The year was 1641 and the place was Mauritsstad, a tropical island city that now forms part of modern Recife on the northeastern coast of Brazil. Mauritsstad was the new capital of Dutch Brazil, created by its governor, German count Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, a commander in the Dutch army and cousin of Frederik Hendrik, the Dutch stadhouder and prince of Orange. Johan Maurits’ role as governor was to secure and expand the new colony, which was intended to be a base of operations for the Dutch West India Company’s (WIC) trade in sugar. It was hoped that the WIC’s profits from the sugar produced in her Brazilian colony would equal or even rival those of her sister company, the Dutch East India Company (VOC), whose Asian empire brought both wealth and prestige. The ships of the WIC were directed to engage in commerce, colonization, and conquest in the Americas and Africa, and if these activities were detrimental to Iberian interests, so much the better. As such, the Company played a role in the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648).

When Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen arrived in Brazil in January of 1637, he had, nonetheless, more than commercial or military interests in mind. The Count had ambitious plans for his governorship in Brazil and immediately began to construct a princely New World empire for himself. He undertook large-scale landscaping and architectural projects and gathered young and talented scientists and artists at his court. The most prominent members of this group were the Dutch painters Albert Eckhout (ca.1610-ca. 1666) and Frans Post (1612-1680), the German natural historian Georg Marcgraf (1610-ca. 1644), and the Dutch physician Willem Piso (1611-1678). By 1641, Vrijburg, the new governor’s palace, was nearly finished and ready for interior decoration (fig. 1). Between 1641 and 1643, Eckhout painted a series of life-size figural works, which were almost certainly intended for display in this palace’s spacious central hall. These paintings did not, however, include the conventional depictions of European royalty, noble ancestors, or court beauties displayed in the aristocratic residences of the Count’s contemporaries in Europe. Tailoring his works to the South American colonial experience, Eckhout instead created a highly unusual series of eight paintings of men and women who represented the ‘wilde natien’ (literally, savage peoples) of Johan Maurits’ Brazilian empire.

These figural works, which all measure around 266 x 165 cm, represent a black man and woman (figs. 2, 3), two male and female pairs of indigenous

Americans, and a man and woman of mixed ‘racial’ background. As described by Johan Maurits and contemporaries in Brazil, the four images of Amerindians display a ‘Tapuya’ (usually identified as Tarairiu) man and woman (figs. 4, 5) and a ‘Brazilian’ (usually identified as Tupinamba) man and woman (figs. 6, 7). The ‘mixed race’ pair includes a mulatto man (in this case, the offspring of a European man and a black woman) and a mestizo woman (figs. 8, 9). This last figure can be identified as a mameluca, the offspring of a European man and a Tupinamba woman. This series of paintings is in the collection of the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, and it includes Eckhout’s only signed and dated works. Other paintings in the Nationalmuseet’s collection, including *Tapuya Dance* and twelve Brazilian still lifes, are also attributed to Eckhout. These works, along with the ethnographic portraits and the lost painting *Johan Maurits with Brazilians*, most likely formed a unified pictorial cycle for display in Vrijburg. Given Eckhout’s status as one of the first trained European painters in the New World, interpretive emphasis has long been placed on his images of Amerindians, with the result that the other figures in his ethnographic series have been relatively understudied in comparison. In particular, there has been surprisingly little