

Press release

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African servants at Court in The Hague: an enthralling unknown story

In its exhibition *African servants at Court in The Hague* later this year, the Historical Museum of The Hague will showcase the lives of the black children Cupido and Sideron. Originally from Curaçao and Guinea, as boys in slavery they were presented to stadholder William V as a gift. They went on to spend much of their lives as well-paid servants at the Court in The Hague. Whereas exhibitions about court life generally omit references to servants with a non-European background, this exhibition specifically focuses on servants of African descent. By doing so, the Historical Museum of The Hague is highlighting an aspect of Dutch history that remains relatively unknown. The exhibition will run from 21 September 2017 until 28 January 2018.

The museum places the story of Cupido and Sideron within the long tradition of African servants in European Royal courts. For example, the exhibition tells the story of Jean Rabo (c. 1714 – 1769), valet to stadholder William IV. Paintings, drawings, prints and documents are used to relate the story of Cupido and Sideron. What do we know about these two African men? What role did they play as servants? Were there any other black servants? The exhibition features major exhibits from the British Royal Collection, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum and the Cultural Heritage Agency (*Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed*). Writer and art historian Esther Schreuder is the guest curator, a role she previously held for the exhibition *Black is beautiful. Rubens to Dumas* in the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam (2008).

With *African Servants at Court in The Hague*, the Historical Museum of The Hague is highlighting a shared Dutch history. In developing the exhibition, the museum is collaborating closely with the Cultural Heritage Network of migrant organisations in The Hague (*Netwerk Erfgoed Haagse Migranten*). Director Marco van Baalen: "The Netherlands' history of slavery has featured increasingly in the news in recent years, but there has so far been little attention paid to black people in the Netherlands in the 17th and 18th centuries. Our aim with this exhibition is to highlight that shared history from a new perspective". The museum has previously developed a city walk on the subject of The Hague and slavery, as well as exhibitions on diversity in The Hague, including *Verbreek de ketenen/Break the Chains* (2013) and *De wereld in Den Haag/The World in The Hague* (2014).

In the exhibition and additional programming, the museum explicitly intends to broach contemporary discussions about the history of slavery and racism. Especially for the exhibition, artist Tirzo Martha (1965) from Curaçao will create an installation in which he gives his personal interpretation of the story of Cupido and Sideron.

To coincide with the exhibition, Balans Publishing House will issue the publication 'Cupido en Sideron Twee Moren aan het hof van Oranje' (Cupido and Sideron – Two Moors at the Court of Orange) by Esther Schreuder.