



PIETER ROELOFS
GREGOR J.M. WEBER

VERMEER

BART CORNELIS
BENTE FRISSEN
SABINE PÉNOT
FRIEDERIKE SCHÜTT
CHRISTIAN TICO SEIFERT
ARIANE VAN SUCHTELEN
MARJORIE E. WIESEMAN

RIJKS MUSEUM

HANNIBAL



CAT. 1

Christ in the House of Mary and Martha c. 1654–1655

Oil on canvas, 158.5 × 141.5 cm

Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, inv. no. NG 1670;

presented by the sons of W.A. Coats in memory of their father 1927

pp. 6, 122, 126–129, 131, 150, 274



CAT. 2

Saint Praxedis 1655

Oil on canvas, 101.6 × 82.6 cm

Kufu Company Inc., on long-term loan at
The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo,
inv. no. DEP.2014-0001

pp. 7, 17, 32, 123, 126, 128-130, 136, 274



CAT. 3

Diana and her Nymphs c. 1655-1656

Oil on canvas, 97.8 × 104.6 cm

The Hague, Mauritshuis, inv. no. 406

pp. 7, 124, 126, 128-132, 137, 150, 274



CAT. 4

The Procuress 1656

Oil on canvas, 143 × 130 cm

Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen Dresden, gallery no. 1335

pp. 8, 17, 32, 35, 125–126, 128–129, 131–132, 150, 275



CAT. 5 ★

A Maid Asleep c. 1656–1657
Oil on canvas, 87.6 × 76.5 cm
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
acc. no. 14.40.611; bequest of Benjamin Altman
pp. 9, 68, 127, 129, 146, 150–153, 156, 275



CAT. 7

Officer and Laughing Girl c. 1657–1658
Oil on canvas, 50.5 × 46 cm
New York, The Frick Collection, acc. no. 1911.1127
pp. 9, 102–103, 114, 116, 140, 153, 158, 162–163, 165, 196, 276



CAT. 6

Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window c. 1657–1658
Oil on canvas, 83 × 64.5 cm
Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen Dresden, gallery no. 1336
pp. 9, 36, 98–99, 147, 151, 153–154, 157, 162, 174, 196–197,
227, 234–236, 275–276



CAT. 8

The Milkmaid c. 1658–1659
Oil on canvas, 45.5 × 41 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum,
inv. no. SK-A-2344; purchased with the
support of the Rembrandt Association

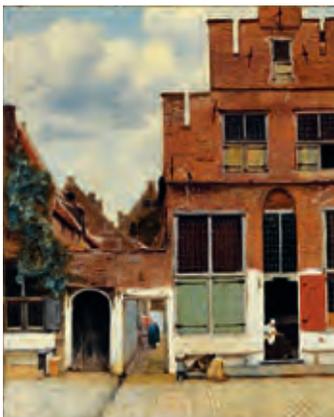
pp. 10, 26, 36, 64, 68, **70–73**, 74, 80, 104,
106–109, 141, **148–149**, 153, 162, **169**, 174,
186, 196–199, 214, 276–277



CAT. 10

View of Delft c. 1660–1661
Oil on canvas, 96.5 × 115.7 cm
The Hague, Mauritshuis, inv. no. 92

pp. 10, 20, 34, 114–115, **139**, 140–143, **145**, 210, 277–278



CAT. 9

View of Houses in Delft known as
The Little Street c. 1658–1659
Oil on canvas, 54.3 × 44 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-2860;
gift of Mr H.W.A. Deterding, London

pp. 10, 36, 51, **53**, **138**, 140–143, 166, 277



CAT. 11

The Glass of Wine c. 1659–1661
Oil on canvas, 67.7 × 79.6 cm
Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 912C

pp. 10, **59**, **170**, 174–177, **180**, 278



CAT. 12

Girl Interrupted at her Music c. 1659–1661
Oil on canvas, 39.4 × 44.5 cm
New York, The Frick Collection, acc. no. 1901.1.125
pp. 11, 58, 82, 168, 171, 174, 177, 208–209, 278



CAT. 14 *

Young Woman with a Water Pitcher c. 1662–1664
Oil on canvas, 45.7 × 40.6 cm
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
acc. no. 89.15.21; Marquand Collection,
Gift of Henry G. Marquand, 1889
pp. 11, 24–25, 34, 36, 62, 77, 140, 177, 250, 254, 256–257, 279



CAT. 13 *

Girl with a Wine Glass c. 1659–1661
Oil on canvas, 77.5 × 66.7 cm
Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum,
inv. no. GG 316
pp. 11, 56–57, 172–173, 174–177, 181, 186, 208, 278–279



CAT. 15

Woman in Blue Reading a Letter c. 1662–1664
Oil on canvas, 46.5 × 39 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-C-251;
on loan from the City of Amsterdam
(A. van der Hoop Bequest)
pp. 11, 36, 104, 116, 121, 140, 163–164, 194, 196–199,
202, 234, 236, 279–280



CAT. 16 *

Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman

known as **The Music Lesson** c. 1662–1664

Oil on canvas, 73.3 × 64.5 cm

London, Royal Collection Trust, inv. no. RCIN 405346;
The Royal Collection, His Majesty King Charles III

pp. 12, 80, **87, 182**, 186, 188–189, 226, **230**, 280



CAT. 18

Young Woman with a Lute c. 1662–1664

Oil on canvas, 51.4 × 45.7 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
acc. no. 25.110.24; bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900

pp. 12, 103, **105, 120, 159**, 162, 164–165, 281



CAT. 17 *

The Concert c. 1662–1664

Oil on canvas, 72.5 × 64.7 cm

Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum,
acc. no. P21w27 (stolen in 1990)

pp. 12, 26–27, 76, **183**, 186–189, 211, 226, **231**, 280–281



CAT. 19

Woman with a Pearl Necklace c. 1662–1664

Oil on canvas, 56.1 × 47.4 cm

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. 912B

pp. 12, 52, 76, **113**, 164, **192, 251**, 254, 256–257, 281–282



CAT. 20

Woman Holding a Balance c. 1662–1664

Oil on canvas, 39.7 × 35.5 cm

Washington DC, National Gallery of Art,
Widener Collection, acc. no. 1942.9.97

pp. 13, 52, 54, 100, 193, 211, 252, 254–257, 261, 282–283



CAT. 22

Mistress and Maid c. 1664–1667

Oil on canvas, 90.2 × 78.7 cm

New York, The Frick Collection, acc. no. 1919.1.126

pp. 13, 17, 34, 67, 210, 212–213, 219, 227, 233–234, 236–237, 283–284



CAT. 21

A Lady Writing c. 1664–1667

Oil on canvas, 45 × 39.9 cm

Washington DC, National Gallery of Art, acc. no. 1962.10.1;
gift of Harry Waldron Havemeyer and Horace Havemeyer Jr.,
in memory of their father Horace Havemeyer

pp. 13, 34, 65–66, 69, 232, 234–236, 273, 283



CAT. 23

Girl with a Flute c. 1664–1667

Oil on panel, 20 × 17.8 cm

Washington DC, National Gallery of Art,
Widener Collection, acc. no. 1942.9.98

pp. 13, 34, 52, 204, 208, 214–215, 284



CAT. 24

Girl with a Red Hat c. 1664–1667

Oil on panel, 22.8 × 18 cm

Washington DC, National Gallery of Art,
Andrew W. Mellon Collection, acc. no. 1937.1.53

pp. 13, 34, 205, 208–214, 284–285



CAT. 25

Girl with a Pearl Earring c. 1664–1667
Oil on canvas, 44.5 × 39 cm
The Hague, Mauritshuis, inv. no. 670; bequest of
Arnoldus Andries des Tombe, The Hague, 1903
pp. 14, 17, 26, 30, 34, 69, 206, 208–214, 218, 285



CAT. 27

The Lacemaker c. 1666–1668
Oil on canvas, 24.5 × 21 cm
Paris, Musée du Louvre, Dépôt du Musée
des Arts Décoratifs, inv. no. MI 1448

pp. 14, 23, 34, 104, 110, 195–196, 198–199, 203,
210, 213, 226, 286



CAT. 26 *

Girl with a Veil c. 1664–1667
Oil on canvas, 44.5 × 40 cm
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
inv. no. 1979.396.1; gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles
Wrightsman, in memory of Theodore Rousseau Jr.
pp. 14, 34, 69, 207, 208–214, 285–286



CAT. 28 *

The Art of Painting c. 1666–1668
Oil on canvas, 120 × 100 cm
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum,
Picture Gallery, inv. no. 9128

pp. 14, 17, 34, 52, 55, 80–81, 84–85, 100, 132, 140, 165,
188, 213, 258, 264–265, 266–269, 286–287



CAT. 29 *

The Astronomer 1668

Oil on canvas, 51 × 45 cm

Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. R.F. 1983-28

pp. 15, 17, 35-37, 51, 117, 165, 198, **240**, 242-245, **249**, **262**, 287



CAT. 30

The Geographer 1669

Oil on canvas, 51.6 × 45.4 cm

Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum, inv. no. 1149

pp. 15, 17, 35, 51, 76, **79**, 117, **241**, 242-245, **247-248**, 287-288



CAT. 31

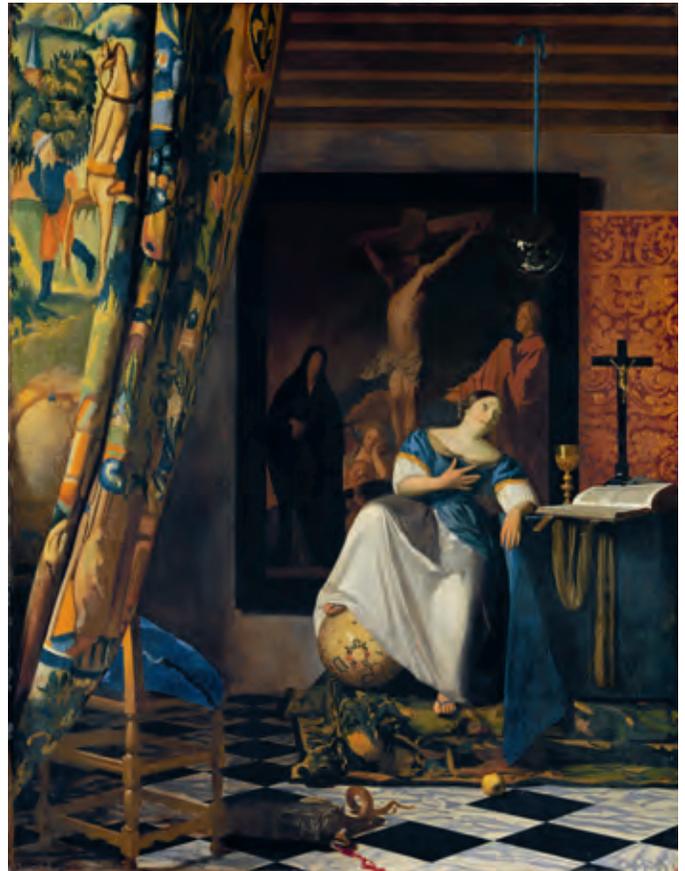
The Love Letter c. 1669-1670

Oil on canvas, 44 × 38.5 cm

Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. no. SK-A-1595;

acquired with the assistance of the Rembrandt Association

pp. 15, **18**, 35-36, 68-69, 75-76, 80, **96-97**, 127, 163, **184-185**, 186, 189, 196, 214, 227, 234, 236, **239**, 288



CAT. 32

Allegory of the Catholic Faith c. 1670-1674

Oil on canvas, 114.3 × 88.9 cm

New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, acc. no. 32.100.18;

The Friedsam Collection, bequest of Michael Friedsam, 1931

pp. 15, 35-36, 56, **60-61**, **63**, 68-69, **111**, 132, **253-254**, 258, **261**, **263**, 288-289



CAT. 33

Young Woman Standing at a Virginal c. 1670–1672

Oil on canvas, 51.7 × 45.2 cm

London, The National Gallery, inv. no. NG1383;
bought, 1892

pp. 16, 35, 100–101, 114, 119, 220, 224–227, 271, 289–290



CAT. 35

Woman Writing a Letter, with her Maid c. 1670–1672

Oil on canvas, 71.1 × 60.5 cm

Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland, inv. no. NGI.4535

pp. 16, 35, 160–161, 162, 165, 201, 213, 234, 238, 290



CAT. 34

Young Woman Seated at a Virginal c. 1670–1672

Oil on canvas, 51.5 × 45.5 cm

London, The National Gallery, inv. no. NG2568;
Salting Bequest, 1910

pp. 16, 35–36, 100–101, 187, 221, 224–225, 227–228, 290



CAT. 36 *

The Guitar Player c. 1670–1672

Oil on canvas, 51.4 × 45 cm

London, Kenwood, The Iveagh Bequest,
English Heritage, inv. no. IBK 962

pp. 16, 32, 35, 83, 100, 198, 210, 222, 225–226, 228, 291

★ not included in the *Vermeer*
exhibition at the Rijksmuseum

All works shown at 10 per cent
of their actual size



CAT. 37

Young Woman Seated at a Virginal c. 1670–1672

Oil on canvas, 25.5 × 20.1 cm

New York, The Leiden Collection, inv. no. JVe-100

pp. 16, 35, 223, 225, 272, 291

NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

This overview encompasses the thirty-seven paintings that most art historians currently attribute to Johannes Vermeer. The works are shown at 1:10 scale, making it possible to follow the artist's progress directly: from the large history pieces, which date from shortly after Vermeer had become a master painter in 1653, via the transition to smaller depictions of everyday scenes and experimental *tronies* (faces), to the late allegories, once again in larger dimensions.

Each painting in the overview bears a catalogue number, so that the reader can easily find an illustration of the works cited in the essays; under each illustration, the page numbers where the work in question is discussed or pictured in the catalogue are listed.

The works are presented in chronological order, as far as this is possible based on the mere five paintings that Vermeer himself provided with dates: *Saint Praxedis*, 1655 (CAT. 2); *The Procuress*, 1656 (CAT. 4); *The Art of Painting*, 1666 (or 1668) (CAT. 28); *The Astronomer*, 1668 (CAT. 29) and *The Geographer*, 1669 (CAT. 30). All of the other paintings are grouped around these, whereby the curators of this exhibition have made use of dates previously posited in the literature. Minor deviations or shifts took place after thorough consideration, whereby the chronology of stylistic developments, influences and societal circumstances, among other things, played a role. The latest results of technical research also played a part in this, such as for *Mistress and Maid* (CAT. 22), in which Vermeer painted over a tapestry in the background. Knowledge about the process of creating this work now places it much closer in date to the small *tronies* from Washington (CATS. 23 and 24), and before *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (CAT. 25).

It was decided to place several groups of paintings in windows of time that span a broader period. The catalogue numbers, however, do provide an indication of the possible chronological order of the pieces.

The 'disaster year' 1672, when the Dutch Republic was attacked by France and England, among others, triggered an economic decline, including for Vermeer, who, according to his widow, sold barely anything after this date. It seems probable that his own production also waned significantly at this time.

The number of surviving paintings from the eighteen-year period between 1654 and about 1672 implies a production of two paintings a year on average, excluding the lost paintings (the subjects of five of which have been documented). With more knowledge of these missing works, what now appears abrupt at times in Vermeer's stylistic evolution might perhaps seem less startling. This is particularly true of the early years (1654–1657) and the years 1659–1662. These paintings, considered lost, might well shed light on Vermeer's progress, should they ever be rediscovered.

Pieter Roelofs
Gregor J.M. Weber



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FOREWORD

Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) did not produce many paintings – probably only two a year on average – yet every one of the works of this Delft master is an extraordinary creation that elicits fascination and wonder. Vermeer takes the viewer into an introvert, tranquil world. In the interiors he painted, light plays in an inimitable way and the use of colour is always startling. Although Vermeer composes his paintings, selects motifs and alters the spaces, he achieves such a degree of illusion that his pictorial world still feels identifiable and familiar some 350 years later.

‘Closer to Vermeer’ could be the motto of this exhibition: gaining a better understanding of his art, his considerations, his decisions. This is possible because it brings together twenty-eight paintings, over three quarters of his surviving oeuvre. It is the first time in its history that the Rijksmuseum has devoted an exhibition solely to Vermeer. This was a long-cherished desire, since the museum itself holds four of the master’s works in its collection. Our partner, the Mauritshuis, has contributed all three of the works by Vermeer in its collection.

It has been almost thirty years since the only previous monographic exhibition on Vermeer was held in Washington and The Hague. The unique opportunity to organize the *Vermeer* exhibition at the Rijksmuseum stems from a joint venture with The Frick Collection in New York. Over the past eight years, the curators of both of our institutions have worked in close collaboration towards exhibiting the three paintings from the collection of industrialist Henry Clay Frick outside New York for the first time and temporarily bringing them home to the country where they were created three and a half centuries ago.

The ten works from the Rijksmuseum, the Mauritshuis and The Frick Collection constituted a promising start for this exhibition. Other prominent collections in Germany, France, Ireland, Japan, Great Britain and the United States shared our enthusiasm and were kindly willing to lend their Vermeer masterpieces for this once in a lifetime occasion. We are enormously grateful to these museums and private collectors in Berlin, Dresden, Dublin, Edinburgh, Frankfurt, London, New York, Paris, Tokyo and Washington DC, for their exceptional and generous loans. We never thought it would be possible to unite so many of the artist’s paintings.

In preparation for the exhibition, technical research was conducted on two of the three paintings by Vermeer from The Frick Collection by a team of curators, conservators and scientists using the latest imaging technology in the Rijksmuseum’s restoration workshop. These same methods were applied in research on the works by Vermeer from the Rijksmuseum, the Mauritshuis and various other collections. This brought to light revealing modifications in his paintings, giving us greater insight into his method of working, his artistic choices and his quest for the perfect composition. We thank our colleagues from the Mauritshuis and the University of Antwerp for this rewarding collaboration, which will continue in the years to come.

Johannes Vermeer is a mystery, as has been repeatedly noted in art history literature over the last 150 years. Indeed we have no letters or diaries from the seventeenth-century Delft master, nor can his portrait be identified with certainty. In the run-up to the exhibition, however, extensive research has been conducted into the Delft artist, which has produced new insights into, among other things, his social position, his household, and the influence of his environment on his painting. Several of these insights are presented in this publication by the exhibition curators, Pieter Roelofs and Gregor J.M. Weber, and an international team of Vermeer experts. In this way, they bring Vermeer closer than ever before.

Vermeer’s paintings make an indelible impression. The intimate restraint of his work makes time stand still for a moment in a world that is moving at such a relentless pace. We wish every visitor an unforgettable experience of beauty and contemplation with Johannes Vermeer.

Taco Dibbits
General Director, Rijksmuseum

LENDERS

Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie
Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche
Kunstsammlungen Dresden
Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland
Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland
Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum
Kufu Company Inc., on long-term loan at
The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo
London, The National Gallery
New York, The Frick Collection
New York, The Leiden Collection
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Paris, Musée du Louvre, Dépôt du Musée des Arts Décoratifs
The Hague, Mauritshuis
Washington DC, National Gallery of Art

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Johannes Vermeer is intimately connected to the Rijksmuseum. For a long time, we at the museum could only dream of an exhibition entirely devoted to the art of Vermeer. Nearly thirty years have passed since Frederik J. Duparc and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., in collaboration with Albert Blankert, Ben Broos and Jørgen Wadum, organized the only monographic exhibition to date, in Washington DC and The Hague. The *Vermeer* exhibition at the Rijksmuseum has now become reality thanks to the generosity of numerous lenders. We would like to express our sincere thanks to them. Not only were sister museums and private collectors willing to part with their exceptional works for an extended period of time, they also advised and assisted us during research in preparation for the exhibition.

DEDICATED TO ALBERT BLANKERT 1940–2022

We express our gratitude first of all to Ian Wardropper and Xavier F. Salomon of The Frick Collection in New York, who made it possible to lend out all three of the works by Vermeer in their collection for the first time in this museum's history. Their trust and generosity laid the foundation for this extraordinary project. In addition, we thank Dagmar Hirschfelder, Katja Kleinert and Babette Hartwieg of the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; Martine Gosselink, Edwin Buijsen, Ariane van Suchtelen and Abbie Vandivere of the Mauritshuis, The Hague; Marion Ackermann, Stephan Koja and Uta Neidhardt of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Caroline Campbell, Kim Smit and Lizzie Marx of the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin; John Leighton, Line Clausen Pedersen and Christian Tico Seifert of the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; Philipp Demandt, Jochen Sander and Friederike Schütt of the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main; Gabriele

Finaldi, Bart Cornelis and Larry Keith of the National Gallery, London; Max Hollein, Stephan Wolohojian, Adam Eaker and Dorothy Mahon of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Thomas S. Kaplan and Sara C. Smith of The Leiden Collection, New York; Laurence des Cars, Sébastien Allard and Blaise Ducos of the Musée du Louvre, Paris; the Kufu Company Inc. and Masayuki Tanaka and Asuka Nakada of The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo; and Kaywin Feldman, Marjorie E. Wieseman and Alexandra Libby of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Thanks to their cooperation and commitment, it is now possible to see more works by Vermeer in one place than ever before, a new generation is able to discover the art of this exceptional Dutch master and researchers have the opportunity to study and discuss his extraordinary paintings in conjunction with one another.

As part of the preparations for this exhibition, extensive materials research was conducted into the works of Vermeer by a research team consisting of Anna Krekeler, Annelies van Loon, Ige Verslype, Francesca Gabrieli, Katrien Keune, Petria Noble, Carola van Wijk, Rob Erdmann and the undersigned (Rijksmuseum), Abbie Vandivere, Carol Pottasch, Sabrina Meloni, Ariane van Suchtelen, Edwin Buijsen (Mauritshuis), Frederik Vanmeert, Koen Janssens (University of Antwerp), Mitra Almasian, Maurice Aalders (Amsterdam UMC). This research, in collaboration with colleagues from, among others, the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Leiden Collection in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, has provided several new insights. A number of these are incorporated in this catalogue. The research will continue in the next few years and result in a publication.

Equally indispensable were our fellow researchers and co-authors of this publication: Bart Cornelis, Sabine Pénot, Friederike Schütt, Christian Tico Seifert, Ariane van Suchtelen and Marjorie E. Wieseman. We learned a great deal from their expertise and insights throughout the project. The completion of this book was made possible thanks to the boundless dedication of Barbera van Kooij, in collaboration with Geri Klazema, Ellen Slob, Kate Bell and Els Brinkman. Miekie Donner compiled the index, for which we are extremely grateful. Bente Frissen conducted the provenance research and compiled the bibliography. We also thank Hannibal Books, Gautier Plateau and Hadewych Van den Bossche for their collaboration. The English translations were produced by Pierre Bouvier, Gerald Brennan, Jennifer Kilian and Katy Kist, John Nicholson and Sophie Kidd.

Colleagues from various departments of the Rijksmuseum, in a project team led by Renske Brinkman, collaborated in the preparations and completion of this major project, contributing ideas and effort. We wish to thank our fellow project team members: Theo van den Broek, Melchior Bussink, Annette Cozijn, Aron Eilander, Bente Frissen, Wieneke 't Hoen, Martine Hulshof, Elles Kamphuis, Karin Keeman, Barbera van

Kooij, Suzan Krabben, Lianne de Laat, Barbara Lameris, Karin Lieftink, Renate Schoon, Wanda Schoonhoven, Maria Smit, Tim Veerwater and Joko de Wit.

Numerous friends, colleagues and specialists in various fields helped us in resolving questions during our research as part of the exhibition preparations. For this, and for all productive discussions, correspondence and support, we thank Dries van den Akker S.J.†, Saskia van Altena, Dina Anchin, Reinier Baarsen, Lucienne Bax, Paul Begheyn S.J., Dirk-Jan Biemond, Jonathan Bikker, Ben Broos†, Quentin Buvelot, Jan van Campen, Martine Dekker, John K. Delaney, Lisha Deming Glinsman, Alexander Dencher, Femke Diercks, Sara van Dijk, Kathryn A. Dooley, Frits Duparc, Menno Fitski, Josephina de Fouw, Melanie Gifford, Frans Grijzenhout, Sabine Haag, David de Haan, Eva Hermans, Jonathan Janson, Marieke de Jong, Kees Kaldenbach, Stephan Kemperdick, Peter Kerber, Lotte Kokkedee, Paul van Laar, Mara Lagerweij, Friso Lammertse, Robert van Langh, Suzanne van Leeuwen, Walter Liedtke†, Karin van Lieverloo, Bieke van der Mark, Suzan Meijer, Bianca du Mortier, Elke Oberthaler, Sabine Pénot, Henry Pettifer, Henriette Rahusen, Monique Rakhorst, Tamar van Riesen, Marlise Rijks, Justine Rinnooy Kan, Răzvan Rusu, Dirk Sacré, Eddy Schavemaker, Robert Schillemans, Jacobien Schneider, Frits Scholten, Hans Slager, Marika Spring, Giovanni Paolo Di Stefano, Dirk Steyaert, Pauline Stoopman, Nicholas De Sutter, Maud van Suylen, Paul Taylor, Matthias Ubl, Jaap van der Veen, Thijn van de Ven, Jørgen Wadum, Adriaan Waiboer, Arie Wallert, Lianne Wepler, Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., Lara Yeager-Crasselt and Huib J. Zuidervaart.

A special word of thanks to Jean-Michel Wilmotte, Emmanuel Brelot and Alexia Gargiulo of Wilmotte & Associés for their design for the exhibition and to Irma Boom, who designed the exhibition texts with great care. Boom designed the publication you hold in your hands based on the format of Vermeer's *The Lacemaker*. The many unique details she selected keep us looking at Vermeer's work with amazement.

Three months before the opening of the *Vermeer* exhibition, art historian and prominent Vermeer expert Albert Blankert passed away. It is with the utmost respect, gratitude and appreciation for his work that we dedicate this book to him.

Pieter Roelofs
Gregor J.M. Weber





JOHANNES VERMEER (DELFT 1632–1675) MODESTLY MASTERFUL

PIETER ROELOFS

Johannes Vermeer, one of the most talented and original Dutch painters of the seventeenth century, now belongs to the *hors catégorie* of world-famous artists. He is so renowned that he is simply presented as ‘Vermeer’ in countless publications and exhibitions – a successful artistic brand. Several of his pictures are counted among the highlights in the history of painting and engraved on the minds of art lovers around the world. The stellar status now enjoyed by *The Milkmaid* (CAT. 8) and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (CAT. 25), for instance, may very well make them even more famous than the painter himself.

Nowadays, most art historians accept thirty-seven paintings as autograph works by Vermeer, twenty-four of which are signed and five also dated [see pp. 274–291]. It is generally believed that Vermeer painted somewhere between forty-five and fifty pictures in the third quarter of the seventeenth century. In a career spanning more than two decades, this amounts to an average of about two per year: a modest number compared to the oeuvres of, for example, his contemporaries Frans Hals and Rembrandt van Rijn. After all, the number of their collected works is more than four to seven times higher, at over two hundred and three hundred and fifty paintings, respectively. Accordingly, one can conclude that while Vermeer may not have been a prolific artist, this does not necessarily mean that he worked particularly slowly.

Five of his paintings are known only from mentions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources. They will have been lost to fire, war, forces of nature, destruction or neglect, or lead an unnoticed existence in private possession or museum collections. One canvas, *The Concert* (CAT. 17), stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston over thirty years ago, unfortunately has yet to be traced [FIG. 1]. The other thirty-six works by Vermeer in collections in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Ireland, Japan, Austria, the United Kingdom and the United States are all public favourites.

Although there are quite a few contemporary sources relating to Vermeer, his personal life is still presented as an enigma, whereby the artist is often conflated with his painting. His great repute is due mainly to the intimacy and serenity of his light-filled representations. This introduction examines Vermeer’s life based on seventeenth-century

documents, traces the chronological development of his oeuvre and examines his growing fame as an artist over the centuries.

HUMBLE ORIGINS

The contrast between Vermeer’s renown today and his modest existence almost four centuries ago captures our imagination. It is hard to imagine that the great Dutch artist’s life in the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century largely unfolded on and around the Markt, the great marketplace in the centre of Delft [FIG. 2].¹ Thanks to various documents, we know that he occasionally left his native city to travel to Amsterdam, The Hague or Gouda, for instance, and moreover must also have spent some time elsewhere for his artistic education. Strictly speaking, however, the urban environment of Delft constituted his world.²

Johannes Vermeer was born in late October 1632 into a modest middle-class family on the Voldersgracht, a narrow canal immediately north of Delft’s Markt. On the 31st of that month, he was baptized ‘Joannis’ in the nearby Dutch Reformed Nieuwe Kerk (New Church).³ Johannes was the youngest child of Digna Baltens and Reynier Jansz, who had wed in Amsterdam seventeen years earlier, in 1615.⁴ As far as the archives reveal, he was their second child. Their daughter Geertruijt had been born in Delft twelve years earlier, in 1620.⁵ As the first son, Johannes was named after his paternal grandfather, the Delft tailor Jan Reyzers,⁶ according to old Dutch custom. Digna, about thirty-seven at the time of his birth, came from a family of Reformed artisans and had moved from Antwerp to the Northern Netherlands with her parents, sister and brother under pressure from the war with Spain. She could neither read nor write.⁷ Reynier, aged about forty-one when Johannes was born, was initially employed in the textile industry as a weaver of a velvety woollen fabric known as ‘caffa’.

While not particularly well off, Reynier and Digna were certainly not penniless. An estate inventory drawn up in December 1623 reveals that they owned a small collection of paintings, including some still lifes, a few history paintings, portraits and genre scenes.⁸ Among them, several portraits of members of the stadholder’s family draw particular attention. The likenesses of ‘Zijne Excelentye ende prins Henrik’ (His Excellency and Prince Hendrik), or Stadholder Maurits and his half-brother Frederik Hendrik, and ‘de prins met de prinsesse’ (the prince with the princess), presumably William of Orange and Louise de Coligny, underscore the Orangist leaning of the Protestant Reynier and Digna in the turbulent days after the Twelve Years’ Truce in the Eighty Years’ War.⁹ One assumes that these works came from the family studio of the Delft artist Michiel van Mierevelt, who painted several portraits of stadholders and court members of the House of Nassau in the first decades of the seventeenth century, of which numerous copies for the free market were

FIG. 1 *The Concert* (cat. 17), detail showing the group of musicians

This slight yet clear opposition probably rested as much on the difference in social standing as on Vermeer's Reformed leanings.⁴⁹ It is conceivable that Maria Thins ideally envisaged a better-off Catholic partner for her daughter than the Protestant painter and art dealer of humble origins. Moreover, the Vermeers' loyalty to the stadholder's family most likely also played a role. After all, as a devout Catholic, she had to profess her faith in modest, tolerated 'hidden' churches, while the Nieuwe Kerk right on her doorstep – once the pride of her religious community, now stripped of altars and statues of saints – served primarily as the final resting place of members of the House of Orange.⁵⁰ Apparently, she did not want to hinder her daughter's choice, but it was a step too far for her to consent in writing to the marriage proclamation. Whether Vermeer converted to Catholicism for the sake of his marriage cannot be said with certainty. If so, then he will have been rebaptized by the Jesuit fathers in 1653.⁵¹ However, the relevant baptismal register no longer exists due to 'various persecutions and other difficulties', according to the oldest preserved register from the late seventeenth century.⁵² Be that as it may, through his marriage Vermeer became a member of a Catholic family that maintained close relations with the Delft representatives of the Society of Jesus, or Catholic religious order of Jesuits. Records show that he himself had no subsequent contact with the Reformed Church, and none of his children were later baptized or married as Protestants.⁵³ In contrast, the Catholic faith did play an important role in his daily household, as we will see in the next chapter.⁵⁴

In the registration of the betrothal Johannes's address is given as 'opt Marctveld', as the marketplace was called in the seventeenth century. At that time, he was once again living with his mother Digna in the Mechelen house following his training outside the city.⁵⁵ In Catharina's case, 'mede aldaer' (also there) is noted. In the art-historical literature, opinions are divided on her exact place of residence in those days. While one camp argues that Catharina moved in with Johannes in the Mechelen house to pressure her mother to agree to the marriage, the other considers it unlikely that Vermeer's future wife already lived in the same home before their marriage.⁵⁶ The latter view is the more likely one. Cohabiting before marrying was disapproved of in the seventeenth century and, as for instance in the case of Rembrandt and Hendrickje Stoffels, even censured as 'whoring', although it should be noted that Hendrickje was pregnant at the time of these allegations.⁵⁷ Moreover, Maria Thins's opposition to her daughter's proposed nuptials was minimal and perhaps related more to her own moral compass and fellow constituents than to her son-in-law. No opposition to Johannes emerged from later sources either – quite the contrary, in fact. It is plausible, as Montias argues, that the Oude Langendijk, where Catharina presumably still lived with her mother in 1653, was considered an extension of the Markt by the clerk registering the banns. A marriage in

the Reformed Nieuwe Kerk across the way apparently went too far for the mixed-faith pair – and Johannes's mother-in-law. Two weeks later, on 20 April 1653, the young couple's marriage was consecrated in the Catholic church of Schipluy, present-day Schipluiden, a village south of Delft.

Montias argued that the painter himself never used the name Jan, but this statement relies only on Vermeer's signature in official documents and on his paintings, in which he presented himself as 'Johannis' or 'Joannes'.⁵⁸ The American Vermeer expert here disregarded the above-mentioned notarial deed of 5 April. It is notable that Catharina Bolnes and Johannes Vermeer are described in this document as 'Trijntgen Reijniers' and 'Jan Reyniersz'. Both in their twenties, they were apparently called Trijntje and Jan by acquaintances in everyday interaction and used the formal names 'Catharina Bolnes' and 'Johannes Vermeer' on official occasions. In the seventeenth century, in districts where residents knew each other well, it was easier to speak of 'Jan of Reynier', the father's son, than of 'Johannes Vermeer', which was reserved for formalities or contacts with outsiders.⁵⁹

MASTER PAINTER JOHANNIS VERMEER

Vermeer had already had contact with several prominent artists in his early years. From the archives we know, as mentioned, that Leonaert Bramer acted as a witness for him and his family on several occasions. Johannes signed a notarial document in Delft with the renowned genre painter Gerard ter Borch from Deventer on 22 April 1653, just two days after his marriage.⁶⁰ Presumably Ter Borch had travelled there for this occasion from The Hague, where he regularly stayed in those days. It cannot be ruled out that the two painters knew each other before then and that the older painter also attended Vermeer's wedding.⁶¹ At that time, Johannes himself was not yet registered with the Guild of Saint Luke. That followed on 29 December, when 'Johannis Vermeer' was recorded as 'meester Schilder' (master painter) in the guild's register.⁶² According to guild regulations, he had to have served as an apprentice and servant to at least one prominent painter for six years before that. The 'incomstgelt' (entrance fee) an independent master had to pay was 12 guilders for a non-resident, 6 guilders for an artist from Delft – the sum his father had paid more than twenty years earlier – and 3 guilders for the son of a master, provided he had been apprenticed to a master of the local guild for two years.⁶³ The entries of Carel Fabritius and Pieter de Hooch in 1652 and 1655 show that, as outsiders, they paid 12 guilders each.⁶⁴ As a native of Delft and son of master art dealer Reynier Jansz, Vermeer did not pay the usual admission fee of 3 guilders, but a sum of 6 guilders, confirming that he had spent much of his apprenticeship outside Delft.⁶⁵ From then on, he was allowed to sell paintings and take on apprentices. Whether he was active as a teacher cannot be determined from the sources. Nor are contemporary copies

or replicas after his paintings known so far. A copy of *The Guitar Player* (CAT. 36) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art [FIG. 4] is the only known painting from the seventeenth century after a work by Vermeer.⁶⁶ However, the young woman's coiffure is characteristic of the 1680s–1690s, suggesting a dating of the painting after Vermeer's death.⁶⁷

In the mid-seventeenth century, Delft experienced a *va-et-vient* of artists. For example, Rembrandt's former pupil Carel Fabritius settled in Delft from Amsterdam in 1650, Pieter de Hooch came to the city from Rotterdam in 1652, and Jan Steen and Cornelis de Man settled there from The Hague and Italy in 1654.⁶⁸ Conversely, Paulus Potter was registered with the Delft Guild of Saint Luke for some time from 1646 before settling in The Hague in 1649, Emanuel de Witte left for Amsterdam in 1651 after living in Delft for almost a decade, and Gerard Houckgeest traded Delft for Steenberg in Brabant in 1650 after fifteen years.⁶⁹ Although Delft no longer enjoyed the cultural and artistic elan of the previous decades, this mobility and interaction of artists fuelled a flourishing art production in the city and encouraged artistic innovations, both in the field of townscapes and of contemporary interior painting, two genres in which Vermeer would also distinguish himself in the following years.

THE DELFT THUNDERBOLT

On the morning of 12 October 1654, the gunpowder magazine known as 't Secret van Holland (The Secret of Holland), located on the grounds of the former Poor Clares convent on the north-east side of the city, blew up. Not only was this the site where some 80,000 to 90,000 pounds of gunpowder belonging to the States of Holland were kept, but also the materials for manufacturing it, such as saltpetre and sulphur. The massive explosion, which could be heard as far away as the Wadden Islands, was one of the greatest catastrophes in early modern Dutch history.⁷⁰

The then twenty-two-year-old Vermeer and his immediate family were spared in this 'Delft Thunderbolt', but more than a hundred people, including Fabritius, lost their lives and many more were injured. Over two hundred houses were demolished in one fell swoop and another three hundred properties suffered irreparable damage, leaving countless citizens homeless. The impact of the event on the relatively modest city of about 25,000 inhabitants cannot be overstated. Everyone knew one or more casualties or survivors of the disaster, buildings in the city centre cracked from the massive blast and even the stained-glass windows of the Nieuwe Kerk on the Markt were shattered. The tragedy also turned Delft into a destination for disaster tourists. Artists such as Egbert van der Poel, a stepson of Vermeer's aunt Tanneken Baltens, produced numerous paintings of the disaster site featuring the explosion and its aftermath for the open market [FIG. 5].⁷¹

The calamity, however, was not reflected in Vermeer's work. During this period, he focused on subjects from the Bible and classical mythology, mostly in large-format canvases (CATS. 1, 2, 3). His first dated paintings stem from the years shortly after the disaster: the 1655 *Saint Praxedis* (CAT. 2), a copy after the work of his Italian contemporary Felice Ficherelli, and the 1656 *The Procuress* (CAT. 4).⁷² His reputation as a painter also gradually spread beyond Delft. In June 1657, for instance, 'A graft besoeckende van der Meer', presumably a biblical scene of the three Marys at Christ's tomb, was mentioned in the estate of the prominent Amsterdam art dealer Johannes de Renialme, who counted Friedrich Wilhelm, the Great Elector of Brandenburg, among his clients and traded works by Rembrandt, Hercules Segers and Jan



FIG. 4 Anonymous, *Lady with a Guitar*, late 17th century Oil on canvas, 52.5 × 45.6 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection, 1917, inv. no. 497

Lievens, among others.⁷³ Financially speaking, Johannes and Catharina fared reasonably well during these years. In 1655, the young couple stood surety for a debt of 250 guilders incurred by Johannes's late father Reynier Jansz.⁷⁴ Soon thereafter, Maria Thins drew up her will, bequeathed her jewellery to Catharina and a sum of 200 guilders to her eldest granddaughter, the young Maria Vermeer. Born in 1654, she was Johannes's and Catharina's first child, and named after her grandmother.⁷⁵

VAN RUIJVEN AND DE KNUJT

Around 1656–1657, Vermeer abandoned history painting in favour of smaller format, contemporary, everyday tableaux in tastefully appointed rooms evincing a certain kinship with the work of his fellow townsmen Pieter de Hooch, Cornelis de Man and Hendrick van der Burgh. In the next four years up to and including 1661, following *The Procuress*, as far as we know he produced his first three works depicting a