As paisagens imaginárias de Frans Post

The Imaginary Landscapes of Frans Post

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RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é investigar o elemento da imaginação nas paisagens exóticas de Frans Post. Através de pinturas extravagantes concluídas no século XVII, Post informou os europeus sobre o Brasil. Durante a sua estada no Brasil, observou e esboçou a sua natureza, flora e fauna, pessoas e assentamentos dos Países Baixos. Post pintou suas paisagens sobre a Comissão de Johan Maurits, outros nobres e membros da burguesia, que estavam conectados com o WIC e novos clientes cativados por paisagens exóticas de acordo com seus desejos. Post utilizado os elementos realistas em suas pinturas imaginárias da tradição da arte dos Países Baixos.

Palavras-chave: Frans Post, imaginação, pintura de paisagem holandesa.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate the element of imagination in the exotic landscapes of Frans Post. Through fancy paintings completed in the seventeenth century, Post informed Europeans about Brazil. During his stay in Brazil, he observed and sketched the country's nature, flora, fauna, people and Dutch settlements. Post painted his landscapes on the commission of Johan Maurits, other nobles, and members of the bourgeoisie who were connected with the WIC and new clients captivated by exotic landscapes according to their desires. Post used the realistic elements in his imaginary paintings in the tradition of the Dutch art.

Key words: Frans Post, imagination, Dutch landscape painting.

1. Introduction

Frans Post's use of imagination in his *oeuvre* is related to Post's observations, sketches and memories of Brazil. Memory, which does not an accurately reproduce the past, occasionally tends to errors, changes, distortions and illusions. Visualization of memory, which serves conceptual and symbolic purposes, is a purely private abstract event, selective and interpretive of experiences. An artwork is a constructed of mental images. Imagination is important for producing artwork. (DRYDEN, 2004, p. 255, 257, 263). Art is a form of ideology that allows people to represent themselves. (ARGAN, 1998, p. 41). In regards to the potential effect of politics on art, propaganda, which is an artistic tool of policy-making, can evade the possibilities for the realization of truth. Thus, art object shapes the visual communication of a culture by referring to the object's own truth as the entire truth of a given event. Hence, art and propaganda do not differ greatly in their interpretations of the art object and the objects influences on individuals and society. (LEWIS, 2005, p. 42, 45). In Dutch political culture, different artistic media were used to spread Dutch propaganda. (ARNADE & NIEROP,

2007, 257). Thus, the Dutch Revolt carried out a successful propaganda campaign that depended on art. (STIPRIAAN, 2007, p. 335). During the Baroque age, the Dutch artists, did not depict reality and painted only a persuasive reality by combining elements of reality and their imagination. The Dutch art is an abstraction that propagates national ideals such as *Blut und Boden*. Thus, the complex relations between Dutch history, the artist's persona public's reception of art, art's social circumstances, and issues of institutional and private patronages as they express this phenomenon are the subject of lively debate. Thus, reality and art are not parallel. (HAVERKAMP-BEGEMANN, 1987, p. 511-514). In the early seventeenth century, the Netherlands became a political entity by gaining independence from Spain. The Dutch were proud of their achievements, land and their social and cultural heritage, especially their literature and art.(WHEELOCK, 1995, p. ix). Moreover, the Dutch economic miracle was remarkable. (ALPERS, 1997, p. 60). The Netherlands represented a bourgeois society. (KOSSMAN, 1999, p. 192). Hence, the commercial, political and cultural characteristics of the Dutch bourgeoisie, including the adoption of Calvinism, had a strong influence on Dutch society. (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 3). To celebrate their glory, power and possessions, bourgeois Dutch decorated their houses with paintings. (SVETLANA, 1983, p. 111; OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 4). Therefore, the secular visual culture flourished in Dutch society and became the centre of social life. (ALPERS, 1983, p. xxvi). The Dutch art market devoted itself to the sophisticated taste of the bourgeoisie. (NORTH, 1997, p. 13; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 4). Frequently, customers for art would make special requests. (PRAK, 2003, p. 239). A painting could also raise the social standing of the person who possessed it. (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 4). Clients who were interested in landscape paintings found the developing culture of the Netherlands and the reinvention of Dutch cultural identity in the paintings. (KOSSMAN, 1999, p. 192). In the Dutch art market, landscapes were the fifth most expensive type of painting according to subject and the second most painted in quantity between 1600 and 1700. (NORTH, 1997, p. 108, 109). Generally, the artists used accepted formats, subjects, patterns and recent events, which allowed the artists to easily find purchasers. Furthermore, the technique of painting the sky in monochrome enabled the painters to paint faster and sell more paintings. (GOEDDE, 1997, p. 143). Compared with their contemporaries in Europe, Dutch painters were remarkable for the variety, quality, style and themes of their work. (BROWN, 1983, p. 9). Dutch landscapes should have been seen through a political prism that highlighted the national traits of such work, such as *mise en scène*, iconography, liberty, and bourgeois values: (JONGH, 1999, p. 142) perfectly modeled, realistically proportioned and arranged figures; (LIEDTKE, 1997, p. 117) commemorations of historical events and economic developments: (GOEDDE, 1997, p. 129) and the flat, treeless homeland rendered as if viewed through a lens. (VIEIRA, 2009, p. 1396). The flat country was particularly suitable for mapping. The Dutch climbed their towers in order to make visual measurements of the country. The aim of Dutch painters was to capture a great range of knowledge about the land. Therefore, Dutch landscapes resembled maps. (ALPERS, 1997, p. 148).

Early in the century, the theorist van Mander stated that those landscapes were painted from the mind. Such paintings were more important than realistical-

ly rendered views, for in them, the mind had carefully selected the motifs. (FUCHS, 1978, p. 123). These imaginary landscapes were understood as a visual allegory. The realistic motifs of allegory also instruct the viewer. (GRIJZENHOUT & VEEN, 1999, p. 269). Dutch painters drew realistic sketches of the land, which served as starting points for their landscapes. They usually relied on their imagination to compose these landscapes, although the artists sometimes closely followed the sketches to produce realistic paintings free of recombination and changes. Painting from the imagination was credible because the painters were used to freely embellishing their work. (JONGH, 1997, p. 28). As is well known, the landscapes were produced in the workshops. Additionally, their compositions and many of their motifs were inspired by the painters' earlier inventions or the works of other artists. These syntheses that characterize the Dutch landscape paintings of the century and that the market demanded are termed selective naturalness. (LIEDTKE, 1997, p. 119, 120). These landscapes were the products of an imagination shaped by Dutch artistic traditions and dependent on the manipulation of stylistic and thematic motifs. (GOEDDE, 1997, p. 133). At that time, in the minds of Europeans, Brazil was a distant exotic country of otherness. In Europe, Frans Post gained a remarkable reputation for his Brazilian landscapes. His reconstructed nature is based on a fiction, which reflected choices, creativity and imagination. Brazil is not only the background on which a depicted event occurred. (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 2, 3, 6, 7). Brazil is the main theme of Post's paintings. Post decorates his Brazilian scenes with interesting exotic elements to gain the appreciation of his patron and evoke the curiosity of his clients.

2. The Life of Frans Post

Frans Janszoon Post (Leiden 1612 – Haarlem 1680), a Dutch landscape painter, dedicated himself exclusively to Brazilian landscapes. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 60; COMMISSION, 1996, p. 34). In his artistic career, Post worked in both hemispheres. He was the first European artist to depict landscapes of the New World. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 34; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 2; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 911; PHAF-RHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 39). Presumably, the Dutch master Pieter de Molijn taught him landscape painting before Post left for Brazil. (LARSEN, 1982, p. 339, 340). In 1637, Post was hired by Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen (1604-1679), who was appointed as the governor of Pernambuco in Brazil by the West India Company. (SILVA & ALCIDES, 2002, p. 153; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 1; PHAF-RHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 38). To aid their nation's economic development, the Dutch invaded Pernambuco in 1630 and captured the Portuguese colony there, holding it until 1654. (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 1). Thus, the WIC gained control of sugar trade for the first time in history. (NORTH, 1997, p. 35). Post lived in Pernambuco between 1637 and 1644. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 60; DUPARC & LARSEN, 1982, p. 761; ROSENBERG, SILVE & KUILE, 1986, p. 260; GASKELL, 1990, p. 462). The official painter of the WIC, Post was charged with painting landscapes and topographical studies. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 11; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 2; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 912; BRIENEN, 2007, p. 32). Dur-

ing his stay, he completed only eighteen paintings (PONTES & OLIEVEIRA, 2008, p. 2; PONTES & OLIEVEIRA, 2009, p. 912) and many sketches of the scenery, fauna, flora, plantations, mills, Dutch settlements, wealth and peoples of Brazil. In 1644, he returned to the Netherlands. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 11; PONTES & OLIEVEIRA, 2008, p. 2; PONTES & OLIEVEIRA, 2009, p. 912). In 1646, he joined the Lukasgilde, a community of painters in Haarlem. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 11). In 1647, with the support by Johan Maurits, Gaspar Barléus published a book, *Rerum per Octennium in Brasilia*, which publicizes Maurits's achievements as well as the battles, major Dutch cities, flora, fauna and numerous maps in Brazil. The book was richly illustrated with engravings based on Post's sketches. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 60; GASKELL, 1990, p. 462; HALL, 1991, p. 69, 70; COMMISSION, 1996, p. 3; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 3; MICELI, 2011, p. 12; MUNIZ, 2011, p. 5; MUNIZ & MACHADO, 2011, p. 5). Post continued to paint Brazilian scenes in his studio for the rest of his life. (PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 7; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2009, p. 912). However, his last landscape dates from 1669. He died in Haarlem in 1680. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 34). Today, his paintings are found in museums and royal and private collections in Europe and the Americas. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 61; SOUSA-LEÃO, 1943, p. 216, 217).

3. The Landscapes of Frans Post

Post, who was brought up in the landscape tradition of Dutch painting, consistently remained true to that tradition in his tropical landscapes, which are characterized in general terms by the depiction of a foreground opening onto a vast plain, with trees painted to the right and left, a diagonal dirt road or a slow-flowing river and land that joins the horizon one-third of the way up the painting. His meticulous observation of tropical nature reveals plentiful detail such as tropical plants and animals in the foreground. Fertile plantations, large houses, mills, churches and ruins are in the mid-plane and background. Peaceful African slaves, white masters and natives are depicted near buildings and on the roads. Post depicted his observation of nature to develop an art based on visual phenomena, exploring the projections of light and shadow and the reverberations of color in his landscapes. Post also possessed a great ability to render accurately landscapes, animals and plants. (LARSEN, 1982, p. 340).

The Dutch colonists stuck to their old customs and sought their pleasure from Dutch art instead of observing the local culture. (DAMS, 2010, p. 19). Thus, they imported art and artists from the motherland, a practice for which Frans Post is a good example. In the Netherlands, at that time, Brazil was totally unknown to the public and the WIC's potential investors. Post would have been aware of his responsibilities to his patron and the company. (SILVA & ALCIDES, 2002, p. 156, 160). Hence, he produced paintings that were designed to exalt the mission of his patron. The Dutch settlements in his paintings can be assumed to symbolize, in particular, the commercial and military efforts of Johan Maurits to ensure the success of the WIC in Brazil. (SILVA & ALCIDES, 2002, p. 160; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 1; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p.1; PHAFRHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 39). Between 1637 and 1640, Post paid more atten-

tion to nature in his landscapes. In his landscapes, Post depicted natural and human elements in a harmonious relationship. Placing figures in the foreground was a characteristic element of his painting. According to Sousa-Leão, Post was little influenced by his contemporary painters. (1942, p. 61). His *oeuvre* was easy to identify. However, his paintings highly resemble the landscapes of his Dutch contemporaries in terms of composition, light, style and technique. Behind the realism of his landscapes was the model of previous Dutch painting. Furthermore, Post's realism is related to that of the landscape painters of the seventeenth century. Importantly, these artists never painted in open air. Post went to Brazil to paint the landscapes of the mind with using his strong technical skill. (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 8, 11, 13; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 6).

During his short stay in Brazil, Post made expeditions in the colony to explore the nature and the Dutch settlements. His panoramic landscape *São Francisco River* (fig. 1) is a good example of traditional Dutch landscape painting. For instance, a large mostly cloudy sky occupied two-thirds of the composition. Moreover, an invisible sun illuminates the land. The smoothly running São Francisco River covers a large area in the foreground. A capybara dominates the foreground. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 102). A large cactus, whose usual habitat is an arid desert, is a rare plant in Pernambuco. A desert and a wide river evoke an exotic, strange land in a far-off country. Sousa-Leão and Joppien stated that Post painted his backgrounds with the scientific topographical accuracy. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 102, 104). In addition to Post, the painter Albert Eckhout traveled to the northeast Brazil to work for the WIC. (SPENLÉ, 2011). Post and Eckhout may have collaborated in Brazil. (GASKELL, 1990, p. 463; LAGO & LAGO, 207, p. 104; BRIENEN, 2007, p. 34). Post could have used Eckhout's sketches of the capybara and cactus, although Post drew his own sketches outdoors. Post's paintings were used as illustrations in *Rerum per Octennium in Brasilia* (fig. 2) by Barléus (BRIENEN, 2007, p. 33) and Marcgraf and Piso's *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (fig. 3). The capybara and rocks disappeared in the illustration of *Rerum per Octennium in Brasilia*. Furthermore, the same cactus and the hills are differently depicted in the original landscape and the book illustrations. (LAGO & LAGO, p. 104). In this sense, to complete a visually well-balanced painting, Post did not strictly adhere to the sketches when he was producing his landscapes. Post's realistic exotic elements should be examined for their decorative function instead of their documentary value.

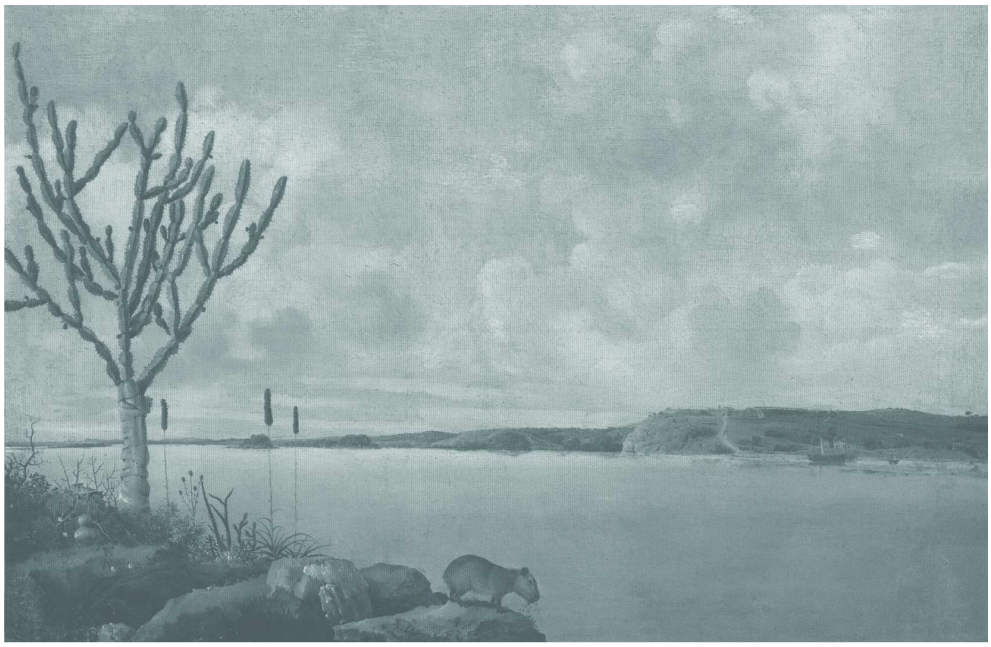

Fig. 1. Frans Post, São Francisco River, ca. 1639, oil on canvas, 62 x 95 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris. inv. no. 1727 (artwork in the public domain)

Fig. 2. The illustration in Rerum per Octennium in Brasilia by Gaspar Barléus, ca. 1647.

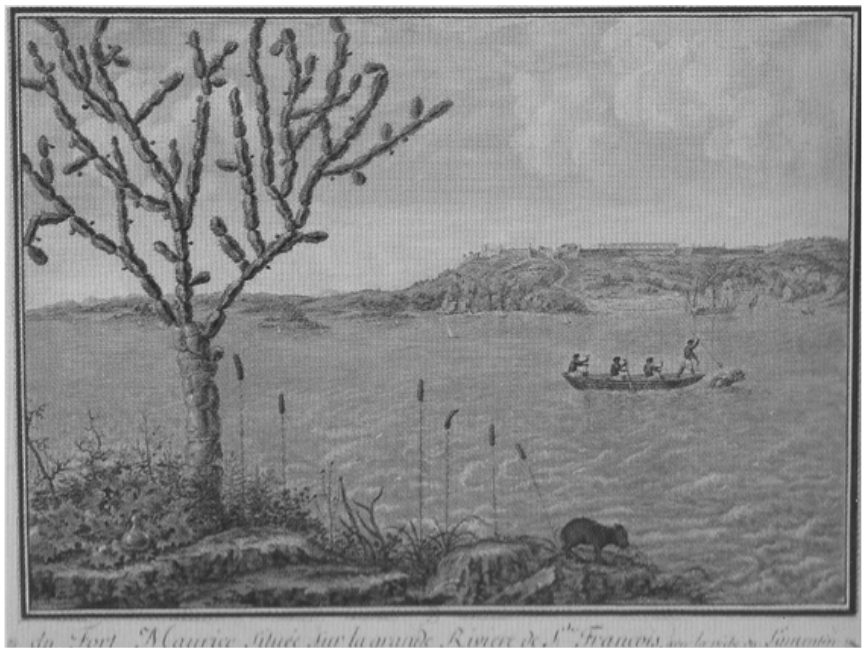

Fig. 3. The illustration in Historia Naturalis Brasiliae by
Georg Marcgraf and Willem Piso, ca. 1648.

Post depicted Brazilian nature and everyday life. One of his paintings, *Landscape with an Ox Cart* (fig. 4), highlights these subjects by using a low horizon in the landscape. (PONTES & OLIVEIRA, p. 2). The WIC brought African slaves to Pernambuco to supply labor for sugar production. (NORTH, 1997, p. 35). In the painting, peaceful bare-chested African slaves are central figures with clean white clothes and presumably carrying sugar in an ox cart along a sandy path in the middle of foreground. As a *repoussoir* device, a large blossoming tropical tree is depicted on the left. This image renders the green tropical vegetation of the sugarcane plantations and marshes. On the opposite bank of the slow-flowing the Sirinhaém River, buildings with red roofs are seen among the green. (MENEZES, 2009, p. 558). Post depicts a pleasant vision of slaves, whose lives are almost free and independent in Dutch Brazil. For instance, in the cart, a slave is playing a flute. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 90, 92). The serene scene is representative of Post's fancy landscapes to display the rich colony with loyal slaves and fertile land. Surprisingly, he did not paint the shiny sun in the tropical land.

Fig. 4 Frans Post, The oxen cart, ca. 1638, oil on canvas, 62 x 95 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris. inv. no. 1728 (artwork in the public domain)

Fort Frederik Hendrik (fig. 5) displays a papaya tree on the left and on a dirt path three figures -a Dutchman, a mestizo woman in European style clothing and an African slave smoking a pipe- represent three different races, indicative of Pernambuco's ethically mixed population. In the background, the landscape shows Fort Frederik Hendrik. A view of Mauritsstadt surrounded by a palisade is seen at the horizon. (PHAF-RHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 41; LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 112). The painting can be interpreted to demonstrate the peace, happiness and wealth of northeastern Brazil. Depicting the figures with bare feet and the slave smoking a pipe shows that Post was working to improve social equality. However, that the Dutchman is carrying a spear suggests a society polarized between masters and slaves. A native woman with pearl earrings indicates her wealth and that of Post's patron, the company and the company's partners.

Fig. 5. Frans Post, Fort Frederik Hendrik, ca. 1640, oil on canvas, 66 x 88 cm.

Post painted eighteen landscapes in Brazil. (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 6). After his return to the Netherlands in 1644, Johan Maurits kept the paintings at his house. In 1679, Maurits sold the paintings to King Louis XIV of France. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 60; LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 11). Seven of the paintings still exist. (PHAF-RHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 40). However, Larsen stated that only six paintings survived. (DUPARC & LARSEN, 1982, p. 762).

Post recorded various species of new flora and fauna in his sketches in Brazil, planning to use the sketches in paintings in the years to follow. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 61; LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 39; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 1, 2). He had become specialist in the Brazilian landscape (HALL, 1991, p. 1991, p. 68; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 7) and recreated Brazil in the imagination of Europeans. His so-called panorama landscapes are deeply connected to Dutch landscape painting (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 12, 17, 18, 20), which had by then become widely popular in the Netherlands. He continued to recombine the visual elements that he recorded in Brazil. In his paintings, mankind observes the strength of nature through the dark framing of the foreground and *repoussoir* devices with an aerial view. (ROSENBERG, SILVE & KUILE, 1986, p. 261; OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 12, 16, 18). Upon his return to the Netherlands, Post's painting underwent an evolution. His coloring and composition attained a theatrical quality. Moreover, his fantasized landscapes based on Brazilian motifs do not possess the same documentary value as his previous paintings done in Brazil. Almost every landscape he painted includes a large interacting group of usually faceless figures, who either dance or work. Different from his Brazilian paintings, the figures here appear to become part of the landscape and no longer subjects placed in the foreground. Furthermore, exotic animals such as pythons, armadillos, iguanas, anteaters, macaws, parrots, sloths, parakeets and capybaras happily populate the foreground of tropical scenes to form an imaginary universe that has defined the tropics of Brazil. (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 22, 23; LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 102, 126, 128, 138, 180, 200). The scientific information was a part of the political and economic program of his landscapes, which can be considered from a sociological view as creating Brazil. Post was a bourgeois and knew what to paint to satisfy the tastes of his clients, who were partners of the WIC and ready to pay well for their demands in the art market of the Netherlands. (SOUSA-LEÃO, 1942, p. 61; OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 13). Barléus's book could have enhanced Post's reputation. Moreover, when Johan Maurits became head of the House of Orange in 1650 (NORTH, 1997, p. 83), Post's paintings could have become more valuable and popular. Maurits continued to purchase landscapes by Post. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 18). His patron's continuing interest should have increased Post's reputation and enabled him to easily sell his paintings. Post may have obtained copies of Eckhout's sketches of plants and animals before Johan Maurits sold the originals to Friedrich Wilhelm I in 1652. (GASKELL, 1990, p. 462, 463).

River Landscape with Indians (fig. 6), dated in 1650, is one of Post's most successful paintings. An exotic animal stands before the vegetation in the foreground, and a tree is on the side as usual. A good number of Post's paintings

show natives traveling on foot, as in this painting. The dominant element is the group of resting civilized Tupy natives with clean white clothes. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 128). Indian slavery was prohibited since the creation of the WIC to maintain the good relations necessary to a colony whose prosperity depended on trade. (DAMS, 2010, p. 25). The appearance of Indians demonstrates the success of the Dutch in civilizing savages, even cannibals. (SPENLÉ , 2011). During the 1650s, Indians repeatedly appeared in landscapes by Post. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 128). He depicted them in their native environment as a means of adding exotic elements to his painting. Surprisingly, the faces of prominent figures are seen. The landscape's background displays sailboats in the water and houses under the palm trees on the horizon. The cloudy sky, which covers more than half of the canvas, is painted with Post's usual grace. (GORDON, 2006, p. 73). His painting displayed sugar plantations (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 3) and pineapple plants as a part of the vegetation. (COLLINS, 1951, p. 150). The elements and vegetation of the far background are painted in blue to enhance the depth of the composition. Post gives the impression of a calm, orderly and peaceful utopia, a Brazilian Eden. The painting most likely does not represent any real location. It depicts an imaginary Brazil.

Fig. 6. Frans Post, River landscape with Indians, ca. 1650, oil on panel, 61 x 91,4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. inv. no. 1981.318.

Water-powered sugar mills signify the commercial strength of the Dutch sugar trade. (SOARES, 2009, p. 64). Post's *Sugar Mill* (fig. 7), is his first known depiction of this popular theme and a valuable topographic exhibit of daily life among the water-powered sugar mills of Brazil. The mill stands at the center of the middle ground behind the pond. In the foreground, the painting also presents

a large interacting group of civilized natives and slave women. At that time, the sugar production depended on the labor of slaves, who worked on the sugar plantations and in the mills and mansions of the plantation owners. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 11). *Sugar Mill* displays a hybrid society in which oppression does not exist. Even black slaves are free and wear no chains. (OLIVEIRA, 2006, p. 14, 15). In front of the mill, a Dutchman in greenish-brown garments and a large hat is speaking with a black slave who seems to work there. At home in the Netherlands, the Dutch likely did not know that slaves ran away from their masters to the forests. The seventeenth-century Dutch writer Johan Nieuhof mentioned the settlements of Palmeiras, each with approximately 6000 dwellers, built by escaped slaves. (HALL, 1991, p. 55). For the first time in his landscapes, in *Sugar Mill*, Post depicted a hilltop chapel, which formerly belonged to the Portuguese. The beige earth and the cloudy sky are typical of his work in the 1650s. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 124, 134). In this landscape, he successfully portrayed a heavenly tropical land appealing to Arcadian stereotypes. (GASKELL, 1990, p. 458). Post presumably painted this imaginary landscape to enhance the achievements of the WIC and to display the happy black slaves and natives under the Dutch authority according to the demand of the market.

Fig. 7. Frans Post, Sugar mill, ca. 1652, oil on panel, 44,5 x 65 cm.
Landesmuseum Mainz, Mainz.

Johan Maurits built a new city, Mauritsstad, near Recife. (SILVA & ALCIDES, 2002, p. 154, 155). *View of Mauritsstad and Recife* (fig. 8), displays precise details of Mauritsstad and the region. Post presumably rendered the view from the tallest building, the first home of Johan Maurits. Surprisingly, the image did not appear in the book of Barléus. Possibly, Post painted the landscape before 1641 on the commission of a partner in the WIC to commemorate a special event. Since the painting does not depict the bridge between Antônio Vaz Island and Recife. Post must have depicted a particular moment in the composition be-

fore the bridge was built. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 146). Depicting gardens might be interpreted as proving the ability of Dutch culture to tame chaotic tropical nature. (SILVA & ALCIDES, 2002, p. 160). The sugar trade was an essential motif in the urban configuration of the time. (PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 1). This painting is a good resource for historians interested in seventeenth-century Dutch cities. (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 18). Among Post's paintings, this landscape includes the greatest number of people. The people belong to several cultural groups and represent the tolerance of the Dutch government and the wealth of a large, highly populated city. In the composition, everyone is communicating with each other. (PHAF-RHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 41). The landscape is a good example how Post recombined the elements from his sketches to enliven an imaginary scene.

Fig. 8. Frans Post, View of Mauritsstad and Recife, ca. 1653, oil on wood, 48.2 x 83.6 cm. Private collection, São Paulo.

During the 1660s, he became a master landscape painter distinguished by his technical maturity and high productivity. Unlike his pictures painted in Brazil, Post's later paintings depicted more forests and exotic elements to satisfy the curiosity of his new clients, who had not visited Brazil. His work became more imaginative and included more decorative aspects. His paintings reached the peak of its popularity at this time. Post was able to charge much more for his landscapes than other artists, who painted exotic scenery could. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 43-45, 191; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 5). Post's work was created from his memory through the recombination of various exotic elements. (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 11). Post also prefers the convenience of treating the same subjects, which he repaints in various versions. Generally, these repeated subjects are limited to sugar mills and views of Olinda and the town's ruins. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 44, 45). As Post proceeded from one painting to the next, he increased the number of figures and placed them in ever more colorful and attractive set-

tings. He recreated a tropical environment by displaying the achievements of his patron, decaying buildings, peaceful natives and black slaves in their fine clothes, the Dutch culture in Brazil, fanciful wildlife, sugar-production scenes and large, blue, partly clouded skies.

The masterly imaginary landscape *View of Olinda Cathedral* (fig. 9) differs from Post's previous paintings. The painting is exceptionally large and displays an elevated decorative aesthetic and a wealth of detail. Post presumably produced the painting to fulfill a high-priced commission. The landscape includes a partly clouded blue sky that covers half of the canvas. The rich *repoussoir* is composed of many trees and other plants. The foreground meticulously depicts various exotic animals. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 200). A group of interacting Europeans and slaves stands in front of the cathedral. Olinda Cathedral appears together with these figures in several paintings by Post. The encroachment of exotic nature is barely seen on the cathedral. In the far mid-ground of the tranquil landscape, a group of Europeans and slave porters is present. Post painted this impressive landscape according to a more elaborate decorative aesthetic than a purely documentary painting requires.

Fig. 9. Frans Post, View of Olinda Cathedral, ca. 1662, oil on canvas, 107,5 x 172,5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. inv. no. SK-A-742.

The landscape presents a series of general views of Olinda merging into the rich vegetation and low hills, which is one of three highly similar scenes of the abandoned city with its ruined churches and cloisters. No other examples in Post's *oeuvre* resemble one another as much as these pictures do. The artificial landscape *View of the ruins of Olinda* (fig. 10), was most likely painted approximately the same time as the two other identical compositions, of which only one is dated 1665. Larsen and Sousa-Leão agree that this landscape dates from approximately 1665. (GASKELL, 1990, p. 460). Although the Dutch burned Olinda

in 1631, the city might have been attractive for Post because the ruined town evokes the defeat of the Portuguese. However, the Portuguese continued Catholic services in Olinda in the following years. Post depicts the significant number of abandoned buildings in his painting. The sun is beating down on the buildings, which are under attack from the tropical vegetation. At the centre of the paintings are typical Portuguese-style houses with red roofs. The ruin of the Carmelite convent stands on a hill to the left. The Jesuit school, the Franciscan convent and the Episcopal Church are on the right. In the centre is a group of happy black slaves singing and dancing to the beat of drums. Additionally, several groups of figures are depicted in other parts of the composition. In the foreground, Post presents detailed renditions of exotic flora and fauna. In the foreground, Post presents detailed renditions of exotic flora and fauna. A fanciful exotic element is a boa constrictor, below on the left, eating an animal. Nearby is a parrot. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 11, 12; PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 13-15; LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 244-246). In the far distance, Mauritsstad and the Vrijburg Palace come clearly into view by the water. Johan Maurits lived in four different houses in different parts of Recife. (SILVA & ALCIDES, 2002, p. 155, 156). The Dutch attached importance to their buildings. (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 5). With its facades and botanical gardens, the Vrijburg Palace (1642) clearly stood as a monument of contemporary Dutch classicism. (HALL, 1991, p. 49). The blue sky with a few clouds covers more than half of the composition. Post allows the background to lose itself in the far distance, where the viewer's attention is focused by every possible means towards the light. (COMMISSION, 1996, p. 11; PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 15). It casts by an invisible sun. The integrally coherent imaginary landscape has nothing in common with a strictly topographical view.

Fig. 10. Frans Post, View of the ruins of Olinda, ca. 1665, oil on wood, 90 x 122 cm. Fundação Cultural Ema Gordon Klabin, São Paulo. Category: Phoca Gallery / Vista de olinda.

The beautiful *Sugar mill* (fig. 11) most likely dates from the mid 1660s. The left *repoussoir* presents some darkening. A local red plant, *timacambiré* and a boa constrictor eating an animal enliven the foreground vegetation to the left. The *varzea* land that is ideal for growing sugar cane is connected to the river in the background.(LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 214). Sugar production contributes elements for Post's landscapes. (VIEIRA, 2009, p. 1397). The meticulously detailed sugar plant contains a mill grinding the sugarcane, an elevated platform for drying the bagasse, a rum distillery, an oxen cart loaded with sugarcane, and a sailing vessel for transporting the sugar. The hilltop manor house and chapel stand closer together than in any other landscape of the same period. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 214). A large space is reserved for the luminous, sunless sky. In the designed landscape, a great number of black slaves are actively going about their work. The utopian landscape, which seems to stop the time, invites the viewers to dream of a lost paradise. Only the river seems to be a conduit from the imaginary land to the real world. (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 10). The overall atmosphere presents idyllic serenity. Post most likely intended to depict the achievement of the WIC in the sugar production. It is the main reason for the conquest of Pernambuco.

Fig. 11. Frans Post, Sugar mill, ca. 1665, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 91.5 cm.
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Roterdam.

Post continued painting Brazilian landscapes during the 1670s. (PHAFRHEINBERGER, 2009, p. 40). Unfortunately, his vision, technical skill and health went into declined because of old age and alcoholism. His compositions weakened, becoming less defined. In addition to this decrease in quality, Post's rate of production slowed, and he stopped dating his work. (OLIVEIRA, 2005, p. 6; LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 46, 47, 297; PONTES & OLIVEIRA, 2008, p. 6). In scope of the subject matter, the highly imaginative painting *Village with church in ruins* (fig. 12) is presumed to date from the early 1670s. The most eye-catching

element is the portal of the ruined church covered with vegetation, a motif characteristically found in the representations of Olinda that Post painted in his previous phase. The painting's other elements, which can be found almost anywhere in Pernambuco (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 298), are the black slaves in white and red clothing, a *repoussoir* of rich vegetation, exotic animals, houses, a large, sunless sky and lowlands in the background.

Fig. 12. Frans Post, Village with church in ruins, ca. 1670s, oil on canvas, 46 x 54 cm. Private collection, England.

Church with portico (fig. 13) is not dated. Nonetheless, the resemblance of the painting's theme to that of other landscapes makes this landscape datable to the early 1670s. In addition, the painting has a marked similarity to another work entitled *Chapel with portico*, dated 1663. Sousa-Leão ascribed the design of the Jesuit or Franciscan church to Post's imagination and knowledge of architecture. Similarly, the landscape does not represent a specific location in Pernambuco. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 305). He should have painted this landscape by depending on his memories.

Fig. 13. Frans Post, Church with portico, ca. 1670s, oil on canvas, 32,5 x 45 cm. Instituto Ricardo Brennand, Recife.

The landscape *Village in ruins* (fig. 14) is dated to the 1670s and presents the ruins of Olinda. This landscape is an example of the decline in quality of Post's work. According to Larsen and Sousa-Leão, Post haphazardly rearranges the vegetation-covered houses, which are decorative elements in the painting. The painting's background and *repoussoir* imitate those of another painting by Post. The painting does not display the Vrijburg Palace and Mauritsstad in the far background, although Post formerly depicted these sights in his landscapes. (LAGO & LAGO, 2007, p. 314). The cloudy blue sky with an invisible sun covers more than half of the composition. As a dominant element, the painting presents the indispensable group of happy black slaves. In the lower left of this fanciful painting, Post again portrays the large boa constrictor and an armadillo.

Fig. 14. Frans Post, Village ruins, ca. 1670s, oil on canvas, 45 x 53,5 cm.
Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro.

Post's exotic paintings differed from the landscapes produced by his competitors, who painted only the landscapes of Europe. Post took advantage of this asset and exclusively produced similar imaginary paintings in this exclusive branch of landscapes to meet the demands of nobles and the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth-century. The skillful realism of his fanciful landscapes gives credibility to his work. Post's landscapes, which still contribute information about Brazil, are unique and memorable pictorial records. His landscapes represent not only what Post saw, but also what he dreamed.

4. Conclusion

Indisputably, the landscapes of Frans Post give much valuable scientific information about the topography, flora, fauna, people and history of northeastern Brazil during the seventeenth century. However, Post produced his paintings for not only documentary and scientific purposes. For many reasons, in all his paintings, he used his imagination. During his stay in Brazil, he was the official painter of the WIC. Post painted the distant exotic country in order to launch a propaganda effort on behalf of his patron and the company. For instance, he aimed to describe the power, strength and triumphs of the new Dutch republic, the Dutch settlements, the achievements of Johan Maurits and the company's highly profitable sugar trade. Post also depicted African slaves living contentedly in good conditions and people of different races living in harmony in Pernambuco. This image was far from the truth. In fact, the poor living and working conditions of the

time drove many slaves to run away from their masters to settlements in Palmeiras. Additionally, Post always painted the tropical Brazilian sky as sunless and cloudy, like the sky of the Netherlands depicted by his contemporaries. Post painted the exotic plants and animals that decorate his landscapes to ensure his paintings would be considered realistic. After he returned to the Netherlands, he continued to paint fanciful landscapes on the special requests of his clients, who were connected with the WIC. At that time, he surprisingly increased the number of figures in his landscapes and added more exotic elements. Instead of representing the reality, in his last two decades, Post gave up using his sketches and continued to increase the number of exotic elements in his paintings to attract new clients. Generally, he painted all his landscapes in his workshop instead of outdoors, whether the paintings made use of his sketches or not. He relied on his imagination and memories to create admirable compositions, although he frequently forgot details. Some of his paintings do not identify a specific topography in Pernambuco. His heavenly landscapes should be considered as belonging to an imaginative *oeuvre*. Notably, Post neglected the reality of struggle with the Portuguese at that time. The repetition of the same themes with varying combinations of similar visual elements enables him to create a new Brazil. His paintings represent a type of tropical paradise, perhaps echoing ancient myths that persisted since the time of Brazil's discovery. In all, Post's responsibilities to Johan Maurits, the wish to promote the WIC, the demand of clients, the tradition of Dutch landscape painting, the exotic nature of Brazil in the dreams of Europeans and memories guided Frans Post to paint exotic landscapes of the imagination.

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