

The “Dutch” “Atlantic” and the Dubious Case of Frans Post

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I From Dutch Atlantic to European Exoticism

Did Frans Post paint Dutch Brazil? In 1879 – exactly 200 years after the death of Johan Maurits “the Brazilian” (1604–1679), the famously admired governor of the Dutch colony during its heyday who brought Post to Brazil as part of his princely entourage – the Rijksmuseum wagered its money brashly on the affirmative. In that year it acquired no fewer than three paintings by the artist, among the first to enter the permanent collections of the newly installed national museum, which arose in its current form a few years later in 1885 (another Post painting would be purchased in 1881 and two more before the close of the century).¹ In one of these early acquisitions, the *View of Itamaracá* (Figure 10.1), the director of the museum at that time, Johan Wilhelm Kaiser, perceived in the central figure on horseback none other than Governor Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen garbed in his “Brazilian costume.” Another painting represented “a house of a Dutch colonist in Brazil,” the proud owners strolling toward the portico-shaded entrance of their substantial New World home (Figure 10.2). And so it goes: the paintings told the story through pictures, like the *Itamaracá* canvas and the others, of the Dutch colonial presence in South America and the Netherlands’ prosperous empire in the Atlantic World.²

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- 1 The three paintings are *View of Itamaracá* (1637), *Franciscan Convent* (ca. 1675–80), and *Riverside Village* (ca. 1675–1680). The well known *View of Olinda* (1662), to this day a star attraction at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, entered the collection (by purchase) in 1881. See Pedro Corrêa do Lago and Bia Corrêa do Lago, *Frans Post, 1612–1680: Catalogue Raisonné* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2007) [henceforth Corrêa do Lago, *Post*], cat. 1, 153–154; and cf. cat. 52 (the *View of Olinda*). On the place of Post in the Rijksmuseum’s collections, see Rebecca Parker Brienen, “Who Owns Frans Post? Collecting Frans Post’s Brazilian Landscapes,” in *The Legacy of Dutch Brazil: The Long-Term Impact of a Short-Lived Atlantic Colony*, ed. Michiel van Groesen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 229–247. Note that a national (“rijks”) museum existed in the Netherlands in some form from the very late eighteenth century, yet the permanent and grand shape of the current Rijksmuseum came to be when the building that presently houses it opened to much acclaim in 1885.
 - 2 Kaiser to the Minister of Binnenlandse Zaken, quoted in Brienen, “Who Owns Frans Post?” The title of the late panel painting (Figure 10.2) has been updated in some recent



FIGURE 10.1 *Frans Post, View of Itamaracá, 1637, oil on canvas (63.5 × 89.5 cm), Rijksmuseum (object no. SK-A-4271), Amsterdam (on long-term loan to the Mauritshuis, The Hague).*



FIGURE 10.2 *Frans Post, Franciscan Convent, circa 1675–80, oil on panel (16.5 × 25 cm), Rijksmuseum (object no. SK-A-4273), Amsterdam.*