



# Middlebury College

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Dear Alumni Students,

I am so looking forward to meeting you all in August at Bread Loaf! In this course, we will discuss one of my favorite topics, Dutch art in a global context, which combines my broad area of specialization (17th-century Dutch art) with my more focused research interests (global trade, diplomatic gift-giving, and intercultural exchange). This is a rapidly developing subfield, so I have taught many iterations of this material—and it is always a thrill!

From the late 16th to the early 18th century, the young Dutch Republic yielded great profits from trade in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Europe. This influx of money resulted in an artistic and cultural flourishing that is often referred to as the “golden age” of the Netherlands, although—as we will discuss—it was by no means “golden” for everyone. The frequent arrival of East and West India Company ships in Dutch harbors meant access to a staggering array of global commodities, including Chinese porcelain, textiles from around the world, sugar, tobacco, ivory, gold, and other luxuries. Artists were inspired by these new materials, incorporating them into still lifes, history paintings, and portraits, where they became signifiers of luxury and worldliness, among other things. But it wasn’t just commodities that circulated—people were moving, too. Company employees, merchants, artists, and scientists travelled the globe recording what they saw in illustrated travel books, paintings, and personal journals, many of which we will examine. Of course, not everyone moved by choice: thousands of inhabitants of the Bay of Bengal and the West Coast of Africa were forced into slavery by the East and West India Companies and violently separated from their homes and families. In this course, we will consider how the circulation of people and commodities shaped artistic production in the so-called golden age of the Dutch Republic. We will also discuss recent museum exhibitions at the Mauritshuis, Rembrandthuis, and Rijksmuseum, which have tried to come to terms with the darker sides of the Dutch colonial past.

To prepare for this course, I’d like you to read **Mariët Westermann’s *A Worldly Art: The Dutch Republic, 1585–1718***, which was just reprinted and is widely available. This text does a wonderful job of introducing many of the themes discussed above, which we will consider at greater length in class. You might also be interested in watching these short videos introducing the current exhibition at the Rijksmuseum called *Slavery*: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/stories/slavery>.

Until August!

Sincerely,  
Carrie