

Wisselkoers

*Exchange Rate of Memory, Trade,
Technology and the Invisible*

Introduction to the sculptural work in the
garden of the Frans Hals Museum
by Anne de Vries

In the garden of the Frans Hals Museum, two bronze figures meet across different historical and imagined worlds. One is based on a figure from *The Meagre Company* (1633–1637) by Frans Hals, completed by Pieter Codde. His white collar, posture and theatrical bearing draw on the visual conventions of seventeenth-century civic militia portraiture, through which members of the urban elite of the Dutch Republic presented themselves and their social position.

The second figure is a hybrid body, part human and part machine, constructed from references to historical imagery, speculative fiction and contemporary

visual culture. Its exaggerated proportions, armour-like elements and hybrid anatomy draw on the hyper-stylised aesthetics of fantasy, video games, anime and other forms of popular and subcultural image culture. These references are combined with fragments of historical material and visual culture, bringing different sources and temporalities together in a single body.

Both figures are cast in bronze, while their clothing is painted onto the metal to imitate textiles. The figures are simultaneously objects and images, combining the physical presence of the monument with the constructed nature of representation.

The Dutch title *Wisselkoers* refers to the ways in which value is assigned, transferred and transformed. This includes economic value, but also cultural value, historical memory and visibility. Seventeenth-century civic militia portraits

were more than representations of individual sitters. They were forms of public self-representation through which the urban elite constructed and displayed collective identity. Clothing, gesture, weapons and composition all contributed to this visual language of status and civic belonging.

This culture of representation was connected to the wider economic and political structures of the Dutch Republic. Trade, shipping and colonial expansion created extensive networks connecting Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas. Goods, raw materials, textiles and spices circulated through these networks alongside people, knowledge and images. Indian textiles, including gingham and other cotton fabrics, had already circulated extensively through established Indian Ocean trade networks before European trading companies entered these markets. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch East India Company

became an important participant in this trade, acquiring Indian textiles both for exchange within Asia and for European markets. The fabrics therefore moved through multiple systems of production, trade and consumption, acquiring new meanings and uses as they travelled. Textiles could carry meanings beyond their economic value.

The ways fabrics were worn, adapted and combined could express social position, cultural identity and belonging. Under conditions of displacement, enslavement and colonial rule, clothing and patterns could also become ways of maintaining cultural memory and identity. Many of these histories remain outside the canonical imagery of seventeenth-century Dutch art. The absence of particular people and histories from these images is itself part of the history of representation.

The post-human figure approaches this from another temporal direction. Its body

combines historical fragments with the visual language of contemporary fiction, video games, anime, and other forms of popular image culture. Its armour, anatomy and costume draw on the way historical cultures, ancient civilizations, mythologies and systems of dress are repeatedly reimagined within contemporary entertainment. In games and cinema, historical references are detached from their original contexts and recombined into new characters, worlds and narratives. Complex cultures can become visual shorthand for a particular kind of hero, warrior, villain or imagined civilization.

This process can be reductive, particularly when living cultures are transformed into aesthetic material without attention to their histories or contemporary realities. At the same time, it reveals something important about the way images survive. Historical forms do not simply disappear. They are continually picked up, altered and given

new meanings as they move between cultures, media and technologies.

The post-human figure takes this process as its own material. It is an anachronistic entity assembled from historical references and projected into the future through contemporary image culture. It does not represent a particular ancient culture or historical identity. Instead, it embodies the way fragments of the past are continually reconstructed into new fictional identities. In this sense, the figure is both a product of and a reflection on contemporary image-making. The same visual mechanisms that turn historical and cultural references into heroes, villains, warriors and fantasy characters also shape how we imagine the future. Digital media has made this process increasingly visible and increasingly accelerated. Images circulate, detach themselves from their original contexts, acquire new associations and return in altered forms.

The two figures are therefore not simply representatives of past and future. Both are constructed through systems of representation. The figure derived from Hals was itself created within a highly codified system of portraiture and civic identity, positioning its subjects as the protagonists of their own historical moment. The post-human figure, by contrast, is assembled from a much wider and fragmented contemporary visual culture. Their encounter brings these different systems of image-making into the same physical space.

One figure carries the visual language of seventeenth-century civic representation; the other carries the accumulated and constantly mutating imagery of fantasy, games, anime, cinema and digital culture. Between them, history is neither preserved unchanged nor simply forgotten. It is transformed, recirculated and given new bodies.

Placed in the garden of the Frans Hals Museum, the sculptures bring these different temporalities and systems of representation together. Wisselkoers considers how images determine what becomes visible, how cultural memory is transferred, and how historical references acquire new values as they move into different forms and futures.