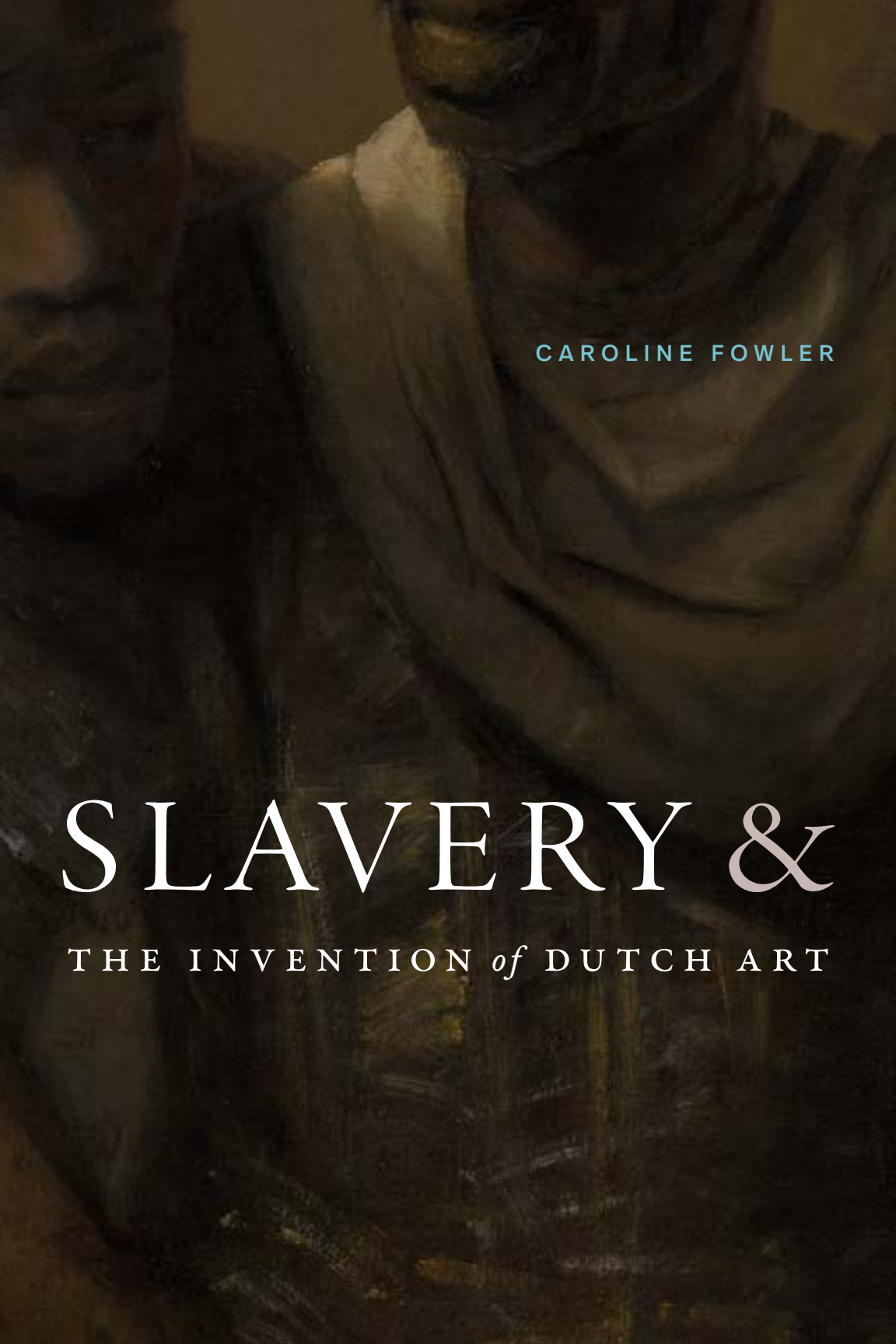

CAROLINE FOWLER

SLAVERY &

THE INVENTION *of* DUTCH ART

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CAROLINE FOWLER

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SLAVERY & THE INVENTION OF DUTCH ART

INTRODUCTION

Transubstantiation across Atlantic Worlds

In January 1619, tobacco planter John Rolfe described "a Dutch man of Warr" that landed in Chesapeake Bay carrying about twenty Africans from Angola, whom the governor had bought in exchange for food and water.[1] This brief account is widely cited as the origin point for slavery in North America, an exchange between the ship's captain and the governor in which lives were treated as commodities. Surviving documents trace the journey, which began with a Portuguese ship, the *São João Bautista*, on the west African coast. While the ship was bound for Mexico, an English privateer, who was sailing under a Dutch letter of marque, intercepted the vessel. The letter of marque, issued by Prince Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen in the Dutch Republic, sanctioned the raiding of ships sailing under sovereign flags of countries with whom the Dutch were at war, therefore legalizing what would have otherwise been considered an act of piracy. Instead of gold, silver, pearls, or sugar, the captain seized kidnapped men and women from Angola and brought the captives to the Chesapeake shore in exchange for provisions.[2] The slippage between the nations—between the Dutch and the English—and the ability of an English privateer to carry out legalized piracy in open waters under a Dutch letter granting him the right to attack were products of the intertangled histories of emerging nation-states. The Dutch role in the arrival of slavery to North America illustrates the longer history of the Dutch relationship to the transatlantic

slave trade, a narrative that has often been obscured by the illegalization of slavery within the Dutch Republic and a historiography that celebrated the Dutch as emblems of tolerance, free markets, and freedom from the tyranny of the Spanish monarchy.[3]

The arrival in 1619 of a ship carrying men, women and children from Angola into Chesapeake Bay marked the landscape, so that the twentieth-century American poet Lucille Clifton would write about a desire to celebrate "grass and how the blue / in the sky can flow green or red / and the waters lean against the / chesapeake shore like familiar / love poems about nature and landscape."[4] Yet instead of a nature poem celebrating sea and shore, Clifton recalls knotted oaks, and she evokes the American history of lynching, a violence that makes it impossible to stand on that shoreline and write a "love poem." The forests, soil, coastlines, and swamps witnessed the emergence of a new world defined across racial lines in ways that continue to shape America today. In conclusion, Clifton asks: "why / is there under that poem always / an other poem?"

This book is about that other poem and the seventeenth-century visualization of a transatlantic space, across which a Middle Passage was born that transformed oceans into burial grounds, while sovereign nations battled for economic control over waterways, claiming the ocean as a neutral, ahistorical, empty space. At the center of seventeenth-century Dutch pictorial production was a struggle with depicting the transubstantiation of personhood into property, a visual labor that defied figuration. The rise of the plantation economy in the seventeenth century can be understood through the visualization of not only bodies and selves but also the sites where lives are discussed but not depicted, imagined but obscured, alluded to but refused pictorialization. The refusal to depict the violence of early racialization and enslavement in seventeenth-century Dutch pictorial production is as important a subject as are the rare instances of its representation. This book predominantly focuses on a period during which the transformation of individual lives into property and units of labor was in the process of legal establishment, while the perceived relationship between skin color, personhood, and enslavement remained fluid in ways that would rapidly diminish by the end of the seventeenth century, as the pigment of one's skin became increasingly perceived in relation to one's right to claim property in one's own person.[5]

While this early history exists in documents—ship manifests, correspondence, and legal letters—the visual record is sparse in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic.[6] The Dutch were prodigious in their development

of maritime painting as a genre, yet the seascapes refuse any visibility to the lives that were carried, born, and died across the expanse of ocean between Africa and the Americas. There are noted exceptions, and certain artists obliquely pictured sanitized renditions of plantations in the Americas, artists such as Frans Post, Albert Eckhout, and Dirk Valkenburg.[7] Recently, scholars have made evident the role of the Dutch in the rise of plantation economies and their impact on seventeenth-century visual production.[8] There has also been an increase in attention to the role of Black figures as central to the history of Dutch portraiture, works in which "black figures were often deployed and read as pure surface, as bodies without presence or interiority, whose value lay solely in their role as a formal, symbolic, and semiotic prop."[9] And rare paintings exist of the free Afro-Dutch community in Amsterdam, such as Rembrandt van Rijn's portrait of two young men (plate 1).[10] In contemporary art, many artists turn to this history of European painting so as to "shift the gaze," or to recognize blind spots within the discipline of art history.[11] In the words of artist Peter Brathwaite, who restages canonical works of European Black portraiture, this process of engaging with the racialized history of European painting allowed him to "construct a Black narrative on my own terms."[12]

Most of the case studies in this book, however, examine images in which the role of figuration remains peripheral or absent. Nevertheless, this figural absence does not necessarily indicate complete absence within the visual archive of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Instead, this book considers the ongoing and surviving presence of the Middle Passage and its aftermath within histories of Dutch painting, as well as the ways in which this visual narrative traveled beside works often read as indicators of erasure or absence. For histories of seventeenth-century painting and slavery, scholarship often pivots around figural representation in portraiture, history painting, still life, and staffage. When human figural presence is absent (or almost completely abstracted), there has been presumed a critical formation around eradication. While acknowledging the fundamental necessity of this work, early modern art histories of the plantation economy must look beyond representations of bodies, for the act of transforming life into property defies depiction and the world of sense. In one of the most trenchant critiques of art history's grappling with the early modern visual culture around slavery, Charmaine Nelson notes that the scholarship tends to focus "on the human subject" and assumes that the subject "needs to be black (or at least not white)."[13] As Nelson points out, this means that scholarship does not examine the construction of whiteness,

or definitions of what might connote the figural, or human, subject. The early modern visual archive around the development of the transatlantic slave trade is often read in terms of absence and erasure, producing a historiography that evades confrontation with the direct presence of enslavement within the archive and with dominant narratives around tolerance, free markets, and global expansion. As a discipline, art history is complicit in maintaining these mythologies instead of writing about the inventories, notes, marginalia, and historiographic texts that overtly acknowledged the role of the plantation economy in the construction of seventeenth-century Dutch painting.

To engage with the period in which transatlantic slavery becomes central to the European (not only Dutch) economy, it is necessary to consider an extant body of inventories, records, and texts that delineate a crisis of picturing the transformation of life into commodity.[14] For it was not only salt, sugar, pepper, and mace that became abstracted into prices on an index, to be exchanged as paper contracts in the Amsterdam Bourse; human life also became reduced to prices in a merchant's log, bills of sale, insurance contracts. Across the case studies in this book, seventeenth-century Dutch pictorial production (and its historiography) is structured by a fundamental struggle with depicting the transformation of life into property, as artists grappled with denying, obscuring, and representing that transformation. This history is particular to the Dutch Republic, as it was marked by discourses around economic and political freedom, tolerance, and a rapidly expansive globalized economy that demanded the abstraction of life into paper and numbers for a stock exchange. Reframing the history of seventeenth-century Dutch painting in relationship to the emergence of the transatlantic slave does not only mean attending to the representations of Black individuals in Dutch painting, or considering more closely work created within the colonies, or examining the economic connections and trade routes of materials or wealth—although all these methods are necessary points of departure. There must also be a reexamination of the theoretical foundation of Dutch pictorial production in relation to the impossibility of figuration, a crisis that emerged in the wake of an iconoclastic Reformation, which stripped churches of altarpieces to replace them with white walls and maritime monuments, creating a visual field for imagining citizenship within an emerging nation-state.

Artistic developments in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic are attributed to various factors on the European continent evolving from the Eighty Years' War between the nascent Dutch Republic and the Spanish

Hapsburg monarchy, a conflict about church and state, religion and taxes, governance and nobility. At the end of the sixteenth century, iconoclastic riots destroyed altarpieces, and artists fled from the Southern Netherlands to the Northern Netherlands to escape religious and financial persecution at the hands of the Spanish monarchy. The Dutch Republic became celebrated for its tolerance (in contrast to the Holy Roman Empire), as well as becoming an innovative site for artists to experiment and thrive, as the domain of religious painting for the church was challenged. While the word of God was celebrated over the picturing of divinity, and churches remained stripped of their images, artists innovated in other genres: landscape, seascape, and urban scenes.

One of the central theological debates of this period was the doctrine of transubstantiation, a contestation that instigated religious wars and led to mass migrations, new theories of the image, and an emerging empiricism countering the belief that a wafer and wine could transform into the body and blood of Christ.[15] Disagreement about this word and its meaning brought on theological strife, so that new sects of Lutheranism and Calvinism splintered from the church (and one another), as they debated Real Presence, consubstantiation, and whether the act of communion was in memory of a Christ now absent. The work of René Descartes was placed on the list of forbidden books because his understanding of corporeality defied the Catholic reasoning over transubstantiation.[16] For over 150 years, the Eucharistic wafer determined the European religious and political landscape, so that the "eucharist was fought over regionally and nationally, personally as well as communally, and became a touchstone of attitudes toward community, family, virtue, and politics."[17] These debates over transubstantiation would continue into the seventeenth century (as evidenced in the banning of Descartes's writings), yet they also reached a tenuous accord with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

As Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen maintain, the Peace of Westphalia, which brought an end to both the Eighty Years' and the Thirty Years' Wars, created a new European order that was fundamental for the ongoing trade in lives as chattel property. The Spanish ended their hostility toward the Dutch Republic and recognized it as a sovereign nation, and monarchs officially adopted state religions, defining countries as centers of either Protestantism or Catholicism. In turn, the Peace of Westphalia set the parameters for trade and economic development.[18] European states were forced to recognize their mutual sovereign borders and rights, including in open waters, where ships sailing under state flags represented

the borders of their territories on land. In turn, European states formalized their investment in the slave trade, recognizing the sovereignty of one another as they dismissed the sovereignty of territories peripheral to the Peace of Westphalia.

This was a period of religious conflict, war, and disagreement on the nature of presence and absence, the ability of images to mediate divinity, the rapid desecularization of property, the replacement of real value (land and gold) with paper bills of sale, and mass migrations caused by internal European religious strife that extended into their colonial enterprises. Historically, however, these revolutions on the Continent have appeared separate from the Middle Passage. Yet the arrival of some of the first Angolans in Chesapeake Bay demonstrates that the intertwined economic and political interests of European sovereign powers during this period were pivotal to the slave trade. The whitewashed walls of the Reformed churches in the sixteenth century were the visual predecessors to a legal theory that would define the ocean as a site of erasure, on which no ship could leave a trace (according to many seventeenth-century jurists). In parallel to this legal theory, artists created a new genre of painting—the seascape—dedicated to depicting the ocean as a reflective surface with no depth on which privateers could act as pirates with impunity. The religious images and altarpieces of the sixteenth century were replaced by an art market selling landscapes, seascapes, and still lifes, a pictorial world dependent on oceanic control and the economic success of the plantation economy of the Americas and elsewhere. The crises of the religious wars and iconoclasm in the sixteenth century created the necessary impetus for new genres, such as landscape and seascape, in the seventeenth century.[19] These narratives have not, however, grappled with the ongoing legacy of racial capitalism and its earliest formation in the early modern period, with the role of artists mediating a world in which life transfigured into property.[20] While the sixteenth century was determined by theological debates about representing Christ and his divinity, the seventeenth century engaged in a continuing crisis of representation, around not only the religious image but also the emergent image of human life transubstantiated into property and the uncertainty of markets and wealth built from futures trading.

Central to this history is the movement of speculation and faith from the altar to the marketplace. The crises around sense and knowledge that the wafer and wine of the Eucharist addressed—how could a thin, dry white wafer embody the presence of Christ—transferred to an economy in which wealth was built from trading in goods that would never touch one's

lips, requiring a new faith in paper and stocks. Transubstantiation—the ability of one thing to become another, of one material world to denote the presence of another material world—did not disappear. Stocks, paper currency, and bonds could hold the Real Presence of wealth as much as land and gold. The Dutch Republic was built on faith in this act of economic transubstantiation while lives in this period were transformed into paper for exchange. In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx also recognized the centrality of transubstantiation to explain the process of a commodity becoming money. In discussing the value of a material, such as iron, Marx writes that iron must "quit its bodily shape" and "transform itself from mere imaginary into real gold," and he describes this process as a "transubstantiation."[21] To receive a fixed price, iron must become not only equivalent to but also capable of transforming into gold. Marx imagines how iron loses its sensual qualities—not to mention its direct links to the earth and mining—to receive a value founded in gold on the system of exchange.

The demand that a life also "quit its bodily shape" to become an abstracted value of labor and production on a document, ship manifest, or insurance contract also transforms bodies, minds, psyches, and their sensate and sensual qualities from real lives into imaginary units of labor. As the contemporary poet M. NourbeSe Philip recognized, the transformation of human life into property is an act of transubstantiation, so that "the conversion of human into chattel becomes an act of transubstantiation the equal of the metamorphosis of the eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Like a magic wand the law erases all ties—linguistic, societal, cultural, familial, parental, and spiritual."[22] Instead of referring to the wafer and wine of the Eucharist, which embodies the miraculous presence of Christ so as to bring his followers into communion, Philip cites the central rite of the Catholic Church to describe a reverse, anticommunion on the human psyche and body. This transubstantiation reduces life to a matter of capital devoid of sentient form, severing the bonds that make communion possible, disconnecting life from universe and being. The word *transubstantiation* in Philip's writing becomes the means by which to understand turning a life into a value on a ledger sheet, a loss of bodily form that cannot be conveyed by the sensory apparatus of aesthetic and knowledge production. The loss extends beyond the corporeal and into the interconnections among selves, earth, and spirit that define, create, nourish, and sustain the body and its eventual passing. Transubstantiation introduces a metaphysical term by which to think about the limited role

of our sensory apparatus in grasping knowledge, from the ability to sense divinity in the mundane foodstuff of wafer and wine to comprehending the violence brought on bodies, lives, and psyches through an economy dependent on trading humans as though chattel property. Philip's employment of this phrase brings to the reader's attention that this movement of life into property is no less stupefying of sensate experience than the transformation of wafer and wine into body and blood. It brings to awareness a crisis of sense at the center of this economic system.

Often terms such as *erasure* are employed to define the absence of the Middle Passage and the violence of the plantation economy in the works of this period, such as Frans Post's landscapes depicting sugar plantations in Brazil. Yet this was an economic moment in which merchants and seamen, bankers and politicians, watched as a new paper economy and revolution emerged, so that commodities and goods (including human lives) became translated into wealth on paper. For many in the Dutch Republic, this transformation and these lives—just like the shipments of nutmeg and cloves from Asia—might not ever actually pass through their physical hands but were represented through a stock exchange and financial market. For the markets to work, merchants had to believe in the Real Presence of these commodities, not their memory or possibility. In terms of transforming a life into chattel property, as Philip recognizes, this is no less a metaphysical feat than the doctrine of transubstantiation. Instead of examining how this history was erased, this book considers the visual sites in which the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade is present, but in ways that are unexpected, overlooked, or abstracted: a marginal note on a drawing; an inventory; a maritime monument; a church interior; a palimpsest of texts and images that demonstrate the pervasive presence of this new trade in determining the visual landscape of seventeenth-century Holland. As Paul Gilroy has remarked, the visibility of Blackness often exists as a "series of bitter negotiations over terms and conditions of visibility."[23] Just as European artists struggled for centuries with denoting the absence and presence of Christ within images, artists in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic also confronted, with the rise of this new economy founded on economic transubstantiation, the presence and absence of a new violence at the center of their economic miracle. The transference of transubstantiation from the altar to the marketplace, from the body and blood of Christ to the body and blood of enslaved men and women across the emergent Dutch colonial world, defined the visual production of Dutch artists confronting and obviating this history.

This crisis is captured by Rembrandt van Rijn in one of the most frequently discussed portraits of two Black men, possibly sailors, living within the free Afro-Dutch community of Amsterdam (plate 1). A disjunctive painting, one man directly addresses the viewer while the other presents a recalcitrance about being made visible. This withdrawal suggests a mode that Tina Campt defines as "a tense grammar" of "vulnerability twinned with proud defiance."[24] The man places his chin over the shoulder of a fellow model, an intimate gesture. With his eyes downcast, he projects a sense of exhaustion coupled with an inner state that remains denied to the viewer. This posture of both affection toward his fellow man and avoidance of the viewer directly counters that of the other model, who poses in an antique costume. The juxtaposition between these two men forms the tension within the composition. The gentle touch of one man's chin on his friend's shoulder transforms the work from a study for a history painting (implied by the costume in the foregrounded figure) to a consideration of the relationship between the two men, their differing moods, one extroverted, the other introverted, one engaging the viewer, the other resisting.[25]

The presence of the second man challenges the viewer. While the man in the foreground embraces his portrait, the man standing behind him rejects this process, thereby also questioning the transformation of himself into an image within Rembrandt's workshop. The second man refuses the viewer's gaze, positioning himself in relation to his fellow model. Rembrandt captures the repudiation of the model toward him, painting the model's ambivalence about standing before him—a rarity for Rembrandt, who was celebrated as a portraitist. Before racialized conceptions became entrenched in the Euro-American imaginary, and epidermal identification and enslavement became intertwined, Rembrandt considered the doubt of a model, recognizing the transference of his being to an image-as-property. Rembrandt's speculations were intertwined with the emergence of the plantation economy in the Americas, and it is difficult to imagine that, although these two men were free on Dutch soil, Rembrandt was not aware that their legal status could be different if they were in the Caribbean. He was an artist acutely aware of his own transformation of personhood into a market commodity, and this transubstantiation of person into property fascinated and repulsed him, as he was both financially made and ruined by speculative financial markets.

Moreover, the rejection of the viewer by the model also asks if finding his identity in the archives is an act of decolonization. The model specifically articulates his self in relation to his fellow model, fostering an inti-

macy that exists between them alone. His presence does not invite the viewer. If anything, his stance rejects the beholder's gaze. This raises the question whether searching for his identity in the archives is justified or runs the risk of continuing histories of forced visibility. He does not need contemporary historical inquiry to determine the value of his existence, which was realized in his contemporary relationships, one articulated in the portrait. To assign an uncertain identity to an individual in an effort to further educate ourselves in the present about the racist structures of museums places a form of labor on an individual who remains firmly rooted in a quality of inward life that never necessarily asked to be made perceptible. This is not to undermine the importance of bringing the presence of the Afro-Dutch community in seventeenth-century Amsterdam into contemporary scholarship, or of examining an archive in which voices have been historically omitted. Instead, as in the portrait of the two men, it is to hold in tension a recognition of the necessary work that remains within the archive while also realizing that making visible runs the risk of turning the complexity of a life into an image for marketing, and for museum diversity campaigns.

For Philip, it is precisely in the empty nonfigural expanses of the page and silences that she gathers the possibility of communion, as she employs the term *transubstantiation* in an essay following *Zong!*—a poetry collection built from the written decision for a late eighteenth-century legal case, *Gregson v. Gilbert*. *Zong* refers to an eighteenth-century merchant ship, originally named *Zorg* (the Dutch word for "care"), which was seized by the British off the coast of Africa. In 1781, the captain, Luke Collingwood, and his crew cast 132 enslaved individuals overboard to secure an insurance payment for the ship's owners in Liverpool.[26] Attempting to ration provisions and maintain profit, Collingwood and his crew committed an act known now as the Zong massacre, assuming that the maritime insurance company would compensate the owners for the 132 human beings cast into the ocean as though inanimate ballast from the ship's hold.[27]

This act demonstrates how financial speculation on paper drove the transatlantic slave trade, a form of finance and "trading in the wind" that developed in Amsterdam. The ship's crew drowned the African men, women, and children, as their value was determined by not only the auction block in Jamaica but also the paper insurance contract in Liverpool.[28] The marine insurance industry, which began in the thirteenth century in the Mediterranean and became, in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, a profitable business, made the development of a global economy possible,

as shareholders could protect themselves against lost cargoes, sunk ships, and piracy.[29] The industry culminates in this moment of financial speculation, in which the kidnapped were cast into the ocean while maintaining their value within the contractual obligations of the transatlantic markets.

This act is not singular in the history of the Middle Passage, and there are other examples from Dutch maritime history. The *Leusden* foundered on a sandbank at the mouth of a river in Suriname. The crew locked the enslaved Africans in the ship's hold while the ship sank, drowning the majority of captives to prevent an insurrection.[30] In 1750 on the *Middelburgs Welvaren*, the crew repressed a revolt of enslaved Africans also by locking them in the hold and thereby suffocating 231 individuals. Like the Zong massacre, this latter case led to a debate between the insurer and the insured about the validity of claiming insurance on the murdered. The morality was never debated, merely the extent of the claim for damages.[31] Even in the case of the Zong massacre, which was pivotal to the rise of the abolitionist movement in England, Collingwood was never held responsible for the individual lives. The trial centered on the insurance claim made by the ship's owner (Gregson) and the refusal of the underwriter (Gilbert) to pay the claim.

Philip takes the language and words of this legal case as it survives in the archives and fragments, disperses, and creates a new work, writing the "other poem" from the legal case document. Philip draws into relationship the white empty space of the page and the printed letters, so that the spaces between the letters and the words—between one clause and another, between one name and another, between a single article and another—reverberate. The paper takes on a physical presence in Philip's spacing of the words, in her rearrangement, reframing, and building of an ode to a history that exists within and between the lines of the legal document. Philip reverberates the empty space of the page so that it is imbued with the presence of not only words but also breath, palpitation, and the hum of existence in the veins. The reader of her work therefore must attend not only to the text but also to the ellipses, and to the areas where nothing exists but the whiteness of the ground. This ground commingles all the lives, grief, crimes, and injustices that are within *Gregson v. Gilbert* yet never directly articulated. Through the physical material of the printed page, Philip makes palpable the "other" poem that Clifton cites. Fragmenting the legal account into verse strategically dispersed across the paper (figure I.1), Philip visualizes an institutional archive that historically omitted the voices of the enslaved, only to bring them back as specters, between the

1.1 M. NourbeSe Philip, "Zong! #1," from *Zong!* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008).

lines, in the margins. Within this collection of verse, Philip places the miracle of transubstantiation at the center to determine how individual lives become reduced to speculative financial futures on sheets of paper.

Yet within these empty spaces, resounding with their beats, stretches of expanse that howl in the absence of words, Philip also draws together a new possibility of communion, as readers of Philip suggest that her poetics creates "a gathering of black life and writing wherein is found another communion (a together-in-nothingness) in openness and multiplicity."[32] Philip's verse, therefore, and the commingling of printed testimonies wrested from the historical archive on the white page present the possibility of an intimacy founded on the relational lives of African descendants lost across the Middle Passage, a history that continues to structure contemporary societies. This displacement of transubstantiation from the altar to the marketplace forms the structure of this book, which is based primarily in the seventeenth-century economic capital of Amsterdam and the emergent plantation economies in the Atlantic world. The loose federation of provinces known today as the Netherlands was the home not only of the Reformed Church but also of one of the first global economies. This history of Dutch painting focuses on the emergence of maritime space—coastlines, seascapes, monuments, natural history—considering how the transatlantic slave trade coexisted beside a pictorial record that predominantly absented the violence of the emergent plantation economies and the Middle Passage, although it remains resolutely present within the ellipses, the open spaces, the resonant surfaces within Dutch pictorial practice.

A Brief Historiography

Beginning with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Dutch painting has been equated with freedom. In his teleological narrative of the limits of painting in the wake of the dissolution of Christianity, Hegel takes particular delight in the surfaces of Dutch painting and their enigmatic portrayal of everyday life. He grounds the tradition of Dutch painting in the Eighty Years' War and Spanish tyranny, arguing that following this conflict, the Dutch created a form of art that reveled in freedom and daily existence:

> By resolution, endurance, and courage, townsmen and countrymen alike threw off the Spanish dominion of Philip II, son of Charles V (that mighty King of the World), and by fighting won for themselves

> freedom in political life and in religious life too in the religion of freedom. This citizenship, this love of enterprise, in small things as in great, in their own land as on the high seas, this painstaking as well as cleanly and neat well-being, this joy and exuberance in their own sense that for all this they have their own activity to thank, all this is what constitutes the general content of their pictures.[33]

For Hegel, Dutch painters were masters in depicting the "prose of everyday life," capturing the ephemeral moments of existence—the reflection in a metal surface, a quick smile—so that it becomes suspended on the canvas. The paintings invite the ability to reflect on the skill of the artist to capture the fleetingness of life and consciousness. For Hegel, this attention to quotidian surfaces was a product of a specific political situation and history, namely, the Dutch celebration of *vrijheid* (freedom or liberty) from Spanish tyranny. The pleasure found in the reflective surfaces of Dutch painting is inseparable from the hard-wrought freedoms won from Spanish tyranny, from the massacres that Spain inflicted on the Low Countries as they sought religious and economic freedom (both necessarily intertwined). Importantly, Hegel employs the word *citizenship* to describe the coming together of a people who took delight in "small things," "their own land," and "the high seas," recognizing the centrality of emergent ideas of citizenship in Dutch urban life to a view of the world that celebrated fleeting surfaces of light and nothingness.[34]

Hegel did not consider the paradoxical relationship between Dutch Republican *vrijheid* and the emerging dependence on enslaved labor, an absence in the historiography that has provided a foundation on which mythologies around freedom, tolerance, and Dutch painting have been constructed. While examining Hegel's writings on Dutch painting in relation to the Dutch colonies might be considered a twenty-first century mode, historians have demonstrated Hegel's acute awareness in his writing of other colonial histories, particularly the Haitian revolution.[35] Knowledge of the Dutch as violent enslavers and their role in the Caribbean was central to the abolitionist rhetoric of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly after John Stedman's account of Suriname and William Blake's accompanying illustrations.[36] Certain traditions of Dutch landscape, seascapes, natural history, and monuments developed to define citizenship, personhood, interiority, and the natural world as a site of refuge. This was an active pictorial project, and there is an abstraction central to seventeenth-century Dutch painting, which is not the divine subsumed

into the natural world, but instead the transfiguration of lives and the natural world into commodities for exchange—a transformation visually realized in an acute attention to detail and surfaces. Hegel recognized this effervescent attention to detail, realizing that it was born from a desire to pictorially articulate a vision defined by political and economic freedom for the citizens who belonged within that world, to the exclusion of others.

While there has been attention to the brushwork that achieved particular qualities of Dutch painting and its surfaces, these effects are mostly accomplished in a pictorial tradition celebrated as a direct portrait of an emergent middle-class life, founded on an urban culture dedicated to civic virtue, tolerance, and a celebration of republicanism (as opposed to monarchy). Nineteenth-century French critic Eugène Fromentin described the Dutch Republic as "a nation of burghers, practical, unimaginative, busy, not in the least mystical, of anti-Latin mind, with traditions destroyed, with a workshop without images, and parsimonious habits, to find an art which should please it, that should seize its conventionalities, and represent it."[37] While scholars could challenge the broad characterization, Dutch painters did forge a visual vocabulary for a class of collectors that was neither clergy nor aristocracy. Moreover, the dominance of an art market driven by the wealth of merchants frames a history of painting created in tandem with an economy built from global economic expansion. As Fromentin wrote, Dutch painting is the "portrait of Holland, its exterior image, faithful, exact, complete, and like, with no embellishment."[38] Although one might dismiss Fromentin's characterization nearly two centuries later, this trope of the "faithful" image that reflects the world persists. Interpretations of Dutch painting have been caught between taking pleasure in the quality of the painting—the brushwork, the surface, the effect—and arguing that these are paintings about everyday life, the interior self, the quotidian delight in light falling through a window. They are paintings about the pleasure of art.[39]

One of the most formative historical engagements of this transcriptional, photographic-like quality to Dutch painting remains Svetlana Alpers's *The Art of Describing*, which moves the discipline away from tired methods of iconography and hidden symbolism. Alpers likened the canvas to the surface of the eye's retina, drawing a parallel between Dutch picturing practices and seventeenth-century concepts of vision and optics, explicating a quality of this particular school of painting that has struck viewers since Fromentin: the appearance of a direct reflection, unmediated by author, hand, viewer. Her scholarship reinforces a sense that this history of

picturing presents the world as though passively, as though fragmented, as though a momentary reflection of the eye, suggesting that the view of the world is an immediate unmediated picture.[40]

The assumptions around an immediately evident form of picture making have reinforced a pictorial practice in which the emergent plantation economies were erased from the historical record, so that art historians for generations abdicated an engagement with enslavement and its role in the rise of a modern global economy. Until recently, little attention has been paid to this textual discourse in art history, for the attention to the picture-plane-as-surface has created a tradition around the coextensive relationship between text and image, so that, as Louis Marin summarized in regard to Dutch painting, "the picture is thus a surface of description that is exactly co-extensive with and perfectly transparent to the descriptive discourse that utters it and which it exhausts in a smooth 'tautology' between image and language."[41] Yet the accounts of the rise of the transatlantic slave trade in records, inventories, and inscriptions, when read beside the pictorial tradition, disrupt this smooth surface, introducing a textual history that reveals the epistemic dangers of reinforcing a reading of the canvas as a direct, passive, unmediated reflection of the world.

In Julie Hochstrasser's account of Dutch still-life painting and the impact of slavery, sugar, and plantations on artists, she writes: "What is to be seen of the grisly realities of sugar production in all of the images of seventeenth-century Dutch art? Precisely nothing."[42] Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz argue that in the long eighteenth century, "these cataclysmic events [the Middle Passage] became almost invisible and virtually unrepresentable (completely so within the formal structures of many artistic genres) for western modernity."[43] Other scholars agree with Jean Michel Massing's assessment that there was no depiction of "the excesses and cruelty of slavery and, more generally, social inequalities," because they "were hardly ever the subject of any painting before the anti-slavery imagery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."[44]

Philip describes how the narrative unfolds in the "space where it's not told—literally in the margins of the text, a sort of negative space, a space not so much of non-meaning as anti-meaning."[45] Philip literalizes this in her visual juxtaposition between words placed in configurations across the pages, drawing attention to the ellipses, empty space, ground, and the construction of the paper book itself as support. Drawing on Philip's account of the negative space as holding meaning, this book examines visual histories that might be considered void of content, particularly regarding

the history of the transatlantic slave trade: sea surfaces disturbed only by wind, coastal profiles against blank sea and sky, canvas grounds, marble slabs, armor, and blue skies. In these sites, which scholars have often described as "pictorial," "pleasant," and "beautiful," I consider how the specter of the plantation economy in the Americas overflows into these nondescript spaces, surfaces that seem to offer little more than a reflection of a still world.

As a visual corollary to Philip's engagement with the space of the paper and its capacity to gather meaning within negative space, there is a seventeenth-century drawing by the artist Gesina ter Borch, in which the paper enigmatically palpitates with a presence that surrounds her drawing of two Black children, who face each other (plate 2).[46] One child sits in a chair while the other stands, looking directly at each other. They are both barefoot, and the standing figure casts a shadow, while the seated child's chair is attended to with great specificity, outlining the simple woodwork carving and a leather seat. This chair and its detailed execution draws attention to the strangeness of the composition, as the child sits on an object from an interior scene in a drawing devoid of interior. Typically, Gesina ter Borch delighted in placing her figural subjects within domestic spaces, often attending as closely to the surrounding details of home as to the figures themselves. Yet in this rendition of two children, she pictures a chair—suggesting an interior scene—while leaving the children perpetually placed outside a domicile. Instead, the empty space of the paper becomes the ground, walls, and landscape, so that they arrive here in the realm of representation devoid of any context beyond a European chair, typical seventeenth-century Dutch clothing, and bare feet.

The only other context provided is a date, September 11, 1654, and the scrawled words *nae 't leven*—indicating that she drew this picture after life. *Nae 't leven* could be used in the context of the artist's studio, to indicate drawing the human figure (often nude) after life, or in the context of botanical or zoological illustration. In using this terminology, Ter Borch places these children within the context of natural history illustration, the foreign oddity that she witnessed. The empty paper speaks to the children's domestic spaces and interiors left unpictured by Ter Borch. The lives of the two children become reduced to the empty space of the paper, across which one boy casts his shadow, giving this nonfigurative realm weight. Obliquely, the paper's ground makes present that the domestic space for the children is absent, as they stand and sit in their bare feet, facing each other across a divide. Unlike the intimacy between the two men of African

descent that Rembrandt captured in his painting, these two children are denied a clear relationality. The caricaturized representation of their facial features suggests that Ter Borch struggled to delineate one child from the other, so that the difference between two selves is demarcated by their clothing. Yet the lack of distinction between their facial features almost suggests that it is one child, doubled and reimagined in another pose and another outfit. The children are therefore posited as infinitely replicable, models to be copied and inserted into other works—like studies of botanical and zoological specimens to be integrated into later paintings and landscapes. The empty white paper represents Ter Borch's inability and lack of desire to imagine these two children as part of a domestic space. The empty white paper surrounding the children demonstrates strategies of representation that made it possible to deny citizenship and belonging, and it is precisely this white space of the page, which has so often been a space of refusal, denial, and occlusion, that Philip transforms into a world for gathering, commingling, and remembering.

Dutchness

This book adheres to a tradition of "Dutch" painting, which is also a construct. For example, Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717), who is the focus of the fourth chapter, is technically a German-born artist, although her life was informed by living in the Dutch Republic and its colonies. This was also a period in which citizenship was more closely bound to local urban identities—Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden—rather than to the Dutch Republic itself.[47] Moreover, as many scholars have argued, and as discussed in greater depth throughout the book, the Atlantic economy defies national narratives.[48] Although the Dutch were often at war with the Spanish and English (among others), they also depended on them for economic prosperity. The interconnections among the Portuguese planters in Brazil and the Sephardic communities in Amsterdam are central to this history. Not to mention that the crews on ships sailing under the flag of the Dutch Republic were often manned by a migrant labor force of sailors, fishermen, and dockworkers coming from the Baltic and Germanic states, France, Africa, and elsewhere.[49]

Nevertheless, the *idea* of a school of Dutch painting and its persistent mythos in museums, curatorial hires, and surveys of European art have created a tradition associated with a small country built from the sea, which

economically dominated the world in the seventeenth century. A specific intellectual history formed in the Dutch Republic around citizenship, Republicanism, virtue, and freedom from Spanish tyranny that is central to the specificity of the transatlantic slave trade's development and its impact on Dutch visual culture.[50] The merchants in the Dutch Republic built on an economic system forged by Italian, Portuguese, and Genoese bankers that would culminate in the British Industrial Revolution. Intrinsic to this historical moment is the work of painters, such as Rembrandt van Rijn, whose work must be understood in the context of a new economic system that formed ideas of property, self, and the right to property-of-the-self, which would ultimately become intrinsic to ideologies of whiteness.

The first chapter engages with the rise of an art market built on financial speculation. In the economic boom of seventeenth-century Amsterdam, artists participated in one of the first open art markets, driven by middle-class consumption as opposed to patronage from church and state. Scholars are only beginning to consider, however, how the Dutch economic miracle was inseparable from the rise of the transatlantic slave trade. Examining the works of Hercules Segers (1589–1638) and Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69), I assert that this emergent world of financial speculation founded on enslaved labor haunts their work. In turn, the rise of the artists' conception of self and property, as often discussed in the products of Rembrandt's workshop, cannot be separated from the simultaneous development of the trade in humans as chattel property.

The second chapter examines the Atlantic crossing, shifting perspectives, and what it means to think about the archive of slavery beside the visual record. Engaging with the famous paintings of Frans Post (1612–80), this chapter explores both his coastal studies of salt mining in the Cape Verde islands and his depiction of the Brazilian sugar plantations in relation to the account books, inventories, and written records that traveled beside his pictorial record. Typically, his work is described as scientific, atmospheric, observational, and beautiful. Yet an extensive archive of texts that traveled beside these pictorial accounts recounts the violence of enslavement. By examining the textual accounts of the emergent slave trade beside the pictorial record produced by Post, this chapter demonstrates how painters struggled with translating the reduction of human life into an abstraction of property and value, a transformation at the heart of Dutch picturing.

The third chapter considers the rise of the Dutch maritime monument within the empty whitewashed interiors of the Reformed Church.

In seventeenth-century texts, there are two scenes of oceanic space. One is a material history of the ocean dominated by the enslaved and Indigenous divers, whose bodies became crucial to natural philosophers' understanding of water, air, pressure, gas, and the corporeal system, thereby existing at a crux of discourses exploring the physicality of oceanic ecospheres and their depths. The other discourse describes the ocean as an immaterial site of erasure and oblivion, a surface—or highway—for trade, in the legal writings of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), and the rise of international law. This chapter juxtaposes these two histories to demonstrate how an urban ideal of citizenship was built from creating a monumental visual language dedicated to Dutch naval heroes, a phenomenon that structured ideas of citizenship and noncitizenship so that the Dutch naval monument built in the empty space of Reformed churches formed a particular view of the ocean as a no-place space devoid of history.

The fourth chapter examines Maria Sibylla Merian, a female naturalist who traveled to Suriname to study local plants and insects, who recounts in a study of the peacock flower that Indigenous and enslaved women used the specimen to perform abortions, as they did not want their children born into slavery. This chapter confronts Merian's celebration as a female pioneer in art history while examining her inextricable role in the plantation economy of Suriname. Merian's study of plants and insects is dedicated to generation, but scholars have yet to consider how the fascination with insect reproduction in seventeenth-century natural history and visual culture occurred in tandem with a series of crises around human reproduction in the Americas. Merian's illustrations and text engage with a crisis in domestic interiors in the plantation.

While the majority of these chapters engage with crises in figuration, the final chapter turns to a specific moment in the history of Dutch art and its historiography, namely Rembrandt's picturing of a young Black man at the beheading of John the Baptist. This man, although overlooked in the historiography on Alois Riegl, was central to his articulation of attention, subordination, and Dutch group portraiture. Riegl's engagement with the child demonstrates the centrality of state violence to the emergence of the modern inward self. While this historiographic turn has been fundamentally ignored by art historians, it was central to Derek Walcott in his final poem, *The Prodigal*, in which Rembrandt's *Syndics of the Drapers' Guild* and Riegl's reading of it are the cornerstones by which Walcott examines the history of Dutch painting and its realization and undoing through its relationships to the Caribbean, the plantation economy, and the trans-

atlantic slave trade. In conclusion, this book examines the ground and the texts surrounding Dutch painting and its mythological foundations, and the ways in which these mythologies continue today in our understanding of capitalism, global trade, the art market, and figuration. These micro-histories unfold in the space between, the words unspoken, the paintings left unpainted. In the words of Lucille Clifton, this book is about an other poem.

NOTES

Introduction. Transubstantiation across Atlantic Worlds

1 "Rolfe to Sandys, January 1619/20," in Kingsbury, *Records of the Virginia Company*, 243. Discussed in Sluiter, "New Light on the 20," 395–98. As the fundamental 1619 Project demarcates, this was the beginning of slavery in North America; Hannah-Jones, "Idea of America," 16.

2 Van der Valk, "De eerste Afrikaanse Amerikanen." The document granting the right to privateer (raid enemy ships) is in the Zeeuwse Admiraliteit in the National Archives, The Hague, and was issued to Johan de Moor, a merchant based in Zeeland who contracted with English ships. Archieven van der Admiraliteitscolleges (nr. Toegang 1.01.46) inv. nr. 2425, Dutch National Archives, The Hague. On the arrival of the *White Lion* and the start of enslaved labor in the Chesapeake, see also Walsh, *Motives of Honor*, 113–19; and Thornton, "African Experience of the '20 and Odd Negroes,'" 421–34.

3 For the best overview of the Dutch Atlantic historiography, see Rivera, "Whitewashing the Dutch Atlantic." See also Games, "Conclusion"; and Lyon and Fowler, "Revision and Reckoning."

4 Clifton, "surely i am able to write poems," in *Mercy*, 23.

5 Stephen Best articulates the precarity of race in this period and its relationship to slavery; see "On Failing." Jennifer L. Morgan also explores the uncertain development of race in the Atlantic world in the mid-seventeenth century; see *Reckoning with Slavery*. On the historicization of race in the early modern world, see Rubiés, "Were Early Modern Europeans Racist?" Blakely also attends to the complicated definitions of race across the various Dutch empires; Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World*, 31–38. In the context of the French Enlightenment and the relationship between the visual arts and race, see Lafont, *L'Art et la race*.

6 Kate Lowe also describes a "perceived invisibility" of the Black African presence in Renaissance art, arguing that it is a production of colonialism and nationalism instead of a material absence, also noting that "far from being genuinely invisible, the traces of these fifteenth- and sixteenth-

century black Africans can be found in almost every type of record: documentary, textual and visual; secular and ecclesiastical; Northern and Southern European, factual and fictional"; Lowe, "Black African Presence," 3.

7 Brienen, "Albert Eckhout's 'African Woman and Child'"; Van den Boogaart, "Black Slavery and the 'Mulatto Escape Hatch'"; Daum, "Das Privileg des Blicks"; Massing, "Albert Eckhout, Frans Post"; Massing, "From Dutch Brazil"; Massing, *Image of the Black*," 143–82; Sutton, "Bittersweet"; Brienen, "Embodying Race and Pleasure."

8 The literature is vast. Allison Blakely wrote one of the first sustained and ongoing influential works on the entanglements between seventeenth-century Dutch art and the slave trade; *Blacks in the Dutch World*. More recently, an explosion of literature has grappled with the visual legacy of the transatlantic slave trade in Dutch history and culture. In particular, the Rijksmuseum mounted an exhibition with an accompanying catalog; Sint Nicolaas et al., *Slavery*. See also Van der Ham, *Tarnished Gold*; and Daalder, Tang, and Balai, *Slaven en schepen*.

9 James, "What Will Blackness Be?"

10 Blakely, "Black Presence in the Dutch World," in *Blacks in the Dutch World*, 225–74. Rembrandt's portrait of the two young men plays a central role in Gikandi's introduction to *Slavery and the Culture*, 1–3, in which he contrasts the portrait study with the simultaneous dehumanization of Black lives through the rise of the slave trade. On the Afro-Dutch community in Amsterdam, see Ponte, "Black in Amsterdam around 1650"; and Hondius, "Black Africans in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam."

11 In Titus Kaphar's TED Talk, "Can Art Amend History?," he discusses "shifting the gaze" to acknowledge the presence of Blackness in early modern painting, focusing on a Frans Hals family portrait.

12 Brathwaite, *Rediscovering Black Portraiture*, 10. Cheryl Finley also discusses work by contemporary artists engaging with this archive as "mnemonic aesthetics"; Finley, *Committed to Memory*; Finley, "Encore"; Peter Erickson, "Invisibility Speaks."

13 Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*.

14 For reasons of scale, this book focuses on the transatlantic slave trade, although the slave trade was also formative and integral to the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company) in Asia, a field that deserves much further study. Vink, "World's Oldest Trade."

15 For a broad overview, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*; and Elwood, *Broken Body*.

16 Nadler, "Arnauld, Descartes, and Transubstantiation."

17 Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 347. For an overview of various understandings of presence and absence in the sixteenth century, see Wandel, "Fragmentation and Presence."

18 Nimako and Willemsen, *Dutch Atlantic*, 14.

19 One of the best overviews of Dutch painting remains Westermann, *Worldly Art*. For an important series of essays engaging with the term *realism* and Dutch painting, see Franits, *Looking at Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art*.

20 Cedric Robinson cites the "Genoese Bourgeoisie" as the first to realize the economic value of the transatlantic trade; Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 103–9. See also Eric Eustace Williams on the intertangled histories of capitalism and slavery; *Capitalism and Slavery*. For an overview of a reception of Williams's work, see Robinson, "Capitalism, Slavery, and Bourgeois Historiography."

21 Marx, *Capital*, 70.

22 Philip, *Zong!*, 196.

23 Gilroy, *Black Britain*, 21. Also cited in Balkenhol, "Canonizing De Kom," 64.

24 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 50.

25 Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture*, 1–3.

26 Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*.

27 On November 29, 1781, fifty-four individuals were killed; on December 1, forty-two were murdered, and later in December twenty-six were murdered. After these killings, ten individuals threw themselves overboard and committed suicide rather than be murdered. See Burnard, "New Look at the *Zong*."

28 Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 62.

29 The Westindische Compagnie (WIC, or Dutch West India Company) did not insure their enslaved, but the business was profitable for private corporations, such as the Middelburgsche Commercie Compagnie (MCC), and illegal traders. See Van Niekerk, *Development of the Principles*; da Silva, *Dutch and Portuguese*; and Go, *Marine Insurance in the Netherlands*.

30 Leo Balai, *Slavenschip Leusden*.

31 Lurvink, "Insurance of Mass Murder," 226.

32 Bradley and Marassa, "Awakening to the World," 126.

33 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1:169.

34 This quality of Dutch painting—its shine and surface, and its production during a period of defining political freedom—continues to influence art history outside the subdiscipline of seventeenth-century Dutch painting. For example, Krista Thompson discusses Dutch painting, its "surfacism" and translation of objects into commodities through an attention to surface, in her work on shine and surface aesthetics in hip-hop; Thompson, "Sound of Light."

35 Tavares, "Hegel, critique de l'Afrique"; Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*; Joseph, "'Haitian Turn.'"

36 Stedman, *Narrative*.

37 Fromentin, *Old Masters*, 131.

38 Fromentin, *Old Masters*, 132.

39 There is also an important body of scholarship on the ambiguity of Dutch

genre painting and the genre's role in the daily political life of the emerging republic. See Helgerson, "Soldiers and Enigmatic Girls," in *Adulterous Alliances*, 79–119.

40 Alpers, *Art of Describing*, 122. The complexity of Alpers's argument has often been simplified, although it is deeply indebted to narrative theories and the work of Ann Bancroft, as best explicated in Louis Marin's review, "In Praise of Appearance." Other important reviews include Grafton and Kaufmann, "Holland without Huizinga"; and Westermann, "Svetlana Alpers's 'The Art of Describing.'"

41 Marin, "In Praise of Appearance," 108.

42 Hochstrasser, *Still Life and Trade*, 200.

43 Quilley and Kriz, *Economy of Colour*, 2.

44 Massing, "Albert Eckhout, Frans Post," 171.

45 Philip, *Zong!*, 201.

46 Kettering, *Drawings from the Ter Borch*, 62.

47 Prak, "Burghers, Citizens, and Popular Politics."

48 For the best overview of the Dutch Atlantic historiography, see Rivera, "Whitewashing the Dutch Atlantic"; and Games, "Conclusion."

49 Van Lottum and Lucassen, "Six Cross Sections"; Van Lottum, "Labour Migration and Economic Performance"; Van Rossum et al., "National and International Labour Markets."

50 For an overview of the importance of martial ideas of virtue as central to Dutch artistic practice, see Brusati, "Pictura's Excellent Trophies."

Chapter 1. Art Markets and Futures Speculation

1 For a brief overview of this literature, see Falkenberg and Westermann, introduction. The work of John Michael Montias remains invaluable in this regard; see Montias, "Cost and Value"; Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft*; and De Marchi and Van Miegroet, "Art, Value, and Market Practices."

2 Prak, "Golden Age."

3 For the most recent estimates, see Fatah-Black and Van Rossum, "Beyond Profitability." For a consideration of the economic impact in terms of local trades in the Netherlands and the economy of fitting out the slave ships, see de Kok, "Cursed Capital." Scholars have studied, in particular, the impact of the marine insurance industry in Amsterdam. See Lurvink, "Insurance of Mass Murder."

4 M. 't Hart, "Merits of a Financial Revolution"; Barbour, *Capitalism in Amsterdam*; Lesger, *Rise of the Amsterdam Market*; Horst, "De peperhandel van de Vereenigde"; Prakash, *Dutch East India Company*; Steensgaard, *Asian Trade Revolution*.

5 Ufer, "Imagining Social Change."