildlife.

The complementary portrait of the *Tupinamba Woman* (Fig. 5)³⁴ likewise advocates that the *Tupinamba* people were far superior to the *Tapuya* people in terms of their acculturation of European customs and values. The portrait features a woman wearing a skirt made of white European cloth tied at the hip. She holds a basket atop her head that contains vegetation and native gourd and her hip she holds an infant. The woman faces the viewer directly and to her right is a banana tree bearing fruit. On the ground is a toad native to Brazil.³⁵ She does not wear any jewelry or body paint and her only ornamentation is the red and white ribbons that wind around her two braids. The background of the portrait features a plantation with organized straight rows of crops with a house in the distance, implying colonization and standardized food production, an element of a productive and sophisticated society.³⁶ At the far end of the row of crops, the plantation house looms over the fields, and on the balcony stands the European owners of the plantation surveying the field workers. All these elements combined suggest a passive, civilized indigenous woman who is in the process of being assimilated into European society.

After extensive research, art historian Rebecca Parker Brienen has come to the conclusion that, when read ethnographically, the portraits created by Eckhout explain the Dutch understanding of and opinions on indigenous peoples they encountered. She argues that the correct names for the indigenous peoples depicted in Eckhout's portraits are "Tapuya" and "Brasilianen." While the *Tapuyas* were a specific indigenous group of coastal Brazil, "Tupinamba" was a term used by the Dutch to describe multiple indigenous tribes that accepted their control and influence. Brienen suggests that *Brasilianen* is a better-suited term for the indigenous groups that did not succumb to Dutch rule as it encompasses all groups of Brazilian indigenous peoples rather than just one.³⁷ This difference between the submission of the *Brasilianen* and rejection by the *Tapuya* of Dutch colonial rule are prominently displayed in Eckhout's portraits of the *Tapuya* and *Tupinamba*. While the portraits of the *Brasilianen* describe an advanced and civilized society in which people wear clothing and cultivate food in an organized manner, the portraits of the *Tapuya* demonstrate a society that is savage and uncultured that was cannibalistic and frequently naked.³⁸

Eckhout not only created images of the indigenous population of Brazil, but also of the Africans that inhabited the coast. During the seventeenth century as race began to become defined by physiognomy and ethnicity, European colonizers were increasingly interested in taxonomic divisions between different ethnic groups and how these taxonomies were affected when two parents of different ethnicities produced a child. The main non-European ethnic groups that were recognized in Dutch Brazil were the *Brasilian*, *Tapuya*, African, *Mulatto*, and *Mameluco*. As a result, these groups are detailed in Eckhout's portraits as they represented the Dutch colonial government's formal stance on racial division in the colony.³⁹ Collectively, if Eckhout's four pairs of portraits were to be analyzed using the same frameworks and tools of visual analysis, the images of the African man and woman, *Mulatto* man, and *Mameluca* woman, would prove to be the most multi-faceted and convoluted to interpret. The images of the *Brasilianen* and *Tapuya* men and women are evidently paired portraits, with counterparts that are equal to one another. While the *Brasilianen* and *Tapuya* portraits are complimentary by their similar dress, level of civility, background, and inclusion

of vegetation, the portraits of the Africans and the *Mulatto* and *Mameluca* are complimentary because they not only represent the physical and material holdings of the colony but the relationship between Dutch settlers and the Africans and indigenous groups of Brazil.

Eckhout's *African Man* (Fig. 6)⁴⁰ portrait is similar to the other images in the series and features a single figure that stands in *contrapposto* and looks directly at the viewer. The figure stands tall, a hand on one hip, holding a spear in the other. The man's chest, leg, and arm muscles are clearly defined, and he is clothed in a blue and white-checked fabric that winds around his waist and covers his pronounced genitals, acting as loincloth. His chest and feet are bare. Several more arrows are tucked into his loincloth and lay across his back, while tucked into the front is a large curved sword with an elaborately decorated hilt. The sword is adorned with a red shell at the base of the hilt and two jeweled orbs along the hilt. At the end of the hilt is a jeweled orb that fans out with a tuft red fiber. His hair is rendered in a similar fashion to that of his Dutch contemporaries, as it falls in soft curls to the sides of his face. He stands on a sandy shoreline that is scattered with shells and framed by a date palm tree. The background of the image is accentuated by the large expanse of a blue sky dotted with clouds that meets the vast ocean in the bottom third of the painting. Growing in front of the date palm is beach grass and vines with pink flowers that extend across the cramped shoreline that the man stands on. In addition, directly in front of the tree are the remnants of an elephant tusk, which coincidentally incorporates the signature of the artist.⁴¹

Correspondingly, Eckhout's portrait of an *African Woman and Child* (Fig. 7)⁴² stages two figures. The work contains both a female adult figure and boy, presumably her son. Both figures look out at the viewer and stand in *contrapposto*, with opposite feet stepping forward to assist in balancing the image. The woman looks out as the viewer as she protectively places a hand atop her son's head and holds a decorative woven basket of fruit and flowers in the other. Atop her head is an elaborate hourglass shaped hat with a wide brim of peacock feathers. Similar to the woven basket in her hand, her hat is comprised of woven strands of vegetal matter that are colored yellow, black, and red. Her full breasts are exposed while her body's lower half is covered by a skirt made of blue and white-checked cloth that is knotted at her waist and held by a belt fashioned from red fabric with fringes at the ends. A Dutch clay pipe is tucked into her waistband and sits directly below her breasts. In contrast to her bare feet, her arms and neck are adorned with jewels. She wears two contrasting necklaces, one composed of a strand small red beads and the other comprising of two strands of modest pearls with a larger drop-shaped pearl at the center. She also wears a wide gold toned bracelet on one wrist and on the other a bracelet made of several strands of similarly gold spherical beads. To complete her jewelry adornment, the woman dons earrings formed of drop pearls tied by red bows.

Her son, on the other hand, is nude except for small hooped earrings and a necklace of multiple strands of black circular beads. The boy's hands are occupied like his mother's, as a colorful lovebird perches on one hand and in the other he clutches a half-shucked ear of corn. Analogously to the *African Man* portrait, a large tree dominates one side of the portrait, in this image, a wax palm. Comparable to the *African Man* portrait, the *African Woman and Child* image is set on a sandy shoreline. While both images feature a large skyline that meets the ocean, there are few details that are included in the *African Woman and Child* image that differ from its male companion portrait. Instead of an empty ocean in the background, the African female figure stands in front of an extended shoreline that leads to a beach that is freckled with *Brasilianens* fishing. The *Brasilianens* are wearing the same white cloth that was featured in the portraits of both the *Tupinamba Man* and *Tupinamba Woman* portraits. Just beyond the *Brasilian* fishing, the horizon line holds several European ships.⁴³

According to scholar Rebecca Parker Brien, the African man is standing on an African coastline because the date palm in the image is native to Africa, while the wax palm included in the *African Woman and Child* portrait originates from Brazil.⁴⁴ She further suggests that the elephant tusk that lies near his feet is a potential allusion to Africa, home continent of elephants, whereas the *African Woman and Child* portrait is set on the Brazilian coastline. Keeping with Brien's assertions, the *African Man* image is designed to represent the alliance between African nobles and traders and the Dutch--as the decorative sword the African man carries is Akan from the Gold Coast of Guinea.

Brien refers to a text written by Dutch explorer, Pieter de Marees's who recorded his travels in his 1602 text entitled *Description of the gold coast of Guinea*. In his travel logs, de Marees discusses African customs, religions, and social classes, and also includes illustrations. He specifically writes about and illustrates the interaction of the African traders and the Dutch and specifically notes the use of "a large sword with a 'fish' skin scabbard decorated by a large red shell."⁴⁵ If the *African Man* portrait was designed to represent the alliance between the Dutch and Africa in regards to trade, Brien suggests that the *African Woman and Child* image can be understood to represent European sentimentality of fecundity and sexuality present in Africans.

Utilizing both the lens of ethnography and *disguised symbolism*, the *African Woman and Child* hosts a variety of interpretations. She is clearly not enslaved as she wears no shackles or other forms of restraint. Instead she stands tall, regal even, wearing an elaborate hat and jewelry. Following Brien's suggestion, Mason claims the figure's "erotic power is explicitly accentuated" and that "her frontal gaze offers to her to the eye of the beholder."⁴⁶ Her "erotic

power” is suggested by her full breasts, which are highlighted by her jewelry and the clay pipe tucked in her skirt that rests just under her left breast. Additionally, her short skirt implies “an erotic invitation” which confirms the child standing before her as a result of her fecundity and promiscuity.⁴⁷ Even her young son contributes to the suggestiveness of her character as he holds a vibrant red-faced lovebird denoting the feelings of lust and exoticism that Europeans regarded Africans with. Furthermore, the boy holds a shucked ear of corn pointing up his mother’s skirt, an obviously blatant phallic image.

Brienen’s theory and analysis of the *African Man* and *African Woman and Child* portraits has yet to be challenged by other art historians, while much of her interpretation is supported by images created by other colonial era artists. She cites a variety of primary sources ranging from journals, etchings, diagrams, and written accounts by contemporaries of Eckhout. It should be noted that much of Brienen’s visual analysis is supported by an iconography that developed around the depiction of Africans during the colonial era.⁴⁸ In her examination of the eight portraits as a complete set, Brienen often describes the works in conjunction with each other in terms of the cultural and racial group they are representing, however she does not compare and contrast them within their individual pairs. When comparing the portraits of the *African Man* and *African Woman and Child*, there is still much to be extrapolated.

If, in fact, the portraits were designed to be hung side by side with their gendered counterpart, as hypothesized by Brienen, the shoreline depicted in the two works is highly intriguing.⁴⁹ If the two images were lined up right next to each other, the shoreline would be consistent between both works, creating a continuation of the shoreline. The two trees depicted in the works, while different species, are rendered on opposite sides, thus framing the two works and aiding a potentially continued shoreline. It is important to note that the same rounded green leaves and pink bell-shaped flowers appear in both portraits, as well as a similar grey and cloudy sky that meets a dark blue ocean. These similarities suggest that perhaps the two figures are not located on two different continents, but maybe perhaps one shoreline. The continuity of the shoreline, similar lighting of the scene, and comparable vegetation present, encourage the theory that the two portraits were designed to be interpreted as a pair.

In keeping with the iconography of Africans developed in the seventeenth century, it could be ascertained that the two works are employing already determined representations of Africans and could be the result of a hybridity of visual information. This hybridity could in turn render two scenes that feature an array of vegetation, clothing, and material objects, which do not ground the scene in a particular location, but rather a space that is ambiguous. The image of the *African Man* and the *African Woman and Child* are already an anomaly when compared to the portraits of the *Tupinamba* and the *Tapuya*. While the portraits of the *Tupinamba* and the *Tapuya* are very similar in their backgrounds, clothing styles, and evidence of savagery, the portraits of the African are uncertain. It is not clear that if the African figures are slaves, as they are not depicted in a submissive stance, but instead look directly out at the viewer. Perhaps their role in the colony was multi-faceted; while the majority was enslaved, there were ambassadors and traders that interacted with the court. In turn their hybrid roles in the colony could very well be depicted in the portraits through their ambiguous setting.

Mason’s definition of ethnography is extremely applicable when analyzing Eckhout’s African portraits. The use of ethnographic artifacts clearly grounds the image with specific information for the viewer to deduce. The artifacts are so specific that they have been cited in different texts of the period thus firmly rooting their ethnographic cause.⁵⁰ By including specific cultural artifacts such as an Akan sword decorated with a red shell, Eckhout firmly implies that the *African Man* portrait features a trader with access to variety of luxurious goods. Ethnographic artifacts surrounding the *African Woman and Child* portrait include both European, African, and American made objects. While the clay pipe tucked into her waistband is distinctly Dutch, the basket she holds details a pattern unique to Africa, which simultaneously carries fruits native to Brazil. Through the inclusion of these ethnographic elements her connection to the Dutch, Africa, and Brazil are all present. She is representative of the three different spaces, all of which Africans were a part of during this period. Africans were enslaved by the Dutch, working alongside the *Brasilianen* in the plantation fields, and also acting as ambassadors of Africa and interacting in the trade market. Her hybrid role encompasses the economic relationship between the Dutch Brazilian colony and Africa.⁵¹ This hybridization is also representative in Eckhout’s portraits of *Mulatto Man* (Fig. 8)⁵² and *Mameluca* (Fig. 9).⁵³

Referred to as a “dusky Brazilian Flora” by scholars Whitehead and Boesman, the *Mameluca* portrait features a female figure that is of both European and *Brasilianen* descent.⁵⁴ The ethnographic artifacts included in her portrait emphasize her racial hybridization. *Mameluca* is a unique term to Brazil and was implemented by the Portuguese in the seventeenth century to refer specifically to the offspring of European and indigenous coupling.⁵⁵ While Eckhout’s images of racial hybrids are precursors to the established *casta* paintings of late seventeenth century Colonial Mexico, their interest on racial classification is still evident. During the seventeenth century, women of mixed race living in European colonies in Africa and South America were regarded as highly sexually desirable because of their unique racial makeup. These mixed race females were not considered fully European and therefore were included in the exotic sexual appeal of Africans and indigenous women.⁵⁶

The *Mameluca* detailed in Eckhout's portrait stands confidently and looks out directly at a viewer with a small smile. She wears a billowing white gown, which she lifts provocatively to reveal her ankle. The plunging neckline of her gown also suggests her promiscuity. A basket of wildflowers spill out of woven basket, which she holds casually as if to offer them to the viewer. The vegetation present in the portrait include a fully bloomed birds of paradise framed by a cashew tree dripping with fresh cashews. A cluster of guinea pigs sit near her feet and in the background the gentle rolling hills of northeast Brazil are manicured and divided plantation fields. She is also decorated with gold beaded bracelets, a matching necklace and earring set made of gems, and a small green hat decorated with pearls and a sprig of orange tree blossoms.⁵⁷ Her jewelry and clothing are European while her background is recognizably Brazilian. The overflowing basket of flowers, fully bloomed birds of paradise and cashew tree all point towards fertility and growth, which in turn further suggests her eroticism. Whitehead and Boseman's label of a "dusky Brazilian Flora" is fitting as Flora was the Roman goddess of spring and often associated with fertility. Eckhout's inclusion of guinea pigs is also telling of the *Mameluca*'s sensual representation considering in the journals of Marcgraf and Governor Maurits the description and illustrations of guinea pigs are labeled as rabbits.⁵⁸ Furthermore, rabbits are often connoted with springtime and reproduction as they quickly reproduce, thus the inclusion of guinea pigs in the portraits even further highlight the sexual appeal of the *Mameluca* in European eyes.

While Eckhout's *Mameluca* portrait accentuates the desirability of a woman of mixed European and indigenous descent, the portrait *Mulatto Man* focuses on the economic connection between the Dutch and the African slaves that inhabited the colony. Unlike *Mameluca*, *Mulatto* was not a distinct term used solely in Brazil. *Mulatto* was also used in Spanish and Portuguese colonies to refer to individuals that were offspring of an enslaved African mother and European father.⁵⁹ A *Mulatto* was considered to also be enslaved unless their European father purchased their freedom.⁶⁰

In Eckhout's depiction of a *Mulatto*, he chooses to use a male figure to be the counterpart to the other racial hybridization existing in the colony, the *Mameluca*. The *Mulatto* man wears a long sleeve shirt and skirt made of a similar white fabric that both the *Brasilianen* figures wear in their respective portraits.⁶¹ Over his shirt, the man wears a brown and black doublet and slung across his shoulder is jaguar skin holder for his rapier. He also holds a Portuguese made gun and his rapier is identified as sixteenth century Dutch.⁶² Both *Mulattos* and Africans slaves were allowed to be soldiers in the Dutch West India Company army and would have been issued weaponry. Furthermore, the facial hair of the man depicted in the image is reminiscent of the facial hair wore by Dutch soldiers of the period. If the *Mulatto Man* portrait is representative of the military involvement of Africans and *Mulattos* in the colony, the background of the image also suggests another aspect of their impact and interaction with the colony. Behind the man is a crop of sugar cane, which was a main export of the colony, and what the enslaved Africans spent their time harvesting. Following the economic theme, there are also European ships dotting the horizon line of the image. The European ships could very well be carrying more Africans slaves to the colony, the other major export besides sugar cane. The *Mulatto Man* portrait represents the economic impact that slaves had on the colony and illustrated the result of European and African coupling, while the *Mameluca* portrait described the desirability and promiscuity of mixed race women in the colony.

3. Conclusion

Eckhout's portraits of the inhabitants of Dutch Brazil detail an unparalleled view of the populace of the New World. While maintaining European portraiture conventions, Eckhout seamlessly incorporated ethnographic artifacts and *disguised symbolism* to create an image of the exotic, strange, and "other" that was still familiar. A European viewer of his work during the mid-seventeenth century would have been able to recognize the standards of portraiture utilized and able to identify the elements that were distinctly exotic and representative of the New World. His work was designed to be large scale, impressive, and telling of Governor Maurits's successful rule. These eight portraits were intended to reflect the newfound constituents of Governor Maurits's colony and reflect his social and economic holdings. Their size and use of expensive materials is also telling of his artistic patronage. They were decorative and informational images that equaled the elegance and prestige of paintings displayed in the palaces of kings in Europe. When Eckhout and Post returned to the Netherlands in 1644, the paintings they had created during their stay also returned with them.

Maurits' return to Europe in 1644 was met with great excitement. He brought back with him a variety of artifacts, artistic works, and even indigenous *Brasilianens*. Maurits's collection is unique because it did not remain in one collective space, such as a *Kunstkammer*, but rather was spread across Europe as social and cultural capital. Soon after his return to the Netherlands Maurits moved into his new palace in The Hague and began to host courtly functions where he would show off the objects he had ascertained in Brazil. His collection encompassed artifacts his crew had

collected as well as objects gained as a result of trade with the indigenous and African ambassadors to the colony. The collection reflected his success as a leader in Brazil and his ability to form alliances. Once back in Europe, his collection entered the culture of the gift-giving elite.⁶³

Beginning in 1652 Maurits began to give large portions of his Brazilian collection to members of the European aristocracy in exchange for acknowledgement, power and prestige. He first gifted paintings, ivory furniture with Brazilian motifs, and over seven hundred drawings and oil studies to Friederich Wilhelm I, the Elector of Brandenburg. Concerning the fate of Eckhout's ethnographic portraits, King Frederick III of Denmark received all eight ethnographic portraits in addition to twenty-two other paintings in 1654. Perhaps not coincidentally, the Dutch also lost their holdings in Brazil in 1654 to the Portuguese. Finally, in 1678 Maurits gave twenty-seven Post paintings, twenty of which had been created in Brazil, to King Louis XIV of France. Maurits's gifts to these great leaders find themselves as part of the great cultural capital exchange that began in Europe during the colonial period. His gifts to these leaders ensured his social standing and also aided in disseminating information about Dutch Brazil to other European countries. Shortly before his death in 1679, Maurits composed a letter to a Danish ambassador in regards to the paintings by Eckhout that he had given to King Frederick III of Denmark. In his letter Maurits requested that the paintings be returned to him. Even on his deathbed, Maurits wanted to be reminded of his cultural and social profits from Brazil.⁶⁴ The work of Albert Eckhout and its function as cultural capital is paramount in understanding the value of intercontinental travel and trade during the early modern period.

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5. Endnotes

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