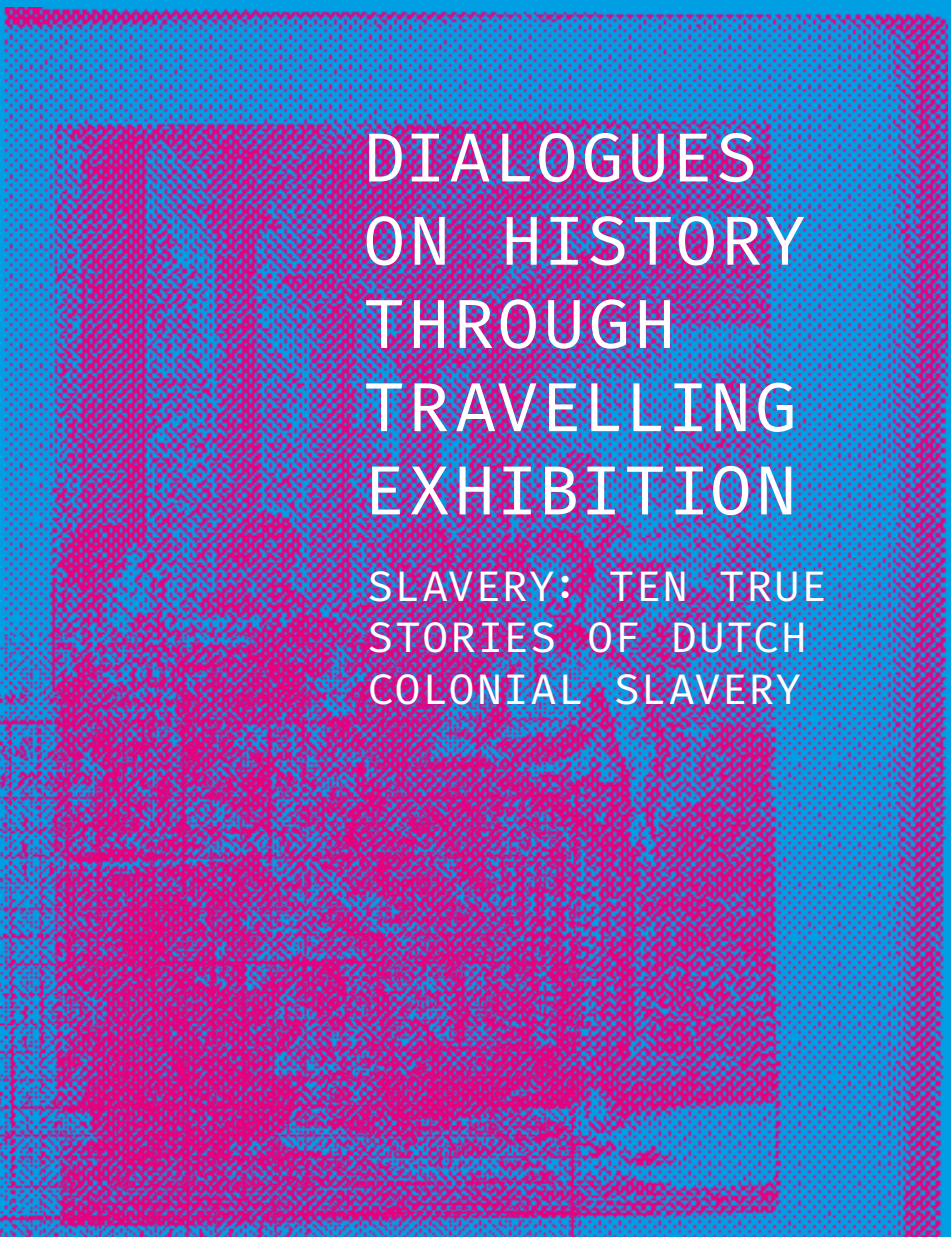
DIALOGUES ON HISTORY THROUGH TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

SLAVERY: TEN TRUE STORIES OF DUTCH COLONIAL SLAVERY



UNITED NATIONS INDONESIA

BINUS UNIVERSITY

Jury: Dewi Kumoratih, Patricia Adele, Siska Widyawati
Editor: Patricia Adele
Design: Patricia Adele & Reihan Riansyah
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CONTENTS

DIRK VAN HOGENDORP

TOWARDS THE TOP 9

DIRK 11

DIALOGUES ON HISTORY THROUGH TRAVELLING EXHIBITION—SLAVERY: DIRK 13

DIRK: BEYOND GOOD AND INTENTIONS: 15

MORAL HYPOCRISY AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF DIRK VAN HOGENDORP 17

WALLY

WALLY 21

WALLY, HI(S)TORY 23

OOPJEN

PORTRAITS OF INNOCENCE, LEDGERS OF SILENCE 27

PAULUS

PORTRAITS OF INNOCENCE, LEDGERS OF SILENCE 31

TULA

TULA: THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM 35

BEYOND THE DEFEAT: THE ENDURING IDEALS AND LEGACY OF TULA 37

JOAO

JOAO 41

UNTUNG SURAPATI

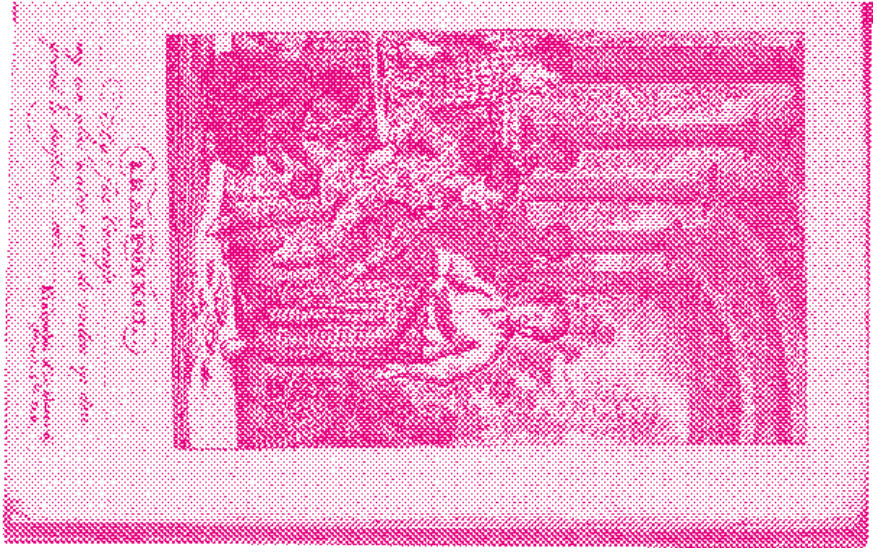
SURAPATI 45
SURAPATI 47
AESTHETIC IDEAS AND THE LEGACY OF SURAPATI 49

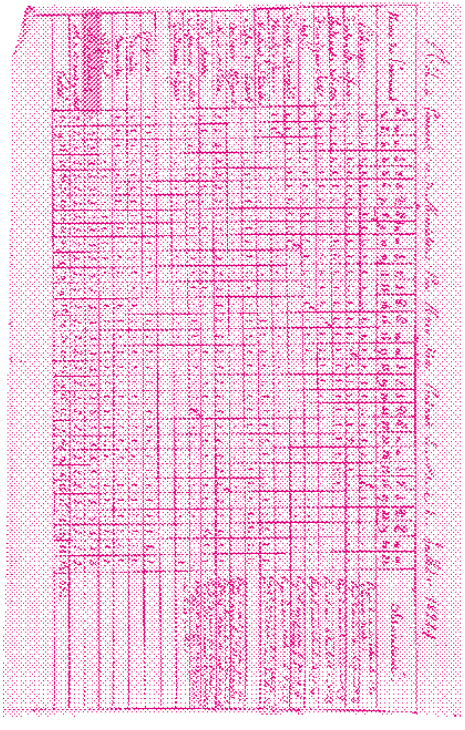
LOHKAY

LOHKAY 53
LOHKAY: THE MEANING OF FREEDOM BEYOND A PIECE OF PAPER 55
LOHKAY : THROUGH MY LENS 57

VAN BENGALEN

WHEN A NAME BECOMES A LABEL: IDENTITY, DIGNITY, AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIAL SLAVERY 63
THE BRUTALITY OF POWER AND ATROCITY 65





DIRK VAN HOGENDORP

TOWARDS THE TOP



This work presents a metaphor about struggle, ambition, and historical traces that continue to be carried from ancient times to the present. The figure climbing the pole while carrying various objects shows that there is an effort to reach the top, while also reminding us that every achievement has a burden and story that accompanies it. In the context of "Dialogues on History through Traveling Exhibition—Slavery: Ten True Stories of Dutch

Colonial Slavery", the pole and the journey upwards can be read as a critical reflection on a power relationship, who is on top, who bears the burden, and how colonial legacies shape the journey of society to this day. The open blue sky presents a space to question, remember, and look together to the future.

ABDUL AZIZ,
S.SN.,M.MED.KOM

DIRK

The first impression when I see the artwork is an admiration to Dirk van Hogendorp, but after I read the story about him I see the Contradiction in his career, someone who refuses slavery, and expecting a no conditional love from his free worker. and knowing the context behind the artwork, i find the truth behind the cash book art, the context is the Contradiction that's a proof of his using a Forced labor. and the house in the artwork is his worker house. and the story behind it is him complaining that free workers keep Ran away from him. That's his excuse for using a slave.

Hogendorp's story illustrates how European concepts of liberty often coexisted with imperial exploitation. As historian Seymour Drescher notes in Abolition, A History of Slavery and Antislavery, early European abolitionism was frequently constrained by economic self-interest and racial hierarchies. Historian Marcus Rediker explains how the colonial labor system made humans into just financial entries in cash books, showing how deep the dehumanization was.

The exhibition reveals that the top-down freedom envisioned by European reformers differed fundamentally from the true liberation actively sought by enslaved people themselves. While Hogendorp debated freedom inside the colonial profit system, the enslaved people ran away to claim their own real freedom. This show us that true freedom is never given by the colonial master,

but it is taken by the courage of the enslaved people themselves. Their struggle exposes how white reformers only want reforms that keep their power and money safe. Dirk van Hogendorp wants abolition in theory, but in reality he still needs forced labor for his plantation profit.

YOVAN WIJAYA

DIALOGUES ON HISTORY THROUGH TRAVELLING EXHIBITION—SLAVERY: DIRK

The story of Dirk van Hogendorp left me questioning what it actually means to oppose slavery. Dirk publicly argued that slavery had no place in an ideal society. Influenced by Enlightenment and French Revolutionary ideas, he even used theatre to expose the cruelty of colonial slavery. Yet the exhibition reveals a disturbing contradiction: while criticizing slavery, Dirk himself owned enslaved people in Surabaya and later purchased people for his plantation in Brazil. This raises a more difficult question: was the freedom Dirk imagined the same freedom that enslaved people were fighting for?

In Kraspoekol, Dirk describes slavery as fundamentally incompatible with human rights. His argument sounds radical for its time, and scholars have recognized the play as an important abolitionist text. Adams and van der Haven (2016) argue that the play functioned almost like a trial, inviting audiences to judge not only individual cruelty but the institution of slavery itself. However, Dirk's actions reveal the limits of his abolitionism.

What struck me most was his explanation that free workers would "run away" from him. His expectation that workers should provide unconditional loyalty and service suggests that he was not necessarily rejecting control itself; he was rejecting slavery as an institution while still expecting the obedience and labor that slavery provided. In this sense, his idea of

freedom remained centered on the perspective of the person in power.

This story made me realize that opposing injustice intellectually does not automatically mean abandoning the privileges created by that injustice. Dirk could recognize slavery as morally wrong while still benefiting from the system he condemned. Levecq (1997) identifies Dirk as one of the earliest prominent Dutch abolitionist voices concerning slavery in the East Indies, but his story demonstrates that abolitionist thought itself could contain contradictions.

Ultimately, DIRK challenges me to ask not only who speaks about freedom, but whose definition of freedom is being protected—and who is still expected to serve.

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KINZI ALIYA NUGROHO

DIRK: BEYOND GOOD AND INTENTIONS:

The story of Dirk Van Hogendorp is presented through visuals such as paintings and old documents. In my opinion, these visuals are quite unique because they do not only provide information through text, but also show a depiction of life in that era.

Dirk Van Hogendorp lived during the colonial period and was known as someone who opposed the slavery system. Based on information from the Rijksmuseum exhibition, Dirk once stated that slavery should not exist in society. He tried to use a stage adaptation of the novel Kraspoekol to introduce criticism against slavery to a broader audience. About twenty years later, he lived in Brazil and established the Novo Sion plantation, which produced coffee and oranges. However, his plantation records show that he also bought and owned enslaved people.

In my opinion, the most interesting part of Dirk's story is the discrepancy between the values he fought for and the actions he took. He opposed slavery, but when he had his own interests at stake, he used the system he had previously criticized, even complaining that free workers could leave his plantation and demanding unconditional loyalty from them. Sarah Adams's article regarding Kraspoekol explains that Dirk viewed slavery as an institutional problem and openly supported its abolition.

From Dirk's story, I learned that a person may appear to have good intentions, but not necessarily be able to apply them in daily life. Opposing injustice becomes

meaningless if a person still maintains personal profits from the same system. This story also teaches me that freedom and equality must not just be spoken words, but must also be implemented through actions. From the figure of Dirk, I learned that historical figures cannot be viewed simply as good or bad people. Someone can have progressive ideas for their time yet perform actions that contradict those ideas. This makes us need to look at history more critically and not from a single perspective.

PUSPA DEVI THAM

MORAL HYPOCRISY AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF DIRK VAN HOGENDORP

This exhibit tells the story of Dirk van Hogendorp, an abolitionist at the turn of the 18th century who opposed slavery. The panel combines bilingual text with visual archives: a painting of the Novo Sion plantation, a portrait of Dirk, a theatre adaptation of Kraspoekol, an 1822 cashbook, and the handwritten words “mes esclaves.” Dirk lived in Surabaya and worked for the VOC, where he “owned” 153 people. Inspired by the French Revolution, he declared that slavery had no place in an ideal society and could be abolished within twenty years. Two decades later, he founded a coffee and orange plantation in Brazil. His cashbook shows that he still bought people, while complaining that free workers always “ran away” from him. He expected unconditional loyalty and service from free people.

From the perspective of mimesis, the idea that art imitates or represents reality, the exhibit works as a historical mirror. The plantation painting, the formal portrait, and the cashbook page are visual imitations of a world that once existed. The cashbook is the most powerful representation precisely because it never intended to be art. It records human beings as property, even listing three people simply as “my slaves” with no names given. Dirk’s dignified portrait, with its uniform and medals, contrasts sharply with the reality the archive captures. Here, mimesis reveals that an official image of a person can differ from the truth of their actions. The theatre adaptation of Kraspoekol is also an imitation of colonial reality, the cruelty of a slaveholder in Batavia, packaged as entertainment.

From the perspective of expression, art as the communication of its maker’s ideas and emotions, there

are two layers. The first is Dirk's own expression. He adapted his father's novella for the stage to voice the anti-slavery idealism he believed in, even though his ideas found little support. The second is the curators' expression. The question on the panel, "Is the freedom Dirk wrote about the same as what enslaved people were fighting for?", clearly conveys a critical stance. By placing idealistic rhetoric next to records of buying people, the exhibit makes visitors feel irony and discomfort. It does not merely deliver facts; it invites us to feel the gap between words and actions.

In my opinion, Dirk's story is an important lesson about moral hypocrisy. He spoke of freedom, but it was freedom understood from the standpoint of those in power. For him, free people leaving his plantation were a problem rather than proof that freedom was real. This shows that voicing good values does not automatically mean understanding or practicing them. I also see its relevance today. Many people and institutions claim to care about justice while continuing to profit from unequal systems. What I find most interesting is that the exhibit does not reduce Dirk to a simple villain. He is shown as a contradictory human being, which invites us to reflect on ourselves rather than only judge him. The key question remains: freedom according to whom, and for whom? In conclusion, the exhibit succeeds in combining representation and expression. Through its archives, it imitates historical reality. Through its arrangement and its guiding question, it expresses a critical attitude toward that history. The result is an experience that makes visitors rethink what freedom really means.

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SAFINA FARANISSA

WALLY

WALLY

On September 30, 2026, I visited an exhibition dedicated to the history of slavery. There were more than 10 historical accounts of slavery, and I ultimately became intrigued by Wally's story.

Wally's story is filled with endless torture, including forced labor by Jonas Witsen. What impressed me was how Wally persisted in fighting against an unfair system despite living in extremely limited conditions. The images and artifacts provided a more tangible understanding of the lives of those involved in this historical event.

As I read and delved into Wally, I discovered he was exploited for planting, harvesting, and processing sugarcane without pause.

Not only him, other workers as
well, leaving them without a single chance of freedom. This story is intertwined with colonialism, where Jonas Witsen used his upper-class status to control his slaves, forcing them to perform forced labor for greater profits. This is in stark contrast to human rights and social justice, which should have given Wally and other workers the
right to speak out and fight for their dignity.

After delving deeper, I realized that his story embodies extraordinary mental resilience, and how he and the other workers came together through a sense of shared destiny. This story remains relevant

today, as modern slavery
persists, such as on fishing boats, where workers are forced to work from dusk until dawn and are threatened with low wages and physical punishment if targets are not met.

Wally's story holds many key lessons, including respecting human dignity
regardless of social or economic background, and demonstrating Wally's courage in resisting injustice despite his lack of power. This story must be shared and studied widely to prevent exploitation from recurring. Furthermore, we can also understand the lives of the people behind these historical events.

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JOFEA FERRENA

WALLY, HI(S)TORY

The story of Wally centers on the theme of slavery. It recounts the tale of a man named Wally, a slave working on a plantation in Suriname during the 18th century. He labored under harsh regulations that along with 155 other slaves forced him to work an extra day. Eventually, Wally and a group of fellow slaves fled into the jungle. They were subsequently subjected to a slow and agonizing execution; Wally's head and those of his supporters were impaled on spikes in the town as a warning to other slaves.

During the era of Dutch colonialism, Suriname was a region where plantation slavery took place. Enslaved people were forced to cultivate crops such as sugar and coffee, with the resulting profits reaped solely by the plantation owners. This system was part of a Dutch colonial regime that persisted for centuries. Wally was one of the individuals enslaved during that period; his story illustrates the relationship between European colonial power and the lives of the enslaved.

Wally's story is featured as one of the works in the "Slavery" exhibition. This piece illuminates the human experience within the system of colonial slavery. Through Wally's story, the history of slavery can be understood from the perspective of an individual who was actually enslaved. This work allows us to witness a history and a human experience that are often overlooked in
historical records.

Through Wally's work, we gain insight into the lives

of enslaved people during the Dutch colonial era. We are presented with a depiction of the setting, the tools employed, and the activities engaged in by both the enslaved individuals and Wally himself during that period. In my view, Wally's work effectively conveys its subject matter and leaves a lasting impression; it
enables us to understand the realities of that time, even though the painting is a form of mimesis a representation of reality created by the artist.

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FRITZ MORADO IMMANUEL
NAINGGOLAN

OOPJEN

PORTRAITS OF INNOCENCE, LEDGERS OF SILENCE

Rembrandt's 1634 portraits of Oopjen Coppit and Marten Soolmans radiate refinement: black silk, white lace, quiet confidence. Their beauty is inseparable from the fortune behind it. Yet the exhibition story "Oopjen" reveals what the canvas conceals. The Soolmans family refined sugar in Amsterdam, a trade sustained by enslaved people who grew and processed cane in Brazil. Oopjen's second husband, Maerten Daey, raped an enslaved woman, Francisca, and was never tried. The question posed, what did Oopjen know, concerns less one woman's conscience than how a whole society learned not to look.

Gloria Wekker (2016) calls this Dutch self-image "white innocence": a belief in tolerance and moral distance from colonial violence, even as everyday prosperity depended on it. Oopjen's household embodies the paradox, wealth displayed as virtue while its origins stay offstage. The earthenware sugar jars and refinery engravings show that complicity was local, industrial, and employed ordinary Amsterdammers. Slavery was woven into domestic life, not confined to distant plantations.

Yet the story's most important figure is Francisca. She survives only in church council minutes written by those who recorded her abuse. Saidiya Hartman (2008) names this the problem of the archive: enslaved women appear as fragments inside documents produced by the powerful. Reading such records demands attention to silence without inventing certainty. Francisca's flight, however, is an act of agency and resistance the archive cannot erase.

The exhibition therefore asks us to read portraits against the grain. Beauty and violence share one frame, and neither can be understood without the other. To ask what Oopjen could have known is to ask what we choose to know today about the origins of our own comfort, from sugar to the global supply chains that feed and clothe us. Remembering Francisca, not only Oopjen, means refusing innocence.

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ANGGUN PUSPITA

OOPJEN

On initial inspection, Rembrandt's Portrait of Oopjen Coppit (1634) appears to be an emblem of personal success, financial luxury, and discerning Dutch sensibilities. Wrapped in billowing black silks and embellished with lace, pearls, and a fanciful ostrich feather fan, Oopjen becomes an embodiment of the 17th-century Dutch Golden Age. Nevertheless, upon closer analysis of the painting from a postcolonial perspective, more precisely that of Dutch colonial expansion in the Indonesian archipelago, this artwork takes on a whole new meaning.

The visual grandeur of the portrait of Oopjen was made possible by the direct funding from the capitalist merchants who enabled the success of the Dutch Republic. Painted during the period of rapid expansion of the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), the means needed to pay for a life-sized, full-length painting by Rembrandt could be attributed to the colonial trade networks.

The black silk, dyes, pearls, and luxury items that make up the clothing of Oopjen were not simply matters of fashion; they were a representation of the gains from the global

trading system with its epicenter at Batavia (present-day Jakarta). Although Rembrandt's chiaroscuro creates a soft light on Oopjen's serene face, it masks the grim truth behind such opulence — the exploitative monopolies on spices, forced labor, and land acquisition by the VOC in Indonesia.

Within the framework of an academic study of colonial art history, Oopjen Coppit becomes an ambivalent object of analysis. On the one hand, she embodies the apogee of European portrait painting, and on the other – remains silent evidence of the geopolitical power imbalance typical for her time. The contrast between the immaculate white lace around her face and the dark shadows enveloping her can be seen as the embodiment of historical memory. The high level of sophistication typical of Amsterdam was directly linked with the exploitation taking place thousands of miles away in the East Indies. In other words, when considering Oopjen's portrait, it is important to recognize that the masterpieces of the Dutch Golden Age should be understood not only as works of art, but also as the result of complicated historical processes. To have more visual material regarding how Rembrandt's work and wealth of the Dutch Golden Age was linked with the trading network, the following resource would be useful for viewing: The Entire History of the Dutch East India Company | VOC.

YASMIN ZAHRA PUTRI MARDHIANA

THE HIDDEN COST OF WEALTH: OOPJEN COPPIT AND DUTCH SLAVERY

Rembrandt van Rijn's Portrait of Marten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit (1634) portrays a wealthy couple whose luxurious appearance reflects their social status. However, the portrait also raises questions about the relationship between wealth and slavery. Oopjen's story reveals how prosperity in seventeenth century Dutch society was connected to colonial exploitation, even when that connection was not immediately visible.

The connection between wealth and slavery becomes clearer through the exhibition's historical objects. Marten Soolman's family was involved in sugar production, while enslaved people in Brazil grew and harvested sugar cane. The exhibition's depiction of plantation workers and its sugar processing objects illustrate different stages of this industry. Brandon and Bosma (2021) explain the importance of slavery to the Dutch economy during the eighteenth century. Together, these examples demonstrate how forced labour in the colonies supported economic activities in Europe.

The contrast between these objects and Rembrandt's portrait is particularly significant.

While the portrait emphasizes elegance and social prestige, the plantation image reveals the suffering behind the production of valuable commodities. The sugar funnels and refinery further demonstrate that slavery's economic effects extended beyond plantations. This contrast encourages viewers to question how historical representations of wealth can obscure the labour and suffering that helped sustain it.

Oopjen's second marriage adds another dimension to this issue. Her husband, Maerten Daey, had lived in Brazil and enslaved people. The exhibition's account also describes his abuse of Fransisca, an enslaved woman who later fled. Although the extent of Oopjen's knowledge remains uncertain, her story raises questions about the awareness and responsibility of people connected to slavery.

Ultimately, Oopjen's story demonstrates that historical wealth cannot be understood solely through its visible symbols. By connecting portraits, plantation scenes, and sugar processing objects, the exhibition challenges viewers to reconsider the human cost of prosperity and whose suffering has been excluded from its representation.

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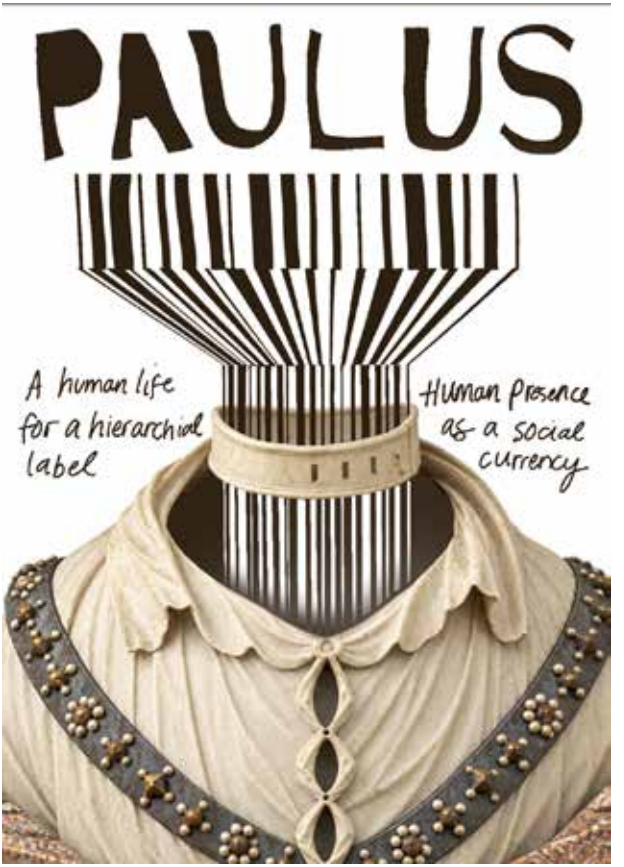
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FELICIA SALVIANA HSU

PAULUS

PAULUS (PAUL MAURICE AGULARD)



This work explores the story of Paul Maurice Agulard as a reflection on how human beings can be reduced to symbols of social status. His face is represented as

a barcode, symbolizing the objectification of individuals as commodities whose value is determined by social hierarchies. Through the subheadlines “Human Presence as a Social Currency” and “A Human Life for a Hierarchical Label,” the work critiques the European colonial perspective that positioned African-descended servants and timpani players as markers of elite prestige. The barcode becomes a metaphor for social labeling that obscures personal identity, reminding us that every human being deserves equal dignity and must never be reduced to a status symbol.

MICHELLE SURJADI

PORTRAITS OF INNOCENCE, LEDGERS OF SILENCE

This exhibition showcases visual representations of Africans in Europe, highlighting the relationship between art, colonialism, race, and power. One of the stories I like the most is the account of Paulus. The story of Paulus in the Slavery: Ten True Stories exhibition covers the history of slavery within colonial territories and Dutch social life. Paulus was an African-born youth who worked as a servant for the Nassau La Lecq family in the 17th century. Although slavery was prohibited in the Netherlands, the presence of servants continued to be utilized by the upper classes as a symbol of wealth and status. Paulus's experience demonstrates the disparity between formal law and social practice.

In its context, the story of Paulus is important because it broadens the understanding of Dutch colonialism. It illustrates exploitation not only on plantations or in colonial territories, but also how ideas of race and ownership were brought into the domestic sphere in the Netherlands. Paulus later married, started a family, and joined as a timpani player in William III's bodyguard regiment. The change of his name from "moor" to Monsieur Paul Maurice Agulard indicates a shift in identity and social status, yet the bodies of African people were still viewed through colonial prejudice.

In terms of content, the object that stands out the most to me in this story is the brass necklace bearing the Nassau coat of arms. The necklace was recorded as a dog collar when it entered the Rijksmuseum collection in 1881, but it is suspected that it may have also been worn by servants. This necklace shows how human

bodies could be treated like property or decoration. In various paintings, African servants are also depicted wearing the same necklace, demonstrating how art functions as documentation and a reinforcement of power relations.

In terms of form, the exhibition presents the necklace, paintings, sculptures, baptism and marriage documents, as well as images of Paulus as a musician. This arrangement transforms small objects into powerful historical evidence. According to Sharon Macdonald (2009), museums select and arrange objects in ways that influence how visitors understand the past. Stuart Hall (1997) notes that representation can shape how groups are understood by society. Furthermore, Simon Gikandi in Slavery and the Culture of Taste shows that European culture and aesthetic tastes developed alongside the history of slavery. Therefore, this exhibition critiques how identity, race, and power are shaped through history and inherited imagery.

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ANDREA MICHAELA DELI APRIYANTO

PORTRAITS OF INNOCENCE, LEDGERS OF SILENCE

Slavery is an inescapable part of history. This reality is reflected in the story of Paulus, a young Black man of African origin who served the Nassau La Lecq family in the Netherlands during the 17th century. Although slavery was legally prohibited in the Netherlands at the time, the elite continued to employ Black servants as status symbols. By placing enslaved individuals in a position subordinate to others, slavery was believed to enhance the honor and power of the slave owner (Harold D, 2014). This practice highlights the racism and injustice faced by Black people, who were viewed as inferior and relegated to the roles of slaves and servants.

A striking feature of this story is the brass collar that appears in every painting depicting him. Masters often placed such items on the bodies of the enslaved as a mark of ownership. The collar bore the crest of the Nassau family—the family Paulus served—suggesting it belonged to him. While initially mistaken for a dog collar, the item also aptly symbolized Paulus's position within the household: akin to a dog, he was someone's personal possession. Another oil painting, created by Cornelis Troost in 1742, depicts Paulus as a timpanist marching ahead of William III's troops. The role of the timpanist was crucial; drum signals conveyed orders, organized troop formations, and served as a means of communication on the battlefield—an environment where shouted commands could easily be drowned out by gunfire and chaos (The Dutch Archaeologist, 2026). This role elevated his status significantly, transforming him from a Black servant—often labeled a "Moor"—into a man holding the distinguished title of Monsieur Paul

Maurice Agulard. Yet, even in that painting, Paulus is still shown wearing the collar around his neck.

Even though Paulus eventually started a family and obtained a title, he was still not fully free; his status remained that of property—an object owned by another. It was truly heartbreaking,for to the very end, Paulus could not attain a sense of self-worth independent of hisstatus as a slave.

DESIANTY

TULA

TULA: THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

After learning about Tula's story through the 10 True Stories exhibition, I started thinking about what life was like for people during slavery. Something we see as normal today, such as having the freedom to make our own choices and living freely was once something that many people had to fight for. Tula's story made me realize that not everyone had the same rights or opportunities in the past. In 1795, Tula bravely led a resistance against slavery in Curaçao, a Dutch colony. Inspired by the French Revolution and the fight against slavery in Haiti, he believed that everyone deserved freedom and equality. Together with thousands of others, he stood up against the colonial system. The saddest part is that, the resistance ended with Tula being captured and executed (Rijksmuseum, 2021).

What stood out to me the most was Tula's courage to question something that was considered normal at the time. He was an enslaved person himself, which meant that speaking up against the system could cost him his life. I can only imagine how difficult it must have been to choose between accepting his situation and fighting for something he believed was right. His story also made me realize that injustice still exists today. Although slavery has been abolished, discrimination, racism, and inequality are still problems in today's society. Sometimes, people choose to stay silent when they see others being treated unfairly because they feel it is not their problem and they weren't affected by that issue.

From Tula's story, I learned that change cannot happen if everyone simply accepts injustice. To me, Tula was more than just someone who led a rebellion. He was a person who stood up for what he believed in, even when the consequences were serious. His story reminds me that freedom and equality should never be privileges, but basic rights that everyone deserves.

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MUHAMMAD AL FARREL SOFYAN

BEYOND THE DEFEAT: THE ENDURING IDEALS AND LEGACY OF TULA

The exhibition's story of Tula highlights how the struggle for freedom can challenge an entire system of oppression. In 1795, Tula led an uprising of enslaved people in Curaçao against Dutch colonial rule. Inspired by revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality, he believed that enslaved people deserved the same rights as everyone else. Although the rebellion was defeated, his actions became an important symbol of resistance.

What I find most meaningful about Tula's story is that he fought for basic human rights that should never have been denied. According to Gert Oostindie (2011), the uprising was influenced by the Haitian Revolution and formed part of a wider period of resistance across the Caribbean. This shows that ideas of freedom could cross borders and inspire people living under similar conditions. Tula's story also reveals the hypocrisy of colonial societies that promoted liberty while continuing to benefit from slavery.

The exhibition's use of historical objects, including a drum associated with tambú music, also raises questions about cultural identity. Music was not simply entertainment; it could help people communicate, preserve traditions, and maintain connections within enslaved communities. These cultural practices demonstrate that resistance did not only happen through physical conflict but also through the preservation of identity and shared experiences.

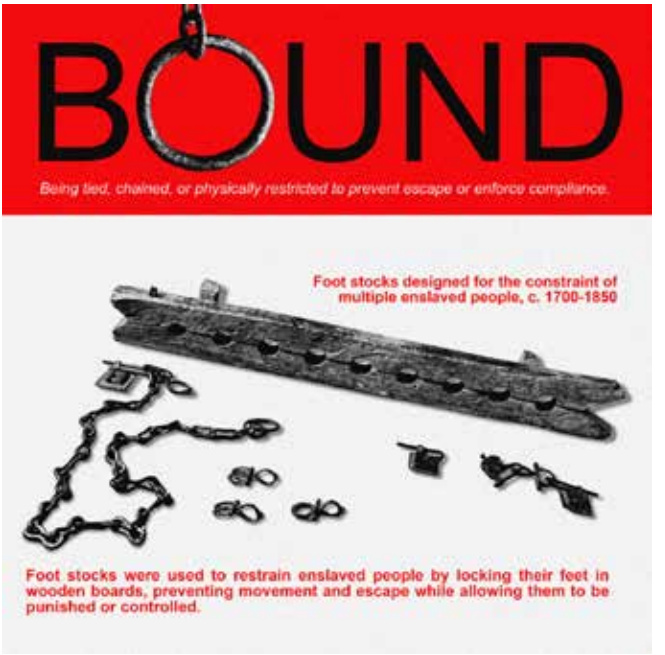
Karwan Fatah-Black (2013) further explains that the revolt took place amid political instability and competing revolutionary movements. This historical context reminds us that resistance is rarely an isolated event. It develops through the interaction of political circumstances, collective experiences, and the desire for change.

In my opinion, Tula's legacy shows that the failure of a rebellion does not mean the failure of its ideals. His movement was suppressed, but its message survived. The exhibition encourages visitors to question whose stories are remembered and whose voices have been silenced. Ultimately, Tula's story reminds us that freedom is not something that should be granted selectively; it is a fundamental human right.

JONATHAN JOCHANG

JOAO

BOUND



This piece is based on the João historical story, made to highlight the cruelty of slavery by focusing on one of the tools that were used to restrain enslaved people, these objects represent the loss of freedom, the inhumane treatment, and the dehumanization that

many people endured under slavery, I've choosen the foot stocks as the main subject, encouraging the viewer to look beyond the object itself and recognize the suffering it represents, serving as a reminder of how such cruel methods of control were used to maintain the plantation system and its production of wealth at the expense of the many people that have suffered in this time period, I used a very minimal but very contrasting colour palette to grab the attention of the viewer, the message is a simple reminder of a darker time in history.

DEVEN CHRISTIAN

JOAO

The exhibition's story of Tula highlights how the struggle for freedom can challenge an entire system of oppression. In 1795, Tula led an uprising of enslaved people in Curaçao against Dutch colonial rule. Inspired by revolutionary ideas of liberty and equality, he believed that enslaved people deserved the same rights as everyone else. Although the rebellion was defeated, his actions became an important symbol of resistance.

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SERAFIM NOELLE NAYLA SINAGA

LOOKING THROUGH THE EYES OF HISTORY VIA “JOAO”

Standing in front of the exhibition board titled “joao,” I found myself drawn into a narrative that goes far beyond a simple history lesson. As a design student, what immediately caught my eye was how the exhibition curates visual artifacts, ranging from 17th-century paintings of slave markets and sugar mills to physical restraints like foot stocks. It uses visual communication not just to display historical data, but to evoke a heavy, tangible sense of human tragedy.

The story of Joao, an enslaved African man caught in the ruthless geopolitical clashes between Portugal and the Dutch Republic over colonial territories like Brazil, makes history feel deeply personal. It serves as a stark reminder that behind every historical trade commodity, such as sugar, there were real human lives commodified and exploited. Looking at the archival sketches and the contrasting display of diplomatic items like the gilt silver vasin next to brutal instruments of torture, the exhibit brilliantly highlights the stark inequality of that era.

Ultimately, this exhibition made me reflect on the power of visual storytelling, it shows how historical archives and visual elements can be combined to communicate complex socio-political issues effectively. For my own journey in creative design, “joao” is an inspiring reminder that good design and storytelling carry the responsibility to tell important, untold human stories.

Connecting this to the imitation theory, the exhibition also reflects how cultural norms, power dynamics, and behaviors are transmitted and mirrored across societies. During the colonial era, the brutal systems of slavery and exploitation were largely driven by institutionalized imitation, where European powers copied and scaled colonial economic models, sugar plantations, and control mechanisms from one another to maximize wealth and dominance. The visual artifacts on display, from the replicated slave market sketches to the administrative documents, show how normalized cruelty was imitated and institutionalized across borders.

On a deeper psychological level, looking at "joao" challenges modern viewers to consider what societal behaviors we might be mindlessly imitating today. Just as historical societies blindly followed and reproduced systems of oppression for economic gain, contemporary visual culture often normalizes consumerism or systemic inequalities. This exhibition acts as a critical mirror, urging us to break away from harmful cycles of imitation and instead use creative storytelling to question, rather than just copy, the status quo.

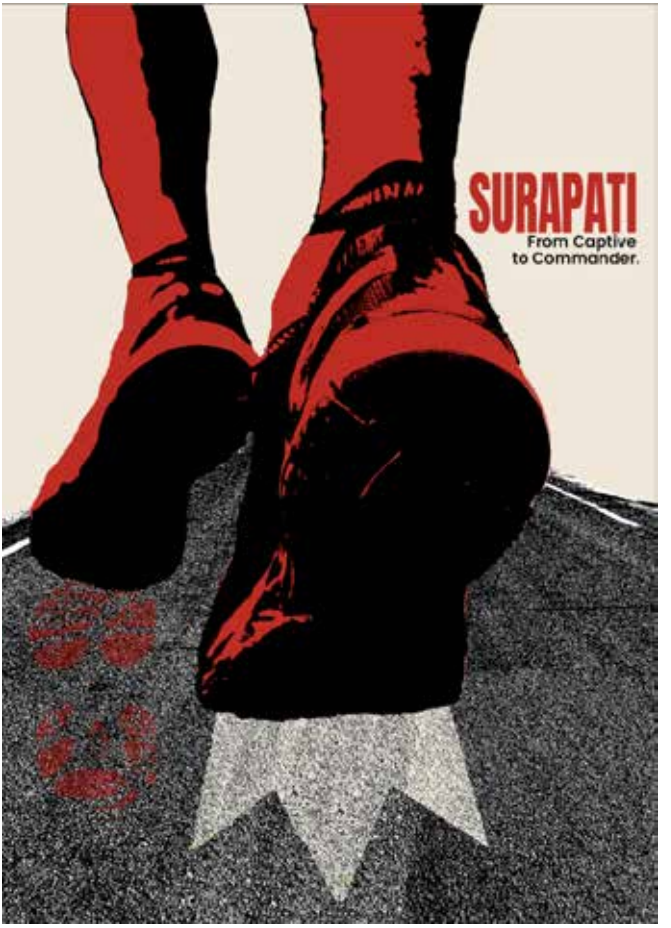
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MUHAMMAD AISY AFRAH

UNTUNG SURAPATI

SURAPATI



This poster portrays Surapati as a figure who rose from captivity to become an influential leader. The bold red and black colors represent resistance and struggle. The shoes symbolize his journey, escape,

and steps toward power, while the crown represents his role as the leader of a group of fugitives. Rather than portraying Surapati simply as a hero, this work highlights his complex journey of resisting authority and building his influence in history.

NATHALIE PRICILLIA SURJADI

SURAPATI

Exhibitions addressing colonial encounters frequently confront a paradox: how to construct counter narratives when primary archives are inherently shaped by imperial power. The display detailing the 17th century resistance leader Surapati highlights this tension directly, tracing his trajectory from an enslaved Balinese youth in Batavia to a formidable anti VOC sovereign in East Java. As the exhibition panel notes, Surapati was simultaneously immortalized in Javanese oral tradition (Babad) and fearfully documented in European colonial records. This dual presence illustrates how indigenous subversion continuously destabilized early colonial hegemony.

Surapati's life demonstrates the fluidity of identity within the contested spaces of early modern Southeast Asia. Initially serving under the Dutch East India Company (VOC), his subsequent rebellion underscores the limits of colonial control and the adaptability of local leadership. As historian M.C. Ricklefs emphasizes in A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200, resistance figures like Surapati were not merely reactionaries, but political strategists who leveraged regional alliances and traditional statecraft to challenge the VOC's commercial monopoly. The cultural artifacts featured alongside his narrative, such as wayang topeng masks and palm leaf manuscripts, reflect how his legacy transitioned from historical defiance into shared folklore, establishing a foundation for anti-colonial consciousness long before the rise of 20th century nationalism.

This historical transformation culminated in 1975, when the Indonesian state officially designated Surapati a Pahlawan Nasional (National Hero). According to Ann Laura Stoler in Along the Archival Grain, postcolonial nation-states frequently reexamine colonial archives to refashion subaltern rebels into foundational icons of national unity. Through this critical lens, the exhibition goes beyond displaying historical artifacts; it highlights how memory is continuously renegotiated. By placing colonial oil paintings alongside indigenous performance masks, the display demonstrates how anti-colonial resistance transformed from an immediate security threat to the VOC into a lasting symbol of Indonesian sovereignty.

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REVAN ANGGOROPUTRA WIBAWA

AESTHETIC IDEAS AND THE LEGACY OF SURAPATI

Surapati's story begins with a man from Bali who was brought to Batavia and forced into enslavement. Instead of accepting his situation, he escaped and eventually became a leader who fought against the Dutch East India Company (VOC). He later established his own court in East Java and gathered allies. His resistance continued until he died from wounds sustained in a battle against the VOC in 1707. Today, Surapati is remembered as an important figure in Indonesian history.

From the mimesis perspective, Surapati's story can be understood as a representation of historical reality. According to Abrams (1953), mimetic theory focuses on the relationship between a literary work and the world it represents. In Surapati's case, his experiences reflect the political conflicts and colonial conditions that existed in Java during the 17th century. His escape from enslavement and resistance against the VOC show the struggles faced by people living under colonial power. Anhar (1984), in her historical biography Untung Surapati, also documents Surapati's life as part of Indonesian history. Through this perspective, readers can understand how his story represents the historical situation of his time.

However, the expressive perspective gives the story a different meaning. Rather than focusing mainly on historical events, this perspective explores the emotions, ideas, and values expressed through the story. Abrams (1953) explains that expressive theory focuses on the relationship between a literary work

and its creator. Through this approach, Surapati's actions can represent courage, determination, and the desire for freedom. His decision to resist the VOC can inspire readers to think about the importance of standing against oppression. His story can also express national pride and admiration for those who struggle for their beliefs. In conclusion, both perspectives help us understand Surapati in different ways. Mimesis presents his story as a reflection of historical reality, while the expressive perspective focuses on the emotions and values communicated through his experiences. Together, these perspectives show how Surapati's story can be understood as both a representation of history and an expression of courage and resistance.

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GANESHA PRATIATA

SURAPATI (2)

This work on Surapati highlights how a historical figure can be continuously reimagined through cultural artifacts to shape collective memory. From a 17th-century painting and Javanese manuscripts to 20th-century posters and theatrical masks, Surapati's image has been reproduced across different mediums, each reflecting the social and political needs of its time. He is not only remembered as a rebel against the VOC but also celebrated as a symbol of resistance and national pride.

The narrative of Surapati as a former slave who rose to challenge colonial power emphasizes transformation from oppression to leadership. His story embodies courage, resilience, and patriotism—values that remain relevant for Indonesians today. Yet, a critical perspective reveals that these heroic depictions are intertwined with political agendas. For instance, the killing of Captain François Tack is often portrayed as a heroic act, but it also served the complex power struggles of the Mataram court. This shows how myth and history merge, creating a narrative that is both inspiring and politically charged.

The masks and performances inspired by Surapati's story further demonstrate how his legacy entered popular culture, functioning as both entertainment and education. Through these artistic forms, Surapati became more than a historical figure; he became a living symbol of resistance, teaching future generations about the importance of standing against injustice.

In conclusion, this work is not just a record of history but a cultural construction that shapes how Indonesians understand patriotism and identity. Surapati's legacy illustrates how art, myth, and politics intertwine to build national memory.

AUFA NA'MIRA AKBAR

LOHKAY

LOHKAY

On this occasion, I visited one of the exhibitions held at Binus, and I took in the story of Lohkay. This story reveals that true freedom begins with the courage to resist oppression. The exhibition portrays Lohkay as an enslaved woman who escaped from a plantation in Sint Maarten rather than accept the injustice inflicted on her. Her story demonstrates that freedom is not simply a privilege granted by those in power; it is also something people actively pursue when their humanity is denied.

What impressed me most about Lohkay's story was her determination to escape despite the dire consequences. In the work, she escapes after plantation authorities threaten to cut off her breasts as punishment. Her resistance challenges the notion that enslaved people were merely passive victims of history. Instead, Lohkay represents the empowerment and resilience of individuals who refuse to surrender their dignity.

Historically, the Netherlands abolished slavery in its Caribbean colonies on July 1, 1863, fifteen years after emancipation in the French territory of Saint Martin (UNESCO). This distinction illustrates how political boundaries and legal systems influence individual freedom. It also raises an important question: if freedom depends on where one lives, can it truly be considered a universal human right? This question led Frederick Douglass to deliver his 1852 speech, "What Does Liberty Day Mean to a Slave?", which challenged the contradiction between celebrating freedom and

maintaining slavery. Douglass argued that the declaration of liberty was meaningless to those who continued to experience oppression (Douglass, 1852). Similarly, Lohkay's escape exposed the gap between the principles of liberty and the realities of colonial society.

I believe this exhibition encourages visitors to reconsider how freedom is defined. Legal emancipation is a valuable historical achievement, but it does not automatically eliminate inequality or its consequences. Lohkay's story reminds me that freedom requires more than official recognition: it demands dignity, equal rights, and the ability to determine one's own life. Her resistance remains a powerful reminder that human freedom should not depend on the permission of others.

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FABIAN OMAR NOTOPRAJITNO

LOHKAY: THE MEANING OF FREEDOM BEYOND A PIECE OF PAPER

Lohkay's story shows how one person's courage can inspire others to stand up against oppression. She escaped from a plantation in Sint Maarten, but the punishment she faced was severe. One of her breasts was cut off, yet she managed to escape again and survive alone in the hills. Her experience shows how much she was willing to risk to gain her freedom. Instead of accepting the situation, she continued to resist, even when her life was in danger.

Lohkay's courage later became an example for many people in Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, and Saba. In 1848, all the enslaved people at Diamond Estate escaped to the French-controlled part of Sint Maarten, where slavery had already been abolished earlier that year. This happened before the laws of 1860 and 1863 abolished slavery in the Dutch Caribbean territories. The event suggests that enslaved people were already taking action to change their own lives before the Dutch colonial government officially ended slavery.

However, the end of slavery did not necessarily mean that people could immediately live freely. In many areas, abolition was followed by years of unpaid labor. Although slavery had officially ended, people still faced difficult conditions and had limited control over their lives. This shows that changing the law alone was not always enough to give people the freedom they deserved.

For me, Lohkay's story raises an important question: what does freedom really mean? Is a person truly free

simply because the law says so, or does freedom depend on how that person lives? Her experience reminds us that freedom should mean more than a legal status. People should also have the right to make their own choices and live without oppression. Lohkay's story continues to be meaningful because it shows that freedom is not only about what is written on paper, but also about what people experience in their everyday lives.

MARIA CICILIA ILONA FEDORA JOHANNES

LOHKAY : THROUGH MY LENS

Lohkay, an enslaved woman on Sint Maarten who resisted colonial oppression by escaping a plantation and refused to give up her freedom. Lohkay has inspired many others to not give up and resist, including myself. Learning about Lohkay has shaped and broadened my understanding of freedom, identity, and human dignity through history. This artwork installation has made me realize that history is not merely collections of the past, yet a compilation of human experiences that has shaped cultural traditions and valuable lessons.

Through Plato's theory of imitation, the artwork represents reality itself, Though, I can understand where Plato's coming from with his theory. However, in this situation, Plato's theory makes me question whether the artwork itself actually captures Lohkay's struggles and suffering. Written records and images may communicate certain aspects of the story, yet they cannot truly express the emotions and experiences behind them. In contrast, Aristotle viewed imitation as a natural human tendency and as a way of learning about the world. I actually agree with Aristotle's theory more for this art installation. The installation becomes more than a representation of the historical events that Lohkay endured. It becomes an opportunity to develop and deepen empathy and understanding. It also evokes feelings of sadness, admiration, and respect.

The installation is not just a representation of Lohkay's past, it is also an expression of human resistance and resilience.

Through Lohkay's story, it has reminded me to never take freedom for granted. History has taught us so much and has stood up and fought for us so that we can be where we are now. It has given us the freedom of expression, courage, and resilience. Their courage and resistance have shaped the world that we live in, allowing us to live with great dignity. This exhibition has taught me that the freedom that we experience today was not simply given, it was built upon the struggles and sacrifices of those who came before us. Their stories deserve to be remembered and honored, not only as lessons, but also as reminders of our responsibility to value our freedom.

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STEPHANIE HOUTEEN

VAN BENGALEN

LOHKAY : THROUGH MY LENS

On September 30, 2026, I visited an art exhibition titled The History of Dutch Colonial Slavery with my friends. During the exhibition, I explored several historical artworks and decided to focus on Van Bengalen for my written reflection. What caught my attention was how the artwork presented the experiences of enslaved people through historical paintings and explanatory texts. Rather than showing only one person's story, it introduced several individuals whose lives were connected to the history of slavery. Through this artwork, I began to understand how slavery affected not only people's freedom but also their identities and dignity.

The artwork is presented as an infographic-style exhibition panel containing six visual reproductions of historical oil paintings. These include Panorama of Cape Town and Environs, The Trading Post of the Dutch East India Company in Hooghly, and The Castle of Batavia. Other paintings depict a meal with Sara van den Broek, her guests and servants, Augustus van Bengalen holding Hendrick Cloete's pipe, and a silver box made by Bengalen in Batavia. The artwork uses earthy colors, such as brown, cream, and terracotta, with a symmetrical and organized composition. Although the visual presentation appears orderly, the historical stories behind these paintings reveal the difficult experiences of people who were deprived of their freedom.

As I learned about the stories presented in Van Bengalen, I discovered that Januarij, Amon, Marij, Susanna, Augustus, and Baron van Bengalen represented thousands of enslaved women, men, and children around the Bay of Bengal. Their experiences varied, but they shared the reality of losing their freedom and identities. Their original names were removed and replaced with new ones, while the name "Van Bengalen" referred to their origins or the places where they were traded. They were forcibly taken from villages around the Ganges River and transported through the VOC trading network to different regions, including Batavia, the Banda Islands, Cape Town, and

the Netherlands. This made me realize how people were treated as commodities within a system that prioritized economic interests over human lives. The artwork reflects the history of Dutch colonialism and the slave trade involving the Dutch East India Company (VOC) between 1620 and 1795. During this period, the VOC trading network was used to transport enslaved people from different regions to colonial territories.

One aspect that stood out to me was the replacement of the enslaved people's original names. I believe this detail is important because a person's identity is part of who they are, yet the system of slavery could take that identity away along with their freedom. Through the stories presented in the artwork, I could see that slavery was not simply about forcing people to work, but also about controlling their lives and treating them as property. After reflecting on Van Bengalen, I began to consider how its message relates to the present day. Although slavery during the VOC period no longer exists in exactly the same form, exploitation can still occur through human trafficking and forced labor. People can still lose their freedom and experience unfair treatment when others prioritize their own interests over human rights. In my opinion, this shows that slavery should not be viewed only as a historical issue. It also serves as a reminder that exploitation can take different forms and that people remain vulnerable when their dignity and rights are not respected. Ultimately, Van Bengalen taught me the importance of remembering the people behind historical events. Their stories show that every individual has an identity and deserves to be treated with dignity, regardless of their social or economic background. The artwork also encouraged me to question whether society has truly learned from the past when exploitation continues to affect people's lives today. For me, understanding this history is not only about learning what happened during the colonial period, but also about recognizing the importance of human rights in the present. By remembering these experiences, we can become more aware of the consequences of injustice and the need to respect the freedom and dignity of every human being.

DEA PUTRI PRUDENIA

WHEN A NAME BECOMES A LABEL: IDENTITY, DIGNITY, AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIAL SLAVERY

Among the ten stories presented in the exhibition, Van Bengalen was the one that stayed with me the most. Its visual form first caught my attention, the story is presented through paintings, portraits, objects, captions, dates, and places. These fragments allow visitors to reconstruct pieces of an individual life while revealing what colonial records chose to preserve, where a person came from, where they were transported, who owned them, and what they were called.

Seeing these fragments made me imagine the circumstances of that period, while questioning how fully a person's identity can be recovered from records created within a system of enslavement. Yang (2022) discusses how individual slavery stories in the Rijksmuseum exhibition are shaped through the selection and presentation of historical materials, showing how Van Bengalen is constructed through archival choices.

My curiosity led me to investigate the name Van Bengalen. I discovered that it was not a family name, but a label associated with enslaved people from the Bay of Bengal region. This shifted my understanding of the story. A name that appears to identify a person can instead reveal how slavery reduced individuals to imposed categories. Mbeki and van Rossum (2017) show how VOC records documented enslaved people through names, origins, age, gender, and caste, while also recording practices of renaming. The archive preserves traces of identity while revealing how it was controlled.

The story also sits within the wider network of Dutch colonial slavery across the Indian Ocean. Van Rossum (2021) argues for understanding Dutch slavery through these interconnected regions, rather than an Atlantic-centred narrative. For me, Van Bengalen makes this history feel closer to Indonesia. Batavia, now Jakarta, was part of these networks. This connection makes the story relevant beyond the past, raising questions of dignity, identity, and whose humanity is recognised in historical records. It reminds me that remembering history means examining whose identities were preserved, whose were erased, and how these histories shape our understanding of human dignity today.

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BRENDA ANGELINA RUSLY

THE BRUTALITY OF POWER AND ATROCITY

It all begins with spices. The Dutch conquest of the Banda Islands unfolded from 1609 to 1621, as the Dutch East India Company sought to establish a monopoly over the lucrative nutmeg trade. The Bandanese, resisting Dutch demands to sell exclusively to them, faced a severe consequence. A large part of the Bandanese population was killed or expelled from their homeland. The conflicts led to a massacre as nearly the entire population of 15,000 was decimated or displaced, sparing only a few hundred. Seeing the beginning of this Van Bengalen event reminded me of the story of the Padri War, where the Batak people were killed and slaughtered simply for refusing to convert to Islam by Tuanku Imam Bonjol and several figures. Even Sisingamangaraja X died at the hands of the Padri forces. The Padri forces were only subdued by an outbreak of disease in the center of the Batak kingdom caused by the scattered and decomposing bodies of human victims of war. The Padri expansion to islamize central Batak failed, so in 1820 the Padri forces moved south and gradually islamized the regions of Sipirok, Angkola, Natal, and Mandailing.

RICARDO CANNAVARO GINTING

CONTRIBUTORS

1. ABDUL AZIZ, S.SN.,M.MED.KOM
2. YOVAN WIJAYA
3. KINZI ALIYA NUGROHO
4. PUSPA DEVI THAM
5. SAFINA FARANISSA
6. JOFEA FERRENA
7. FRITZ MORADO IMMANUEL NAINGGOLAN
8. ANGGUN PUSPITA
9. YASMIN ZAHRA PUTRI MARDHIANA
10. FELICIA SALVIANA HSU
11. MICHELLE SURJADI
12. ANDREA MICHAELA DELI APRIYANTO
13. DESIANTY
14. MUHAMMAD AL FARREL SOFYAN
15. JONATHAN JOCHANG
16. DEVEN CHRISTIAN
17. SERAFIM NOELLE NAYLA SINAGA
18. MUHAMMAD AISY AFRAH
19. NATHALIE PRICILLIA SURJADI
20. REVAN ANGGOROPUTRA WIBAWA
21. GANESHA PRATIATA
22. AUFA NA'MIRA AKBAR
23. FABIAN OMAR NOTOPRAJITNO
24. MARIA CICILIA ILONA FEDORA JOHANNES
25. STEPHANIE HOUTEEN
26. DEA PUTRI PRUDENIA
27. BRENDA ANGELINA RUSLY
28. RICARDO CANNAVARO GINTING


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