Behind the Silver Platters of the Dutch Golden Age

The wild profits of 17th-century Dutch trade are lusciously represented in still-life paintings of the time—but their alluring surfaces elide the true social costs of that prosperity. As such they reveal much about dynamics of early modern global trade to which we are still heir today.

Monday, May 12, 2008
6:30 p.m
75 Alta Road, Stanford

Reception to follow
Free and open to the public
Seating is limited—please RSVP

For a brief period in the seventeenth century, the tiny Dutch Republic ruled the seas in what was truly a global trade network. During this, their Golden Age, Dutch painters figured forth the fruits of this worldwide commerce in dazzling still lifes of the laid table that constituted a new genre of painting within European art.

Emerging just at this significant moment in the development of consumer society, these pictures served up the new luxury commodities on silver platters, as luscious in their facture as the real products were costly to acquire. Yet investigation into the trade histories of these various commodities reveals that these elegant representations gloss over a darker tale, of the true social costs of the Dutch Golden Age.

JULIE HOCHSTRASSER is an Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Iowa. She received her BA with Distinction in the History of Art from Swarthmore College, an MA in Renaissance and PhD in Baroque (specializing in Dutch painting) from the University of California, Berkeley.

Professor Hochstrasser’s teaching addresses history and techniques of Dutch and Flemish painting, history of the print, and global issues in visual culture with special regard to Dutch colonial history. She is the author of Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age (Yale University Press, 2007), and wide-ranging essays on Dutch still life, landscape, and the influence of Dutch visual culture throughout the world.

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