Black figures – individuals, types, and fantasies – have been a ubiquitous presence in Western art since antiquity. Often hidden in plain sight, they have been historically overlooked or their lives discounted as lost to history. Recent events in the struggle for racial equality and justice are inspiring renewed consideration of the history of black people on a global scale. Even the most cursory overview of the history of Western art will reveal the extent to which black people were part of European society in many different roles, informing the ways in which European artists and craftsmen imagined their world. Yet, images of black people often indexed their subservient status and affirmed a kind of exoticism that rendered them fundamentally different or “other.” With the rise of the slave trade, colonialism, abolition, and imperialism framing Europe’s dominating relationship to Africa and Africans from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, the fraught engagement of European art featuring black bodies became even more charged. Race Matters takes a broad overview of this dynamic, assembling works of European art from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries in which black people figured in various contexts such as biblical figures, historical personages, allegories, court servants, decorative types, and free blacks. Understanding how people of color have figured in the history of European art provides an opportunity to learn more about the lived experiences of people often overlooked in history and to face the ways in which art was complicit in upholding racial hierarchies.