



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Milkmaid*, c. 1657-58, 45.5 × 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

- This is ***The Milkmaid*** by Johannes Vermeer, one of his best known works but **literally every painting by Vermeer is a masterpiece** and it was difficult to choose a selection so I decided to show everyone of his paintings.
- He was one the **greatest painters of the Dutch Golden Age**. There are **now only 34 paintings firmly attributed** to him and a further three possibles which I have included.
- **We know little of his life** or when he painted which works but I will show them chronologically according to current best estimates.

BIO:VERMEER

- Johannes Vermeer (October 1632-December 1675) was born in Delft and spent all of his life in the town. His father was a silk worker who started buying and selling paintings just before Vermeer was born. Also, at the this time he leased an inn and later bought a larger inn in the market square.
- In 1652 his father died and Vermeer took over the art business and the following year married **Catharina Bolnes** (pronounced 'Bol-ness'). Her family were a lot wealthier and it is likely he converted to Catholicism to get permission to marry. At some point they moved in with his mother-in-law and remained there the rest of his life. **His brother-in-law Willem Bolnes was extremely violent and swore at his mother and on one occasion pulled a knife and tried to stab her.** He also threatened to beat Vermeer's wife with a stick when she was 'pregnant to the last degree'. His wife gave birth to **15 children** but four died before they were baptised.
- There is disagreement about whether Vermeer was an apprentice and to whom. He painted in the front room on the second floor and one other room in the house. **He painted slowly and with great care and used the most expensive pigments.** There is no other 17th-century artist who employed the exorbitantly expensive pigment **lapis lazuli (natural ultramarine)** either so lavishly or so early in his career. He even employed it as an **underpaint** to create a cool, crisp appearance such as in the shadows of the red satin dress of *The Girl with the Wine Glass*. He even continued to use it after his financial breakdown suggesting it was **supplied by a wealthy collector**, possibly **Pieter van Ruijven** (pronounced 'row', as in quarrel, 'ver').
- In 1653 (December 29th), aged 21, he became a member of the **Guild of Saint Luke**. This was **a year of plague, war, economic crisis** and a terrible explosion that destroyed a large part of the city. Possibly for these reasons Vermeer did not pay the usual admission fee.
- At the time Gerard Dou (pronounced 'herard dow') was selling paintings for exorbitant prices and **Vermeer charged higher than average prices and we believe most of his works were sold to a local collector.** He probably competed with Nicolaes Maes (pronounced 'mass') who produced genre works in a similar style. In

1662 Vermeer was elected head of the guild and again in 1663, 1670 and 1671.

- **1672 was a year of severe economic downturn (the 'Year of Disaster')** because of the war with France and later England. Theatres, shops and schools closed and it was five years before things recovered. In 1675 Vermeer borrowed 1,000 guilders in Amsterdam using his mother-in-laws house as security.
- **In 1675 he died after a short illness aged 43.** In a petition his wife explained that he had been ruined financially, could not sell any paintings and was left with old masters paintings he could not sell and she attributed his early death to the stress of his financial problems. He was almost unknown outside of Delft, he never had any pupils and he only produced about three paintings a year.
- **He produced fewer than 50 paintings of which 34 survive.** Only three paintings were dated by the artist.
- There is a theory that **Vermeer used optical devices, such as a camera obscura** or a comparator mirror but none was found in his house after his death. However, he was a **friend of the pioneering lens maker Antonie van Leeuwenhoek** who was his executor after his death.
- He was **overlooked by art historians for two centuries** until his catalogue raisonné was published in **1866**.
- **Hans van Meegeren became a master forger and painted many new 'Vermeers'** which he sold to the Nazis during occupation. When charged with treason he demonstrated his skill by painting a new 'Vermeer' in court. Today his forgeries look like obvious fakes.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Vermeer
- <http://www.essentialvermeer.com/index.html> (an excellent and comprehensive analysis of Vermeer's work)

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Michiel van Musscher, *Portrait of an Artist in His Studio*, Bass Museum, Miami Beach, Florida, may be a portrait of the young Vermeer



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Procuress* (detail), 1656, 143 × 130 cm, Dresden, may be a self-portrait

Michiel van Musscher, *Portrait of an Artist in His Studio*, Bass Museum, Miami Beach, Florida, may be a portrait of the young Vermeer

Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Procuress* (detail), 1656, 143 × 130 cm, Dresden, may be a self-portrait

- We don't know **what Vermeer looked like** as there are **no authenticated portraits or self-portraits**. The painting on the left is alleged by some to be a portrait and on the right some claim this person in Vermeer's *The Procuress* is a self-portrait.
- Vermeer just **one of many artists at the time and was known for his perspective**, a highly appreciated aspect of paintings. The art critic Pieter Teding Van Berckhout (1643-1713) went to Vermeer's studio and was impressed. He wrote "**I went to see a celebrated painter named Vermeer**" who "**showed me some examples of his art, the most extraordinary and most curious aspect of which consists in the perspective.**"
- **Johannes Vermeer** (October 1632-December 1675) was **born in Delft and spent all of his life in the town**. His father was a silk worker who started buying and selling paintings just before Vermeer was born. Also, at the time he leased an inn and later bought a larger inn in the market square.
- In 1652, when Vermeer was 20, his father died and Vermeer took over the art business and the following year married Catharina Bolnes (pronounced 'Bol-ness'). Her family were a lot wealthier and it is likely he converted to Catholicism to get permission to marry. At some point they moved in with his mother-in-law and remained there the rest of his life.
- Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) was **re-discovered by the French art critic Théophile Thoré-Bürger** (1807-1869) two hundred years later. He was so impressed by **View of Delft that he spent twenty years researching Vermeer's work**. The impact of his research was enormous and Vermeer **went from a little known painter to one of the greatest 17th century Dutch artists**. This led to a spending spree by American buyers, which, together with the small number of Vermeer's in existence pushed up prices which added to his fame.
- I will now show you the **34 paintings we believe to be by Vermeer and the three that are disputed**.

DELFT

- At the beginning of the 17th century Delft was known for its beer brewing but by 1670 the number of breweries had dropped from over 100 to just 15. However, Delft's prosperity grew and grew as it reused the breweries to make china and it became famous for its 'Delft-Blue' china. The town was also known for its tapestry weaving. The town is bisected by the Old Delft river and covered in canals. In fact 'delf' means 'canal'. The town was known for its beauty, elegant houses, tree-lined streets and pleasant atmosphere.

DUTCH CLEANLINESS

- **The Dutch at this time were known throughout Europe for their cleanliness**. They cleaned their homes, their floors and doorsteps regularly and were

mocked by other countries for wearing slippers indoors. Their kitchens, hearths and dishes were kept spotless. It extended outside the home, public spaces, markets, barges and inns, even stables and abattoirs were meticulously cleaned. **Farmers would wash their cows** and dock their tails to stop them being fouled.

- Delft tiles lined the bottom of the plain white-washed walls inside houses. As the **Dutch housewife washed the floor every day** it stopped the walls from becoming soiled.

VERMEER'S WHITEWASHED WALLS

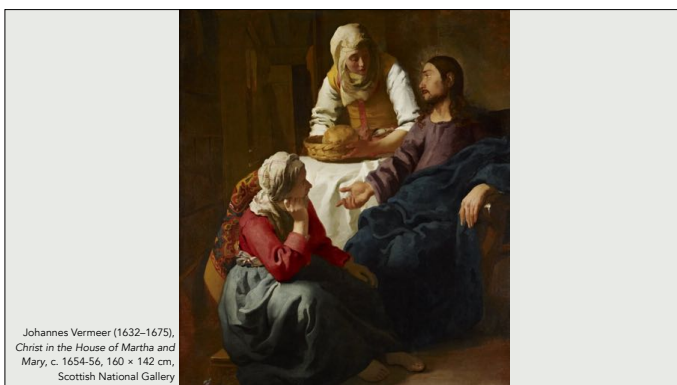
- The **light from a window fades** across the length of a wall perpendicular to the window. However, **our brains automatically adjust** for this and we see such a wall as evenly lit. So did Vermeer paint a wall as it is or as our brain sees it? **He painted it as it is** so you see the **light markedly dropping in intensity** across his walls. The brain does not adjust if we see this in a painting.

VERMEER'S INTERIORS

- The **windows and walls appear to be factual but the floor it is believed was constructed** using linear perspective and coloured with imagination. **The props**, wine jugs, pictures, tables, mirrors and maps **were probably owned by Vermeer** but the **tapestries and musical equipment** was expensive and so was probably **borrowed**. We don't know who the **models** were but it is likely they were **members of his household** simply to save money. He would have used **mannequins so that the folds of the clothes did not change** from session to session. The lighting would change from hour to hour and day to day so he must have used his visual memory.

PROSTITUTION

- It is estimated there were about 1,000 prostitutes in Amsterdam at this time. Prostitutes were often immigrants who were kept in virtual slavery by placing them in debt for clothing, board and lodging to a degree they could never afford to repay.



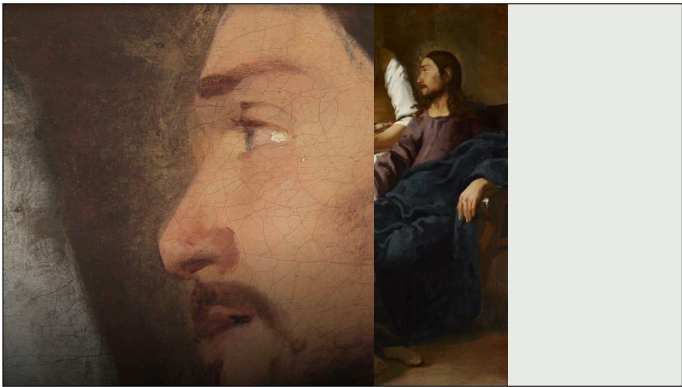
Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675),
Christ in the House of Martha and Mary, c. 1654–56, 160 × 142 cm,
Scottish National Gallery

Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, c. 1654–56, 160 × 142 cm, Scottish National Gallery

- This and the next painting are the **earliest produced by Vermeer** and experts don't know which was produced first. This one is the **largest painting by Vermeer** and one of the few based on a bible story. Christ visiting the house of the two sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany. Mary sat at his feet listening while Martha prepared the food. Martha protested and Jesus said that she should not complain as Mary had chosen the better path.
- The painting **shows little evidence of Vermeer's later style and techniques**. For example, Christ's robe was blue but he painted it using smalt and indigo. This is **the only painting where he didn't use ultramarine blue** and the smalt, which is ground blue glass, has faded over time.

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_in_the_House_of_Martha_and_Mary_\(Vermeer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_in_the_House_of_Martha_and_Mary_(Vermeer))
http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/christ_in_the_house_of_mary_and_martha.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, c. 1654-56, 160 × 142 cm, Scottish National Gallery

- (CLICK) Also, look at the bread basket and compare it with the one on the left from *The Milkmaid* that he painted only a few years later.
- (CLICK) To me it **almost looks like a work by the forger Han van Meegeren** (1889-1947) with its flat, plastic faces. Like Vermeer, Van Meegeren painted white spots on the bread, known as pointillé. I am sure it is a Vermeer as many experts have pored over it but it demonstrates how van Meegeren was able to convince people that his forgeries were early Vermeers.
- (CLICK) If we zoom into Christ's face you can see how he create the eye, the nose, with its chopped off end and his lips with what looks like his tongue protruding.
- **The open door in the background is a technical device** recommended in artist's manual. It provides an escape for the viewer's eye to prevent the foreground overpowering the scene. It was known as **doorsien** (see-through).

REFERENCES

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_in_the_House_of_Martha_and_Mary_\(Vermeer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christ_in_the_House_of_Martha_and_Mary_(Vermeer))
http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/christ_in_the_house_of_mary_and_martha.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Diana and Her Companions*, c. 1653-1656, 98.5 × 105 cm, Mauritshuis, The Hague

- This painting of the **mythological goddess Diana** is unusual as it **does not show one of the dramatic moments** typically illustrated by artists. It is a quiet, private and reflective moment showing Diana with her attendants. The dramatic moment that artists often show is when Actaeon, who is out hunting, chances upon Diana naked while she is bathing and she turns him into a stag and he is killed by his dogs.
- This painting was **not accepted as a Vermeer until the early 20th century** when its similarity to the previous painting was noticed.
- Let us examine his early technique...

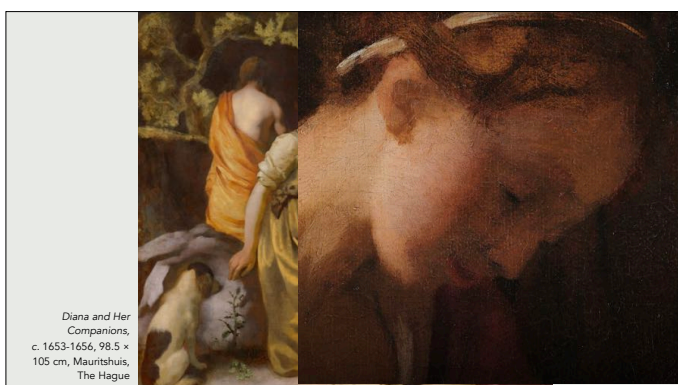
NOTES

- Compare Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-9), National Gallery of Scotland.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diana_and_Her_Companions

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/diana_and_her_companions.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Diana and Her Companions*, c. 1653-1656, 98.5 × 105 cm, Mauritshuis, The Hague

- (CLICK) I have zoomed in on one of Diana's assistants to show you his early painting technique. **Loose brushwork**, particularly for the ear with the brushstrokes following the contours of the face. If we zoom out then it resolves into an ear.(CLICK)
- Incidentally, you may come across **reproductions** of this painting with a blue sky at the top right. In 1999 this was discovered to have been added in the 19th century and it was covered over as you see here.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diana_and_Her_Companions

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/diana_and_her_companions.html#top



Attributed to Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), after Felice Ficherelli (-1660), *Saint Praxedis*, c. 1655, 101.6 x 82.6 cm, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo
 Felice Ficherelli known as Riposo (1605-1660), *Saint Praxedis*, 17th century, private collection, currently on display at the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, labelled as "attributed to Johannes Vermeer".

- At first glance it **looks like a copy** of (CLICK) this painting of **Saint Praxedis** (pronounced 'prax-say-dis') by **Felice Ficherelli** (pronounced 'fell-each-ay pic-a-relly'). There are differences, in the Vermeer the distinction between the light and dark areas is more clearly defined and the Saint is holding a crucifix.
- In 17th-century Holland a crucifix signified above all other objects the owner's Roman Catholic faith.
Vermeer had married Catherina Bolnes two years before and converted to the Catholic faith.
- In the background on the left there is a **beheaded man** and the Saint is **squeezing out a sponge containing his blood**. In a church (Basilica of Santa Prassede) in Rome a sponge is said to be the one used by Saint Praxedis to mop up the blood of 23 Christians discovered in her home and martyred in front of her.
- Not a lot is known about Saint Praxedis who cared for Christians and was herself later martyred. *The Golden Legend* (1259-1266) claims she was the sister of Saint Pudentiana, Saint Donatus and Saint Timothy.
- Christie's carried out a new investigation in 2014 and **stated categorically that this painting is by Vermeer**. It was sold to a private buyer for £6.25 million, a low price perhaps because of concerns about its authenticity. It is currently on loan to the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, which label it as "attributed to Johannes Vermeer".

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Praxedis_\(painting\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Praxedis_(painting))
<http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/praxedis.html#top>



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Procuress*, 1656, 143 x 130 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden
 Gerard ter Borch the Younger (Dutch, 1617-1681), *An Interior with a Couple and a Procuress*, 67 x 54 cm

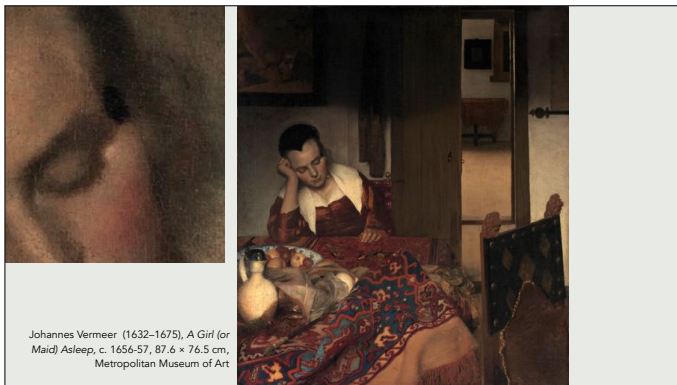
- This shows a scene of figures in **contemporary dress possibly in a brothel**. It is one of **only three paintings that he signed and dated** so we know he painted this when he was 24.
- **The figure at the back is a woman**, possibly the procuress and (CLICK) **the man on the left with slashed sleeves is thought by some to be a self-portrait**.
- I will repeat what I told you earlier. **Vermeer was born in Delft and spent all of his life in the town**. His **father was a silk worker** who started **buying and selling paintings** just before Vermeer was born. Also, at the this time he **leased an inn** and later bought a larger inn in the market square.

- When Vermeer was 20, **his father died** and Vermeer took over the art business and the following year **married Catharina Bolnes**. Her family were a **lot wealthier** and it is likely he **converted to Catholicism** to get permission to marry. At some point they **moved in with his mother-in-law** and **remained there the rest of his life**. His wife gave **birth to 15 children** although four died before they were baptised.(CLICK)
- (CLICK) His mother-in-law owned a painting by Gerard ter Borch also called *The Procuress* (c. 1622) and this must have influenced Vermeer.

NOTES

- The technical investigation of this painting in 1968 shows Vermeer's use of his usual pigments such as ultramarine in the blue wine jug and lead-tin-yellow in the jacket of the woman. He also employed smalt in the green parts of the tablecloth and in the greenish background which is less usual for him

REFERENCES



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *A Girl (or Maid) Asleep*, c. 1656-57, 87.6 × 76.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art

- **This is his earliest simple interior.** There is an open door and on the right the edge of a map. The weight of the **rod** at the bottom held the **map flat** and the **ball** held it away from the **inevitably damp wall**.
- We find the same woman in later paintings by Vermeer and some think **the model was his wife Catharina Bolnes**.
- (CLICK) On her **left temple is a black patch**. If I zoom in more it is clearer (CLICK). Can you see it now. This was considered the **height of fashion**. They were **first worn to cure toothache** but they became **stylish** as they highlighted the whiteness of the skin. The **position of the patch** involved a '**secret language**' and could mean you were flirtatious, married, engaged or somebody's mistress.(CLICK)
- The picture **upper left** is hard to identify but has been narrowed down to two paintings both of **Cupid** and one of which was in his household goods when he died.
- There is a **white wine jug that Vermeer used in other painting**. It is positioned on an **expensive Oriental carpet** which were used to cover tables. The **fruit bowl behind is Chinese** (Wan-li) and is a type of large soup bowl. To the right of the jug is some **gauzy material** covering a jug on its side and above them a barely visible **wine glass half filled** with white wine and some nut shells. Below the wine jug is a glass jar that has suffered from restoration and to its right a knife set end to end with a spoon.
- The **chair is a Spanish chair** that Vermeer used in other paintings. It covers what was **originally a dog** looking through the open door **at a cavalier** standing at the far wall. Also painted out was a plate near the girl's fingers and some grape vines.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Girl_Asleep



Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window, c. 1659, 83 × 64.5 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Old Masters Gallery), Dresden

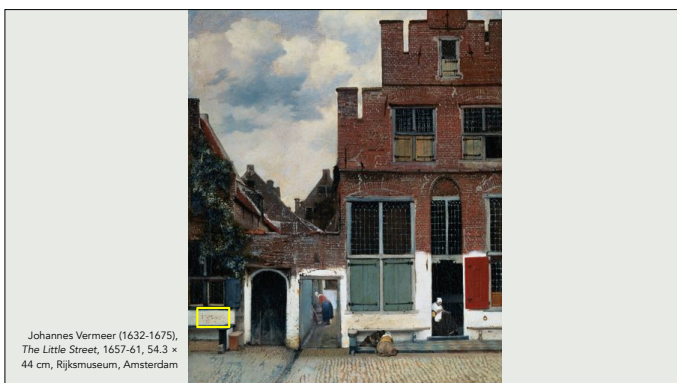
Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window*, c. 1657-59, 83 × 64.5 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Old Masters Gallery), Dresden

- For many years this was **thought to be by Rembrandt and then by Pieter de Hooch** before it was recognised as a Vermeer in 1880.
- It was speculated that she is **reading a love letter** with the open window representing her longing to escape her domestic situation and the fruit represents her extramarital relationship. This may sound far fetched but **X-ray analysis showed this picture of Cupid** on the wall. It had been **painted over in the 18th century** but a recent restoration restored the image ([Click](#)) and it was put on display this year. There is some controversy as some say it was **painted out by Vermeer** himself but the general agreement was that it was painted over after Vermeer's death to make it easier to sell as a Rembrandt.
- The girl's head was originally turned further away explaining the full face reflection in the window.
- In Europe at the time the wife's **total obedience** was considered the basis of a good marriage. However, in **Holland love was considered the core of a marriage**. The model in this painting was probably his wife and the affection with which she was painted is a reflection of his love. **Foreign visitors were surprised and embarrassed** to find married couples showing signs of affection and one French author (Antoine de la Barre de Beaumarchais, 1698-1750) was **shocked when his host complimented his wife for the meal and she kissed him in thanks**.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Reading_a_Letter_at_an_Open_Window

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/girl_reading_a_letter_by_an_open_window.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Little Street*, 1657-61, 54.3 × 44 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Little Street*, 1657-61, 54.3 × 44 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

- This is **the second of only three views of Delft** that Vermeer painted. It shows a **typical Dutch street** of the Dutch Golden Age and Vermeer has animated what could have been a static picture by the lively sky and by the skilful use of thicker paint for the brickwork and stone.
- Note that it is **signed 'I V MEER'** below the window at the lower left of the picture.
- The **exact location has been the subject of dispute** over the centuries **but in 2015 an archive** that gives the exact measurements of every house and passage established it as numbers **40 and 42 Vlamingsstraat**. This also showed that the property on the right **belonged to Vermeer's aunt**. She had a **business selling tripe** and the **passageway** in the centre was called Penspoort or **Tripe Gate**.

- In 2017 this apparently sound conclusion was disputed by two art historians who claim that the painting does not depict an actual place.
- There are two children playing and a woman in the doorway sewing. **The maid in the alleyway is washing laundry** in a wooden barrel and a broom stands ready next to her. 17th-century Holland was known throughout Europe for its dedication to **cleanliness** which in Holland was associated with spiritual cleanliness and purity and an **essential part of a Christian life**.

NOTES

- The plant on the left is a grape vine which was associated with fidelity and marriage. The blue tinge is because the yellow glaze he used has faded leaving the blue colour underneath.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Little_Street



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Officer and Laughing Girl*, c. 1657–60, 50.5 x 46 cm, The Frick Collection, New York

- This is **typical of many of Vermeer's later paintings** which are believed to have been **painted in the same room of his mother-in-law's house**. Light streams from the left, there is an open window and a picture, in this case a map, on the wall.
- This painting and *Girl Reading a Letter* which we have just seen are the **earliest to use tiny white globules of paint** to enliven the image (CLICK). This is one example from the back of the chair. This and many other features **have led some historians and the artist David Hockney, to speculate that Vermeer used an optical device** such as a double concave lens on a camera obscura to achieve these highly realistic light patterns.(CLICK)
- Many Dutch paintings show **military figures in a bad light, gambling, drunk and in amorous situations**. This may be because in Holland and in the rest of Europe the Dutch were **not considered suited to a military life** and officers frequently complained about a lack of discipline. The black sash worn by this person signifies he is an officer and his red jacket enlivens the composition. The dark form of his back also frames the picture and draws attention to the woman's face, a **technical framing device known as repoussoir**.
- **He wears an expensive felt hat made of beaver fur**. Beavers had been largely hunted out of existence in Europe and their pelts were imported from North America. Most were first sent to Russia and when worn and dirty they were resold to Europe where hatters used mercury to turn them into a felt. Mercury is toxic and its widespread use by hatter's is what led to the expression "**mad as a hatter**" as we see in the Tea Party in *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. By 1660 the brim of these hats became so wide they were turned up to create the tricorne.

NOTES

- The map on the wall was by an artist (Balthasar Florisz. van Berckenrode, c. 1591-1645) who ran into financial problems and had to sell the rights to produce the map (between 1621 and 1629). Only one example survives and we know from this that Vermeer's rendering was precise.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Officer_and_Laughing_Girl

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/officer_and_laughing_girl.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Officer and Laughing Girl*, c. 1657–60, 50.5 x 46 cm, The Frick Collection, New York

- Notice how Vermeer shows her with her left hand open and relaxed signifying her attitude to the officer and her right hand holds the Berkemeyer glass, a glass with a wide top and no stem, in a manner that signifies high social refinement. However some historians have interpreted the whole painting entirely differently. She is open, smiling and relaxed because she is a prostitute negotiating her business and that is why she is holding out her hand, for money.
- Note that paintings like this representing couples in various forms of relationship were warnings of the dangers **not everyday situations**. They were bought and hung of the wall to warn of **moral risk to your soul**.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Officer_and_Laughing_Girl

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/officer_and_laughing_girl.html#top

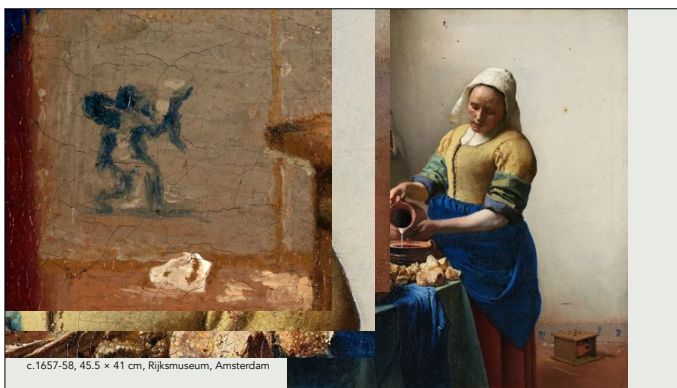


Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Milkmaid*, c. 1657-58, 45.5 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

- Perhaps the most common type of painting in Holland during this period were **scenes of everyday life**. Vermeer produced some of **the most peaceful yet intense** representations of everyday life.

REFERENCES

<http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/milkmaid.html#top>



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Milkmaid*, c. 1657-58, 45.5 x 41 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

- A woman who may be a domestic kitchen maid or a milkmaid is pouring milk into a low earthenware container. In front of her are various breads. She is sturdy and wears a linen cap, blue apron and has her sleeves pushed up.
- (Click) There is a little of the **Mona Lisa about her smile** as we are left unsure whether she concentrating or wistfully daydreaming. It is not clear **whether she is a milkmaid**, who worked in a dairy and made butter and cheese **or a kitchen maid who worked in the house**. **For two centuries both** had a reputation for being **predisposed to love or sex** and this is reflected in Dutch painting of the period but not here. **Vermeer's painting is a rare example of a maid being treated in a dignified manner**, although, is it?
- (Click) At the time **milk or melken was a slang word meaning "to sexually attract"** and the tile on the left next to the foot warmer **depicts Cupid**. (Click) Let me show you an even closer view of the tile. Pursuing this thought further a **wide mouthed jug was used as a symbol of part of the female anatomy** and a foot warmer implied sexual arousal as women would place it under their skirts to heat their body below the waist. However I am not sure it is a cupid the 'wings' look to me like a backpack and it is then simply a travelling salesperson.
- (Click) **Simon Schama has argued for a different and I think more likely interpretation**. This painting is part of a **tradition for showing hard work, restraint and domestic virtue**. This analysis is supported by a suggestion that **she is making bread pudding** which accounts for the milk and the broken pieces of stale bread. She has made the custard and is very carefully pouring the milk into a Dutch oven. If milk is not added the crust will be hard and dry and if too much is poured in it will be ruined. The maid therefore **demonstrates care** in preparation, **thriftiness** in turning stale bread into a pleasurable product as well as **modesty and**

judiciousness.

REFERENCES

<http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/milkmaid.html#top>



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Wine Glass*, c. 1658–61, 67.7 × 79.6 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

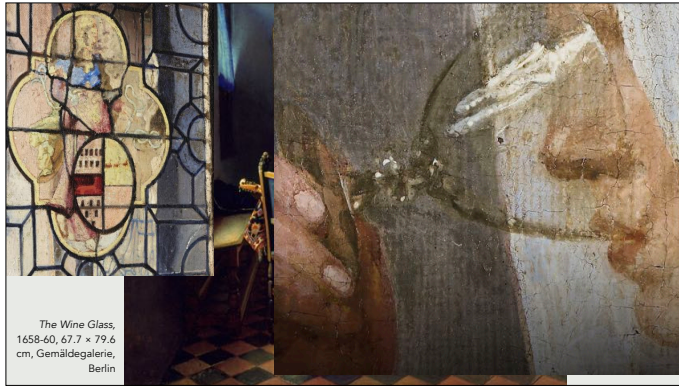
- The scene is **ambiguous** and seems to represent **some form of seduction or courtship**. He is still **wearing his hat** and outer coat and there appears to be a distance between them but it was normal in 17th-century Holland for a gentleman to wear a hat indoors except for certain, defined situations such as during prayer or when an important person is toasting someone.
- **A cittern, a type of flat-backed lute**, lies on the chair as if a **music lesson** has been postponed. Is he her music teacher? **A concern at the time** was with the morals of music teachers as they were one of the few professions that involved a man being left alone with a woman.
- **Music was a common 17th century metaphor for love and harmony**. Members of the upper middle-class like this couple would have spoken, read and written several languages and would know Dutch, French and even English song-books and music.
- The **painting in the background** is hard to see. It is a **landscape in the style of Allaert van Everdingen** (1621-1675) and although landscapes in a painting were often decorative 'fillers' they could be used as a **metaphor for love**. The cavalier is using music making and wine as part of the recognised standards of love making. The situation is ambiguous as the **closed body language of the young woman** implies reluctance yet to invite a young man into her chamber and accept a glass of wine implies a positive intention.
- (CLICK) The woman has just finished the glass of wine and the gentleman is **keen to refill her glass**.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wine_Glass

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/baroque-art1/holland/v/jan-vermeer-the-glass-of-wine-c-1661> (includes a four minute video)

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/glass_of_wine.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Wine Glass*, 1658-60, 67.7 × 79.6 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

- The woman has just finished the glass of wine and (CLICK) we can zoom in even closer to examine the brushwork. Note that the gentleman's hand is on the flask and he is waiting to **refill her glass**.
- (CLICK) Maybe the coat of arms gives us a clue? It has been identified but the owners died before Vermeer was born and it is not known how he came by it. The female figure holds **a level and a bridle** and represents **Temperance**. The bridle symbolises **emotional control** and so implies moderation although it is not clear if this means the couple are controlling their emotions or whether the window is a warning to the couple to control their excessive behaviour.
- (CLICK) Significantly **her eyes are shielded** from **Temperance** by the glass implying she is shutting her eyes to moderation.
- **More broadly the painting perhaps represents harmony versus disharmony**. The picture contains many squares and rectangles aligned and askew. The **folds of his cloak create a wave** rushing towards her but they are **opposed by the gold brocade of her dress which pushes back** but the folds of her dress seem to continue his and so pull them together but the colours oppose each other. On the other hand **her dress is the fiery red of passion. Which force will win, it is an epic battle between good and evil** presented as a seemingly trivial incident.
- The painting shares some elements with the following picture...

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wine_Glass

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/baroque-art1/holland/v/jan-vermeer-the-glass-of-wine-c-1661> (includes a four minute video)



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *The Girl with the Wine Glass*, c. 1659-60, 78 × 67 cm, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum

- This has similar elements to the last painting such as the open window with its coat of arms and the tiled floor which Vermeer never painted again.
- **An important difference** however, which is hard to see in a reproduction, is the **painted surface**. The previous painting had a **rougher surface with a grainier texture reminiscent of late Rembrandt (1606-1669)** and known at the time as the *rouw* or **rough manner**. A **new, smooth manner**, known as *net*, was **becoming desired by patrons and this painting has a very smooth, almost polished surface**. It is possible that Vermeer was experimenting with and learning this new style. **The rough style of Rembrandt was heavily criticised** and was rejected by most art writers of the time.

- In terms of meaning, **this painting is even less clear** than the previous one. (CLICK) **The girl looks out at us and smiles. Why?** Is she unsure what to do, is she smiling as she is pleased with the attention or is it a plea for help? (CLICK) In the **background is a man dozing**. Is he a rejected lover or is the man in the background **her guardian** who has fallen asleep allowing the bowing man to court her.
- (CLICK) The window contains a stained glass image of a woman with a coat of arms mimicking the colours of the painting. The same window is portrayed in the previous painting we saw, Vermeer's *The Wine Glass* in Berlin and she represents **Temperance**.
- (CLICK) On the table is a **still-life with lemons on a silver plate** indicating a wealthy household. **Lemons** were used to spice the wine and they could also signify **modesty or a warning against immoral behaviour**.
- One suggested interpretation is that the woman's smile is a knowing smile and it was a common subject for



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *View of Delft*, 1660-63, 98.5 x 117.5 cm, Koninklijk Kabinet van Schilderijen Mauritshuis, The Hague

- This is one of the great paintings of the world. The scudding clouds have cast a temporary shadow over Delft but it is not movement that Vermeer conveys but stillness. He has captured a moment in time and an overall feeling of stillness. The quote I like is "**He took a turbulent reality, and made it look like Heaven on earth**".
- We do not know why he painted it but it might have been commissioned by his patron, Pieter van Ruijven (pronounced 'row-ven', 'row' rhymes with 'cow'). Dutch citizens strongly identified with the city of their birth as well as the republic and there are many Dutch cityscapes.
- The building to the left of centre is the Schiedam Gate and the building to the right of centre is the Nieuwe Kerk. Vermeer lived just to the right of the Kerk. The clock on the Schiedam Gate shows it is 7:30 in the morning and the herring boat on the right is being repaired prior to the herring season which started on 1 June so it is probably **early May**.
- The **Nieuwe Kerk is important** to all Dutchman as it is where the Father of the Fatherland, **William of Orange** is buried along with all Dutch monarchs. He led the northern Netherlands in their revolt against Spanish rule and he chose to live in Delft where he was assassinated by a political opponent.
- The **absence of bells from the New Church** dates the picture to 1660-61. It was painted from an **elevated position**, possibly the **upper storey of a house** looking over the river Schie. We are looking northwest with the Schiedam Gate to the left of centre and the Rotterdam Gate on the right. Behind the Schiedam Gate are the long red roofs of the arsenal. It is morning with the sun illuminating the new Church, right of centre. To the left is the Parrot Brewery ('De Papegaey') and **left again is the Oude Kerk (Old Church) where Vermeer is buried**.

- If you like the painting you are in good company, **Marcel Proust** wrote, "**Ever since I saw the View of Delft in the museum in The Hague, I have known that I had seen the most beautiful painting in the world**".

NOTES

- He used only five pigments (calcite, lead white, yellow ochre, natural ultramarine and madder lake) but his technique is meticulous. It is thought he used a camera obscura to paint the picture.
- In 1654, the city suffered the terrible explosion known as the **Delft Thunderclap**, which destroyed a large section of the city.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Vermeer

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/View_of_Delft

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/view_of_delft.html#top



Girl Interrupted at her Music, c. 1658-61, 39.4 x 44.5 cm, The Frick Collection, New York



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Girl Interrupted at her Music*, c. 1658-61, 39.4 x 44.5 cm, The Frick Collection, New York

- A gentleman, **possibly a music teacher, leans over a young girl** to give her or show her a sheet, possibly originally of music. **The woman is looking out at us** with an enigmatic expression. The convention of one person looking out of the picture goes back to Leon Alberti's book *De Pictura* published in 1435. The, so called, pictorial commentator is often someone in the know **seeking our complicity**. Here we are drawn in by her gaze but it tells us nothing of her intent.
- (CLICK) The young girl's skirt and jacket have suffered from over restoration like many parts of Vermeer's work. However, the girl's face is relatively unscathed. (CLICK)
- Again, there was a literary convention at the time that compared **men overpowered with love to mice caught in traps, squirrels running in caged wheels, stags shot by arrows and insets attracted to their death by burning candles**.
- The blue and white wine jug on the table is porcelain made in Delft. Delft, Rotterdam and Haarlem had been competing trying to **outdo Chinese porcelain** by producing thin, light, bright-white glazed earthenware. **Eventually Delft produced the best** and became the centre of porcelain production to the extent that. Delftware was even exported back to China.
- It is thought the bird cage to the right of the window was added at a later date.
- The painting on the back wall is of Cupid and it supports the reading of the picture as an amorous encounter, at least on the man's part.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Interrupted_at_Her_Music

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Interrupted_at_Her_Music

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/girl_interrupted_in_her_music.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Girl Interrupted at her Music*, c. 1658-61, 39.4 × 44.5 cm, The Frick Collection, New York

- It is hard to see but there is a **glass of red wine on the table** and a decanter nearby. Wine and music were regarded as two companions to courtship. Women could choose who they wished to marry subject to issues of class, religion, age and money. There were formal rules to follow, a man could write love letters to a woman but a woman must never write one as the woman had to adopt a passive role in courtship. The sheet music in the painting **does not make musical sense**. (CLICK)
- **Unfortunately, the painting has been damaged** over the centuries by over restoration. The woman's dress was originally bright red and the man's cloak has been almost destroyed.

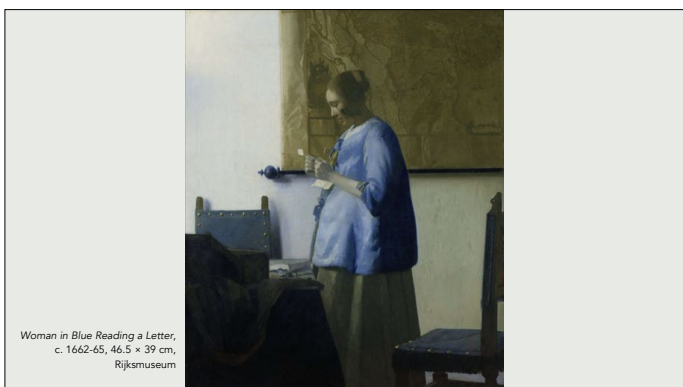
NOTES

- The **cittern on the table** was a very popular instrument at this time. It was like a lute but had brass strings and so sounded more like a banjo. It was used to accompany the singing voice and for dancing.

REFERENCES

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Interrupted_at_Her_Music

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/girl_interrupted_in_her_music.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, c. 1662-65, 46.5 × 39 cm, Rijksmuseum

- In Dutch paintings **women reading letters are almost always associated with love**. Here the letter seems important as she holds it close and is concentrating.
- Although **she looks pregnant this is unlikely** as it would be the only example of a picture of a pregnant woman in Dutch art of this period. As many women were painted during the first year of their married when **many would have been pregnant** it can only be assumed that **pregnancy was not regarded as looking attractive**. We do know that a **bulky silhouette like this was fashionable** and a short sleeved jacket over a heavily padded skirt was a way to achieve this. The blue jacket is a satin bed jacket showing she has just risen from bed.
- We now know that paintings like this were **not intended to literally represent life** in 17th century

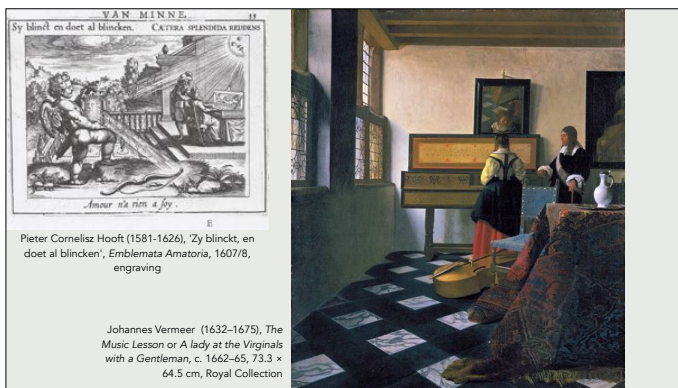
Netherlands. They were constructed to show an **ideal world to act as models for correct behaviour** and to warn of moral dangers.

- On a technical note, when most people examine a painting they look at the positive shapes but an artist also considers the **negative spaces**. Vermeer was a master of the negative space. Consider the wall either side of the woman. Its shape holds the woman in place and provides the painting with a sense of stability.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_Reading_a_Letter_\(Vermeer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_Reading_a_Letter_(Vermeer))

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/woman_in_blue_reading_a_letter.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *The Music Lesson or A Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman*, c. 1662-64, 73.3 x 64.5 cm, Royal Collection

Pieter Cornelisz Hooft (1581-1626), 'Zy blinckt, en doet al blincken', *Emblemata Amatoria*, 1607/8, engraving

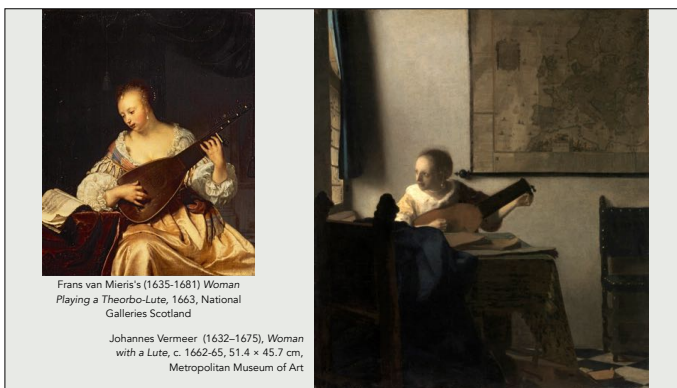
- **It is thought this represents two people in love.** The woman is playing the virginal and the man's viola de gamba is on the floor. The viewer assumes he will soon pick it up and they will make sweet music together.
- **The motto on the virginal**, translated from Latin, reads "**Music is the companion of joy, balm for sorrow**". The picture on the right illustrates a story from the Roman author Valerius Maximus concerning charity. A man is sentenced to death by starvation, we can see his bound arms, and his daughter secretly breast feeds him to keep him alive. She is discovered but her act of selflessness wins her father's release. We only see his bound arms so it may refer to the gentleman being bound by virtual fetters of love.
- The **mirror above the virginal is also important** as it has many associations. It could stand for **truth or vanity** and it was also associated with the **art of painting**. In one treatise (Samuel van Hoogstraten) is written "**A perfect painting is like a mirror of nature**" and it is **just possible to make out the leg and crossbar of the painter's easel** and this **reminds us of a third person in the room**—the artist. This reminds us that the painting is a construct of the artist's intellect and it introduces a moral dilemma—the more the painted image is regarded as real the **more deceptive** it is and therefore the more **morally reprehensible**.
- (CLICK) **Mirrors also appeared in emblem books** (see P. C. Hooft's *Emblemata Amatoria*) **representing love**. An emblem book is a book containing images used as symbols with text explaining the meaning. They were popular in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. Emblem books explained that in the same way a mirror reflects sunlight so does love reflect its source in the loved one. So the love the man feels comes not from himself but is a reflection of his love from his beloved.

The similarity of the woman playing the virginal, the man standing next to her and the mirror suggest that Vermeer was influenced by this book.(CLICK)

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Music_Lesson

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/music_lesson.html#top



Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Woman with a Lute*, c. 1662-65, 51.4 × 45.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art
Frans van Mieris's (1635-1681) *Woman Playing a Theorbo-Lute*, 1663, National Galleries Scotland
Lute music, *Canaris* from the M.L. Lutebook, 26r performed by Thomas Berghan

- (CLICK) It is likely that **Vermeer appropriated this pose from Frans van Mieris's** (1635-1681, pronounced 'meer-ess') *Woman Playing a Theorbo-Lute* (1663, pronounced 'thee-aw-bow'). Van Mieris was three years younger but was renowned as a *fijnschilder* (fine painter) and although there is no record of them meeting he lived in Leiden **only twenty kilometres from Delft**. (CLICK)
- Note the way the woman's head is balanced by the head of the lute and he has kept the woman and the lute from overlapping the map. The ball of the map's stretcher subtly nestles into the woman's neck. She is tuning the lute and listening intently. **Lutes often went out of tune and it was a standing joke** among lutenists that they spent more time tuning than playing.
- In Vermeer's time the delicate tone of the lute meant it was often used to symbolise the transience of life and death but it **also had many erotic associations** partly because the Dutch word for lute was **luit** (pronounced 'lout') **meant vagina**. Prostitutes were often shown in paintings holding lutes. **To avoid these associations he has emphasised the gentleness of the woman and the spiritual light flooding over her** from the window. The picture shows music as a **solace and a pleasant activity**.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman_with_a_Lute

<https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/88427>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frans_van_Mieris_the_Elder

http://www.essentialvermeer.com/catalogue/woman_with_a_lute.html#top



- Literally every painting by Vermeer is a masterpiece. This is perhaps his best known work *Girl with a Pearl Earring* that we shall see next week.
- He painted slowly and with great care and used the enormously expensive pigment, **ultramarine**, which few other artists used so lavishly. **He even used it as an under-paint.** He painted mostly in one room of his house and it is thought that he used a form of camera obscura.
- **He was born in Delft and spent all of his life there.** He married Catharina Bolnes from a wealthy family and she gave birth to **15 children**. He was **repeatedly elected headsman of the Guild of St Luke** and we believe he sold his work to wealthy local collectors, in particular Pieter van Ruijven.
- There was a **severe economic depression in 1672** and he **died three years later aged only 43**. His wife explained that **he had been ruined financially, could not sell any paintings** and was **left with old masters paintings** he could not sell and she attributed his early death to the **stress of his financial problems**. He was **almost unknown outside of Delft**, he **never had any pupils** and **he only produced about three paintings a year**.
- After his marriage he lived with his mother-in-law all his life and there is no evidence he ever fell out with her. He maintained a vital relationship with a **wealthy Delft patron, Pieter van Ruijven**, who bought more than half of his entire artistic output.

BIOGRAPHY

BIO:VERMEER

- Johannes Vermeer (October 1632-December 1675) was born in Delft and spent all of his life in the town. His father was a silk worker who started buying and selling paintings just before Vermeer was born. Also, at the this time he leased an inn and later bought a larger inn in the market square.
- In 1652 his father died and Vermeer took over the art business and the following year married Catharina Bolnes (pronounced 'Bol-ness'). Her family were a lot wealthier and it is likely he converted to Catholicism to get permission to marry. At some point they moved in with his mother-in-law and remained there the rest of his life. His brother-in-law Willem Bolnes was extremely violent and swore at his mother and on one occasion pulled a knife and tried to stab her. He also threatened to beat Vermeer's wife with a stick when she was 'pregnant to the last degree'. His wife gave birth to 15 children but four died before they were baptised.
- There is disagreement about whether Vermeer was an apprentice and to whom. He painted in the front room on the second floor and one other room in the house. He painted slowly and with great care and used the most expensive pigments. There is no other 17th-century artist who employed the exorbitantly expensive pigment lapis lazuli (natural ultramarine) either so lavishly or so early in his career. He even employed it as an underpaint to create a cool, crisp appearance such as in the shadows of the red satin dress of *The Girl with the Wine Glass*. He even continued to use it after his financial breakdown suggesting it was supplied by a

wealthy collector, possibly Pieter van Ruijven (pronounced 'row', as in quarrel, 'fer').

- In 1653 he became a member of the Guild of Saint Luke. This was a year of plague, war, economic crisis and a terrible explosion that destroyed a large part of the city. Possibly for these reasons Vermeer did not pay the usual admission fee.
- At the time Gerard Dou (pronounced 'herard dow') was selling paintings for exorbitant prices and Vermeer charged higher than average prices and we believe most of his works were sold to a local collector. He probably competed with Nicolaes Maes (pronounced 'mass') who produced genre works in a similar style. In 1662 Vermeer was elected head of the guild and again in 1663, 1670 and 1671.
- 1672 was a year of severe economic downturn (the 'Year of Disaster') because of the war with France and later England. Theatres, shops and schools closed and it was five years before things recovered. In 1675 Vermeer borrowed 1,000 guilders in Amsterdam using his mother-in-law's house as security.
- In 1675 he died after a short illness aged 43. In a petition his wife explained that he had been ruined financially, could not sell any paintings and was left with old masters paintings he could not sell and she attributed his early death to the stress of his financial problems. He was almost unknown outside of Delft, he never had any pupils and he only produced about three paintings a year.
- He produced fewer than 50 paintings of which 34 survive. Only three paintings were dated by the artist.
- There is a theory that Vermeer used optical devices, such as a camera obscura or a comparator mirror but none was found in his house after his death. However, he was a friend of the pioneering lens maker Antonie van Leeuwenhoek who was his executor after his death.
- He was overlooked by art historians for two centuries until his catalogue raisonné was published in 1866.
- Hans van Meegeren became a master forger and painted many new 'Vermeers' which he sold to the Nazis during occupation. When charged with treason he demonstrated his skill by painting a new 'Vermeer' in court. Today his forgeries look like obvious fakes.

REFERENCES

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Vermeer
- <http://www.essentialvermeer.com/index.html> (an excellent and comprehensive analysis of Vermeer's work)

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- The notes are based on information found on the public websites of Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.
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