



Taschen
VERMEER. THE COMPLETE WORKS - FP

Karl Schütz
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Occhio infallibile

Lo straordinario universo pittorico di Vermeer

Le sue opere hanno ispirato un best seller del New York Times e un film interpretato da Scarlett Johansson e Colin Firth. Le mostre a lui dedicate hanno attirato un numero record di visitatori da Amsterdam a Washington ed è stato necessario adottare misure di sicurezza speciali per contenere la folla alla Mauritshuis dell'Aia, dove migliaia di persone sono accorse per dare uno sguardo all'enigmatica e incantevole fanciulla dagli occhi grandi raffigurata nel quadro *La ragazza con l'orecchino di perla*, nota anche come "la Monna Lisa olandese".

Nel corso della sua vita, tuttavia, la fama di Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675) andò poco oltre la nativa Delft e una piccola cerchia di sostenitori. Dopo la morte, il suo nome fu a lungo dimenticato, fatta eccezione per alcuni collezionisti e mercanti d'arte olandesi. Fuori dai Paesi Bassi, i suoi lavori vennero persino erroneamente attribuiti ad altri artisti. Solo verso la metà del XIX secolo tornò al centro della scena artistica internazionale, che improvvisamente volse lo sguardo verso le sue minuzie narrative, i meticolosi dettagli delle consistenze e i maestosi piani di luce, scoprì un genio e non cambiò più idea.

Questo catalogo completo delle opere di Vermeer raccoglie le scene tranquille ma coinvolgenti custodite come veri tesori nei musei e nelle gallerie di tutta Europa e degli Stati Uniti, presentate in riproduzioni di altissima qualità. Numerosi dettagli enfatizzano inoltre la considerevole abilità di cui l'artista dà prova non solo nel testimoniare le tendenze e le mode del Secolo d'oro olandese ma anche nel racchiudere un'intera storia in un solo fugace gesto, un volto, uno sguardo.

"Uno libro magnifico!"

— *The Financial Times*, Londra

L'autore:

Completati gli studi di Storia dell'arte e archeologia all'Università di Vienna, **Karl Schütz** iniziò a lavorare alla Gemäldegalerie del Kunsthistorisches Museum della stessa città, come curatore dal 1972 e in qualità di direttore dal 1990 al 2011. I suoi interessi accademici comprendono in particolare la pittura olandese, la pittura tedesca di inizio Cinquecento, i ritratti di corte e la storia della collezione della Gemäldegalerie.



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Detail of
Girl with a Pearl Earring
c. 1665-1672
inv. 0. 16-107

Detail of
*The Girl with the
Red Hat*, c. 1665-1672
inv. 0. 16-107

Detail Vermeer
*View of Delft from an
Inauguration Piazza*, 1664
inv. 0. 16-107
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Delft, Museum Prinseshof

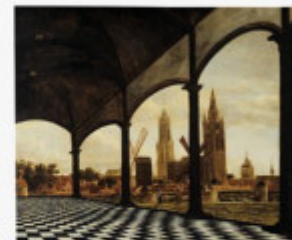
Living and Working in Delft

Very little documentation has been discovered relating to the life of Johannes Vermeer after his marriage to Catharina Bolnes and his involvement, as a master, in the Delft 'Painters' Guild. We do not know where and under what circumstances the young married couple at first lived, so where Vermeer had his first studios. It has been pointed out that the view shown in his painting of c. 1665, *The Little Street* (p. 103, Cat. 35, which would be seen from a window on the second floor of the 'Middelste' tower on the Groote Markt, and that this is where his studio could be found at the time. It is also reasonable that his studio was in the house of his mother-in-law, Maria Thins, on the Oude Langendijk, which was close to the Groote Markt. We know that the Vermeer family was living here from at least December 1665, when 'van Kint van Johannes Vermeer aan d'n O. Langendijk' ('a child of Johannes Vermeer on the Oude Langendijk') was baptized at the Oude Kerk in Delft.¹⁰

It appears that the painter had rather little money during the first years of his career. We know, from the evidence of the first will drawn up by Maria Thins, in 1672,¹¹ that Vermeer had received a loan of 200 florins from his mother-in-law. The above-mentioned document divided Maria Thins's fortune among her daughter, Catharina Bolnes, the wife of Johannes Vermeer, the couple's oldest daughter, Maria Vermeer (who was also the goddaughter of Maria Thins), and Maria Thins's son, Willem Bolnes, who had inherited with his father in Gouda after his parents had separated, and who in 1670 had been admitted to a primary sea consular institution.¹² Willem Bolnes was still an inmate there when he died in 1678.

In all, only four documents bear witness to Vermeer's presence and activity in Delft in the time between his marriage. In 1673, and the aforementioned hotel of his child, in 1670.¹³ In January 1674 he is registered as a master *schilde* (master painter) when qualifying before a notary, alongside a military captain from Cluses.¹⁴ Montan conjectures that it may have been through his mother's brother, the military contractor Reynier Bolnes, that Vermeer had access to military offices, who served as models for the civilian featuring in several of his genre scenes.¹⁵ A second notary document, drawn up in April 1674, likewise names Vermeer as a witness and in December 1674 he acted as a witness in another legal transaction, on this occasion being referred to as 'de [art-painter] Johannes Vermeer', a respectful form of address, indicative of high social standing, such as was never granted to his father.¹⁶ Vermeer's established position within the Delft community of painters is reflected in his being appointed *opvoeder* (Highness's Treasurer) of the Guild of Saint Luke. He held this position for two years, from autumn 1674.¹⁷ In each such period the Guild had six headmen: in total, two painters, two glaziers and two figure artists. At the age of 36, Vermeer was the youngest painter to have held such a position since the Guild's reorganization, in 1612. This, however, has been not so much an indication that Vermeer's contemporaries recognized his outstanding significance as an artist than as a sign of the gradual cultural decline of Delft, for the Guild now encountered difficulties filling such positions.¹⁸

The last of the four documents relating to Vermeer concerns a loan of 100 guilders, repayable within a year at an interest rate of 4 per cent, which Johannes Vermeer and his wife received in 1675 from the wealthy Delft patrician Pieter Claesz. van Ruijven.¹⁹ This document was discovered in 1876 by Abraham Bredius, but its far-reaching implications were recognized only much later, by Montan.²⁰ Montan put forward the thesis that,



from 1672, Vermeer worked almost exclusively for a single patron, Pieter Claesz. van Ruijven, the document being marking the start of this collaboration and being, in all likelihood, the advance payment for pictures that Vermeer had undertaken to supply.

From the time of his work on *The Procession*, dated 1670, a painting in the spirit of the Dutch caravaggio, and the early genre scenes of the following years (see c. 1671/72 (Cat. 4-6), Vermeer devoted himself, with only a few exceptions (both of which are discussed in the production of *Further genre scenes*). Scholars have repeatedly wondered about the reasons for this. One explanation might be that Vermeer did, indeed, work for a single patron, and, therefore, produced paintings that suited this patron's desires and preferences or complied with the subjects and settings specified in his commissions.

Surviving documents relating to contemporaries of Vermeer indicate that many painters during this period did not produce work for the art market, but in response to commissions received from collectors. The two most important representations of the Leiden tradition of 'fine painting', Gerard Dou and Frans van Mieris, painted their especially idiosyncratic, and therefore expensive, small genre scenes for specific collectors, to whom they were contracted. From these they received regular annual remuneration for all the work they had produced, although the respective systems remained the 'right of first refusal'. It was only the 'retail' paintings that the artists were then permitted to offer to other interested buyers. In this respect, the situation of painters in 17th-century Holland was fundamentally different from that of those in other parts of Europe, such as the Catholic countries, where the enduring dominance of ecclesiastical patronage ensured a prevalence of religious art. In Vermeer's Holland we encounter, to one surprise, a situation that appears to resemble the modern phenomenon of artists producing work in the spirit of *fine pour fine* (art for the sake of art) – a concept primarily associated with the late 19th century.

It is highly likely that most of the pictures that Vermeer painted from 1672 onwards entered the collection of Pieter Claesz. van Ruijven (see Cat. 6, 8-10, 11). However, as no list of the works in his collection as any recorded reference to it has been found, Montan was able to refer only to the catalogue of the *step-sons* at auction of works from the collection of Pieter van Ruijven's late son-in-law, Jacob Abrahamz. Douma (1672-1692).²¹ Van Ruijven was so wealthy that the sum he spent on paintings only minimally reduced his fortune. Most of this, as also that of his wife, Maria Stenwickz. de Knipff, had been inherited. He seems not to have possessed any sort of career and the factory that his father once ran was closed down c. 1670. As a Remonstrant, and thus a member of a religious minority, he would not have been permitted to hold public office. The only post that he did occupy, from 1688 to 1672 – as had his father before him – was that of Director of the Delft Chamber van Chatham, the public charity set up to ensure the welfare of the poor.

Peter van Ruijven and his wife, together with a daughter born in 1670, lived on the Oude Delft, the city's most elegant street, in a house with a value estimated at 20,000 florins. In 1676 Pieter Claesz. and Maria van Ruijven drafted a joint will. This document has in part survived, although a codicil concerning a list of his children's collection of paintings, and the provision formally made for its disposal, has been lost.²² In a separate will drawn up by Maria van Ruijven, which would have taken effect only if her husband had predeceased her, specific bequests to a number of rela-

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