

Marsely Kehoe, *Trade, Globalization, and Dutch Art and Architecture: Interrogating Dutchness and the Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023, 244 pp., ISBN 9789463723633).

Over the past two decades, scholarship on the Dutch ‘Golden Age’ has increasingly questioned the celebratory and nationally bounded narratives that once dominated the field. Works such as Julie Hochstrasser’s *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age* (2007), and edited collections such as *Globalizing Netherlandish Art* (2021) and Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello’s *The Global Lives of Things* (2016) have foregrounded the profound impact of global trade, colonialism, and cross-cultural exchanges on Dutch art and material culture. Marsely Kehoe’s *Trade, Globalization, and Dutch Art and Architecture: Interrogating Dutchness and the Golden Age*, a scholarly monograph positioned within a global and critical art historical framework, adds to these historiographical and decolonial efforts.

In this work, Kehoe addresses the complexities and contested nature of the Dutch ‘Golden Age’, both in the past and in the present. She argues that this period was not simply a time of national cultural flourishing, but rather one of global expansion characterised by extensive trade, colonisation, and cultural exchange. Over time, the more challenging aspects of this global history have been deliberately forgotten, she argues. Kehoe reflects on the malleability of the concept of a Golden Age, suggesting that the ‘gold’ and ‘shine’ – while seemingly permanent – have in fact been polished regularly throughout Dutch history (18). Her aim is to increase the visibility of these ‘tarnished’ moments to reveal the power imbalances, the enslavement of people, and deceit that tainted this period.

Kehoe uses the term ‘Dutching’ as a guiding framework for understanding the Dutch Republic’s global reach – a process she defines as moving ‘from not-Dutch to more-Dutch’ (19–20). She views Dutching as continuous yet unstable, reflecting the colonial and expansionist activities pursued by the Dutch Republic beyond Europe. This book is organised into an introduction, four chapters each focused on a distinct case study, and a conclusion. Rather than a continuous historical narrative, the first two chapters explore key seventeenth-century developments shaping Dutch mercantile power and narrative, while the latter two examine the Golden Age’s legacy from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries and into recent times, highlighting recurring moments when its history was ‘polished’ to serve contemporaneous needs and agendas.

In chapters 2 and 3, Kehoe explores the internal dynamics of Dutching within the Republic itself, focusing on the influence of imported foreign goods and raw materials on domestic aspirations and artistic developments. Chapter 2 highlights the nautilus cup – an exotic shell set in elaborate Dutch silverwork – as emblematic of Dutch global trade ambitions. A prized collector's item during this period, Kehoe argues that the cup embodies a deeper tension: the natural, exotic shell as representing the vast and uncontrolled wealth of foreign lands, while the elaborate silver mounting imposes control and order, transforming this raw bounty into a refined object reflecting Dutch power and prestige. This physical tension in the cup mirrors the tension and contradiction present between Dutch ideals of free trade and mercantilist efforts to restrict and monopolise economic access from other economic rivals.

In contrast, chapter 3 examines the increasing anxiety stemming from the Dutch Republic's waning dominance in global trade. Kehoe discusses the presence of pepper in *pronkstilleven* (still-life) paintings as a symbol of Dutch wealth and trade, and its cultural and economic importance as a luxury good. She connects the visual prominence of pepper in these paintings to the archival cargo lists and price data, which demonstrates the gradual decline in Dutch East India Company's (voc) profits in spice trade towards the end of the seventeenth century. This juxtaposition underscores how pepper's artistic depiction as a luxury starkly contradicted its diminishing economic value while signaling deeper anxieties about the Republic's weakening commercial power.

Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus to cities in former Dutch colonies, namely Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) and the city of Willemstad in Curaçao. These chapters showcase the architectural manifestations of Dutching in urban planning and historical colonial buildings. In chapter 4, Kehoe discusses how the city plan of Dutch Batavia served as a colonial strategy for control not only over the local population, but also over a growing Dutch community, whose economic and political influence required regulation to maintain colonial order. She argues that while Batavia's layout appeared to follow the ideal Dutch city plan designed by the mathematician Simon Stevin – which focused on clear order and functional public spaces – the real design was stricter and more hierarchical to reinforce colonial authority and social stratification. This hidden hierarchy contradicted the perceived Dutch values of egalitarianism, concealing the segregation of Batavia's diverse population into ethnic quarters and the voc's attempts at regulating the outward displays of status and ranks amongst Dutch Batavians. Chapter 5 reflects on how Curaçao's architectural heritage informs its contemporary identity, especially in its tourism sector. Here, the process of Dutching led to the trend gravitating towards a 'Dutch Golden Age' aesthetic in its townhouses. According to Kehoe, this shift threatens to erase the city's complex multicultural past,

including the contributions of Iberian Jews, the uniquely Curaçaoan colourful aesthetics, and the labour of enslaved Africans who built these structures.

Throughout the book, Kehoe successfully applies Dutching as a concept to describe how objects, practices, and identities became increasingly ‘more Dutch’ (168). Each chapter showcases how the Dutch struggled politically, economically, or socially in maintaining the façade of a successful empire by making things Dutch or by embracing the supposedly Dutch ideals. While this framework aids analysis, it risks imposing a modern perspective on the past, as early modern period actors likely did not perceive their actions as part of a unified, self-aware effort to become ‘more Dutch’ (20). Although not inherently problematic, as many historical concepts are analytical constructs developed retrospectively to make sense of past phenomena, critical reflection requires an awareness that processes such as Dutching did not constitute a coherent national movement. Rather, they involved diverse, fluid, and transnational interactions that contemporaries may not have consciously understood as deliberate nation-building. Deeper research into the Dutch archives could perhaps reveal a more historically accurate term that describes the processes in the early modern period.

Although comprehensive, the book could further benefit from more detailed narratives of the exploitative practices of the *voc* and the Dutch West India Company (*wic*), as well as the experiences of indigenous and enslaved labourers. These stories would have vividly revealed the ‘tarnished’, often suppressed realities behind the wealth and cultural achievements of the Dutch ‘Golden Age’. Kehoe anticipates this challenge in her introduction, acknowledging the difficulty of addressing such a vast and complex history in a single-author monograph. Importantly, she critically reflects on her positionality as a ‘white American cis-het woman’ (22), recognising how this background shapes the scope and perspective of her work. This reflexivity, as highlighted by Kehoe, perhaps helps to explain why some narratives remain underexplored while opening important space for future scholarship to engage more fully with these difficult histories.

Overall, Kehoe’s work succeeds admirably in depicting how the bright and shiny ‘gold’ of the Dutch Golden Age has been repeatedly polished – both historically and historiographically – concealing its tarnished and less desirable aspects. This book also serves as a great introduction for students of Netherlandish art and material culture to examine the production and legacy of the Dutch ‘Golden Age’ in its broader global and imperial context.

Nur’Ain Taha, Utrecht University