

Press release

The Hague, 7 September 2017

New exhibition examines the lives of African servants at The Hague court

In the new exhibition *African servants at The Hague court*, from 21 September 2017 to 28 January 2018, the Historical Museum of The Hague tells the life stories of Willem Frederik Cupido, Guan Anthony Sideron and other African servants who, in slavery, were offered as presents to European courts during the eighteenth century. The exhibition highlights an aspect of Dutch history that so far has remained relatively unknown. Whereas exhibitions about courtly life often overlook servants, and especially those with a non-European background, The Historical Museum of The Hague is now specifically focusing on them.

The main impetus for the exhibition is a painting in the museum's collection, made by Hendrik Pothoven in 1781. It shows Stadtholder William V and his retinue, including the servants Cupido and Sideron, who were approximately seven years old when they arrived in The Hague from Guinea and Curaçao. Young boys without family, far from their homelands and entirely at the mercy of adult strangers. Who were these boys? What were their lives at court like? And were they treated as slaves, or as free employees?

The exhibition examines the life stories of Cupido, Sideron and other servants of African descent, in light of changing views about skin colour and slave uprisings in the colonies. Top works in the exhibition include the bust of an African servant from the British Royal Collection and the installation that Curaçao-born artist Tirzo Martha (born 1965) created exclusively for this exhibition. The exhibition concludes with a surprising perspective: using Cupido's family tree, the museum went in search of his Dutch descendants to the present day. Who are they, and what do they think about the story of their distant ancestor?

Cooperation and activities

The museum consulted with various organisations in the making of the exhibition, including partners from the Cultural Heritage Network of Migrant Organisations in The Hague, NiNSee and the Pasado Presente foundation. Art historian and guest curator Esther Schreuder researched the lives of Cupido and Sideron. The exhibition is based on this study. Accompanying the exhibition, Schreuder's book about their lives will appear, *Twee Moeren aan het hof van Oranje* (Uitgeverij Balans, 2017).

During TALKS and lectures this autumn, a bridge will be built between the exhibition and present-day discussions on the history of slavery, white privilege and racism. On Saturday, 23 September, the museum will host the free event 'Traces of Africa in The Hague', featuring music, dance, storytellers and more.

The exhibition and activities are made possible by:

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Note for the editors: The press preview of African Servants at The Hague Court and the book presentation for Cupido en Sideron. Twee Moeren aan het hof van Oranje will be held on Wednesday, 20 September from 10:00 to 11:30, in the Historical Museum of The Hague. Director Marco van Baalen, guest curator Esther Schreuder and artist Tirzo Martha will be present. We look forward to seeing you and kindly ask that you confirm your attendance by 18 September at the latest via pr@haagshistorischmuseum.nl or +31 (0)70 312 3066 (Romy Meijer). Press images can be found at haagshistorischmuseum.nl/persbeelden.