



Studio of Johannes Vermeer
Dutch 17th Century

Johannes Vermeer
Dutch, 1632 - 1675

Girl with a Flute

c. 1669/1675

oil on panel

painted surface: 20 x 17.8 cm (7 7/8 x 7 in.)

framed: 39.7 x 37.5 x 5.1 cm (15 5/8 x 14 3/4 x 2 in.)

Widener Collection 1942.9.98

ENTRY

Gazing at the viewer from beneath a striking hat that casts a strong shadow over much of her face, the subject of *Girl with a Flute* occupies a shallow space defined by a patterned tapestry and a chair with lion-head finials. She rests her left arm on a ledge in the foreground and holds a recorder loosely in that hand. She wears a fur-trimmed jacket known as a *jak* or *manteltje*, a garment commonly found in domestic genre paintings by Gerard ter Borch the Younger (Dutch, 1617 - 1681), Gabriel Metsu (Dutch, 1629 - 1667), Frans van Mieris (Dutch, 1635 - 1681), Johannes Vermeer (Dutch, 1632 - 1675), and others from the 1650s through the early 1670s. [1] (Similar jackets are worn in Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* and *A Lady Writing*.) Like the feathery, red beret in Vermeer's *Girl with the Red Hat*, the curious hat in *Girl with a Flute* has no exact equivalent in paintings of the period. [2] It appears to have been inspired by Chinese hats constructed of woven bamboo, but it has been modified by the addition of a gray, white, and black striped fabric covering, presumably to enliven its appearance. [3]

When *Girl with a Flute* came to the National Gallery of Art in 1942 as part of a massive donation from Joseph E. Widener and his late father, Peter Arrell Brown Widener, the work was hailed as the museum's fifth painting by Vermeer. [4] The painting had been discovered in 1906 by Abraham Bredius, director of the Mauritshuis in The Hague, in the Brussels collection of Jonkheer Jean de Grez. [5] Bredius found the painting "very beautiful," and it was exhibited at the Mauritshuis in the following year to great acclaim. In 1911, after De Grez's death, the family sold the painting, and it soon entered the distinguished collection of August Janssen in

Amsterdam. After this collector's death in 1918, the painting made its way to the New York dealer M. Knoedler & Co., which sold it to Joseph Widener. On March 1, 1923, the Paris art dealer René Gimpel recorded the transaction in his diary, commenting, "It's truly one of the master's most beautiful works." [6]

Yet despite its enthusiastic initial reception, the painting's attribution was soon called into question by scholars, who noted the painting's many compositional weaknesses. [7] The figure is static, posed nearly frontally, and leans heavily on the ledge in the foreground with no sense of breath or incipient motion. There is an awkward disparity in the proportions of her arms and only the vaguest sense of a body beneath her fur-trimmed robe. Her hat, left shoulder, and right hand are cut abruptly by the edges of the panel. [8] The flute she holds (actually a recorder) is curiously undefined and seems inaccurately rendered. [9] Rather than venturing an oblique glance from over her shoulder, a detail that characterizes Vermeer's other single-figure depictions of young women, she looks at us straight on with little attempt at intrigue or beguilement. Even the chair finial and background tapestry are indifferently rendered—the brushwork is blocky and does little to create a sense of form or volume.

Similarities in scale, subject matter, and wood panel support have caused some scholars to consider *Girl with the Red Hat* [fig. 1] and *Girl with a Flute* as companion pieces and to accept or reject the attribution of the two in tandem. There is, however, no documentary evidence linking them before they entered the collection of the National Gallery in 1937 and 1942, respectively. Slight differences in the size of the panels, the compositional arrangement of the figures, and the quality of execution led former National Gallery curator Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. to argue that the paintings were not companion pieces and that the attribution of *Girl with a Flute* to Vermeer could not be maintained. Accordingly, in 1978 the painting was classified as "Circle of Vermeer." [10] Wheelock subsequently modified his assessment and stated that "removing the *Girl with a Flute* from Vermeer's oeuvre was too extreme given the complex conservation issues surrounding this image." [11] To account for some of the painting's curious features, he proposed that Vermeer initially blocked in the painting sometime in the mid-1660s and that another artist revised it at later date. [12] Based on his hypothesis, the painting was cataloged as "attributed to Vermeer."

Despite its modest appearance, *Girl with a Flute* has a more complex relationship to Vermeer than Wheelock has proposed. A combination of traditional connoisseurship, understanding of historical painting practice, and the latest

results of an array of technical analyses shows that *Girl with a Flute* was made not by Vermeer, but by someone who, despite understanding that artist's distinctive working methods, was unable to achieve the same level of finesse: conceivably, an unknown studio associate.

Several factors relate *Girl with a Flute* to paintings by Vermeer, and specifically to *Girl with the Red Hat*. The overall conception of the two paintings is undeniably close. Both are *tronies*: informal, anonymous head studies that offered artists a vehicle for exploring physiognomy, facial expressions, unusual costumes, and striking effects of light and shadow. [13] The depth of both spaces is compressed, with the women posed between a tapestry-covered wall and a chair with lion-head finials. Light coming from each sitter's left suffuses their left cheeks, noses, and chins with rosy highlights, which are countered by the greenish shadows cast by the broad and striking hats they wear. To understand the reasons for identifying *Girl with a Flute* as the creation of a close associate of Vermeer and not the artist himself, it is necessary to peer below the surface, where technical examination has yielded results that both link the painting to works by Vermeer (including *Girl with the Red Hat*) and reveal the differences between them.

Girl with a Flute is indisputably a 17th-century painting. Dendrochronology has determined a felling date for the wood in the early 1650s, [14] and pigments identified throughout the painting are both consistent with 17th-century practice and also characteristic of Vermeer. For example, a paint sample taken from a yellow highlight on the young woman's left sleeve includes natural ultramarine, lead white, and lead-tin yellow. Lead-tin yellow was prevalent in the 17th century, but not later. [15]

However, at every stage of the painting process, the execution of *Girl with a Flute* is less assured than that of *Girl with the Red Hat* or any other painting by Vermeer. [16] Although the panel was traditionally prepared with a double ground layer, this appears to have been inexpertly done, perhaps even by an amateur. Unlike the smooth surfaces observed in the ground layers of Vermeer's paintings, the upper ground layer here has an unusually coarse and brushmarked texture that would have made it impossible to achieve a refined finish in the completed painting. [17] While Vermeer used the underpaint stage to fluidly model forms and quickly define areas of light and shadow, in *Girl with a Flute* this underlying layer is clumsily applied, with brushstrokes that make little deliberate attempt to model form. [18]

Poor technique in the painting's underlayers, presumably the mark of an inexperienced artist, caused paint defects that impacted the surface appearance. These include wide drying cracks in dark areas and wrinkles in white areas that had to be scraped down to level the surface before the final paint was applied [fig. 2]. [19] Such severe paint defects are rarely observed in works by Vermeer. [20] These features were interpreted by Wheelock as damages to the underpaint—which he assumed to have been done by Vermeer—that had to be corrected before the final paint could be applied—which he surmised had been done by another, later hand. [21] A simpler and more plausible explanation, however, is that they represent the errors of a painter who had not yet experienced (or chose to ignore) the consequences of improperly preparing their materials. The extensive modifications to the composition visible in x-radiographs [fig. 3] and infrared reflectograms [fig. 4] may be further evidence of an artist learning as they went and making a determined effort to bring the composition to a satisfactory balance. [22]

The final paint of *Girl with a Flute* not only reveals an intimate knowledge of Vermeer's idiosyncratic painting practice, but also betrays the artist's struggle in mastering his process and technique. In both *Girl with a Flute* and *Girl with the Red Hat*, the dull, greenish shadow cast by the hat over most of the face includes green earth, an unusual pigment choice for flesh tones in Dutch paintings. Although Vermeer used green earth for flesh tone shadows at times throughout his career, the practice is virtually unknown among his contemporaries. In both paintings, this greenish shadow is interrupted on one cheek by broad swaths of bright pink highlights. But while Vermeer modulated flesh tones with delicate strokes of his brush, the painter of *Girl with a Flute* formed the cheek highlights with hard-edged planes of thick, unvaried pink or gray paint and applied the greenish shadows with a similarly heavy hand [fig. 5] [fig. 6]. In *Girl with the Red Hat*, Vermeer suggested the moistness of his model's glistening mouth and eyes with tiny dots of highlight that incorporate the color around them—faint pink at the corner of the mouth and blue green in the eye peering out from greenish shadow. The artist of *Girl with a Flute* also added dots of highlight but, apparently oblivious to Vermeer's intentional color harmonies, incongruously placed a blue-green dot within the pink mouth [fig. 7] [fig. 8].

Such qualitative disparities are also evident in the painting of the chair's lion-head finial, where the artist dutifully followed Vermeer's process for crafting diffuse highlights to suggest an abstracted play of light. Yet the curves and dashes with

which Vermeer magically conjured up the carved head of the chair's finial in *Girl with the Red Hat* [fig. 9] are, in *Girl with a Flute*, just meaningless patches of color on a shapeless form [fig. 10]—the work of an artist who understood the *process* but was unable to achieve the *effect*. In the deepest shadows of the garments in both *Girl with the Red Hat* and *Girl with a Flute*, brown underlayers glimmer through the thinly applied surface paint, and highlights formed by admixtures of white lead and lead-tin yellow have been touched onto the surface in dots and brushed along the folds in angular strokes. In comparison to the delicately patterned brushstrokes and nuanced palette of warm and cool highlights evidenced in *Girl with the Red Hat*, the jacket in *Girl with a Flute* is simply modeled, with randomly dotted highlights and with the white and yellow pigments mixed uniformly throughout [fig. 11] [fig. 12].

The many similarities with Vermeer's *Girl with the Red Hat* and the evident differences in material knowledge and skill of execution suggest that *Girl with a Flute* represents a student's or workshop associate's earnest response to that vibrant and engaging painting, or another similar, now lost painting of its type. There is, however, no record of a studio in which Vermeer trained or was assisted by another artist or artists, and most scholars have deemed such an arrangement unlikely and unnecessary for an artist who probably executed just one or two paintings per year. Vermeer registered no pupils with the Delft painter's guild, and the brief notes made by visitors to his studio make no mention of assistants. [23] Yet artists did not always formally register their pupils with the guild, and visitors rarely recorded the presence of anyone other than the primary artist. It is entirely possible that Vermeer took on a pupil or apprentice at some point in his career, perhaps welcoming the tuition fees as a source of much-needed income. [24] Alternatively, he may have had help from family members, possibly enlisting his children to assist with routine tasks like grinding pigments and preparing supports. Scholars have periodically floated the notion of Vermeer family members working in his studio, though there is no archival evidence to indicate that any of Vermeer's 11 children inherited their father's artistic skills or pursued careers in the arts. [25]

In sum, while the theory that *Girl with a Flute* was begun by Vermeer and completed by another artist cannot be sustained, it simply is not possible to know who did paint the work or under what circumstances it was painted. It is clearly dependent upon, and probably closely postdates, *Girl with the Red Hat*. With present knowledge, we cannot be sure whether it was created in honest emulation or with the deliberate intent to fool a discerning 17th-century Dutch art market, as it

fooled connoisseurs in the early 20th century.

Marjorie E. Wieseman

October 7, 2022

COMPARATIVE FIGURES

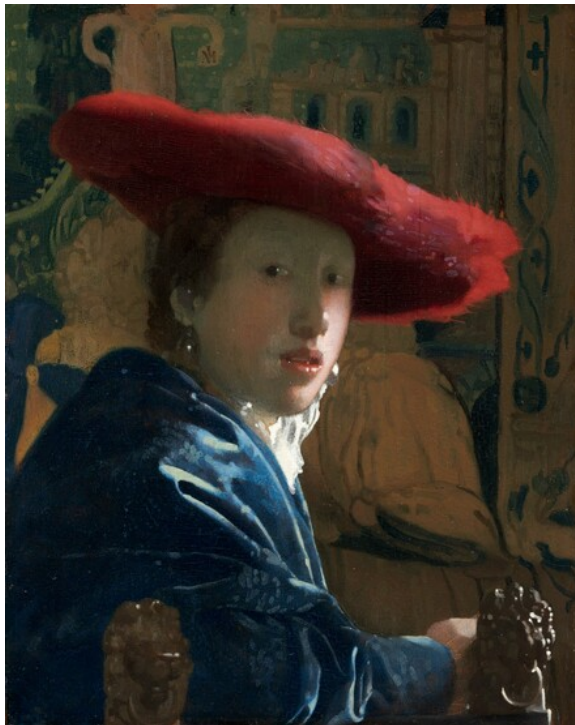


fig. 1 Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with the Red Hat*, c. 1669, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.53



fig. 2 Detail showing wide drying cracks in dark blue areas and wrinkled paint in white areas, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98



fig. 3 X-radiograph composite, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98



fig. 4 Infrared reflectogram, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98



fig. 5 Detail of the face, showing fine brushstrokes used to modulate flesh tones, Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with the Red Hat*, c. 1669, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.53



fig. 6 Detail of the face, showing flesh modeled by thick, flat areas of paint, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98

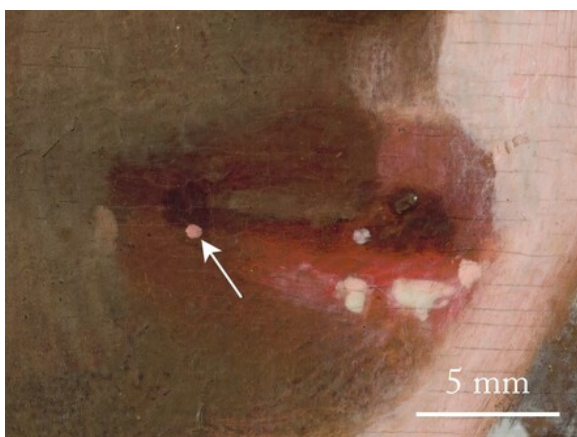


fig. 7 Detail showing pink highlight within the mouth, Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with the Red Hat*, c. 1669, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.53

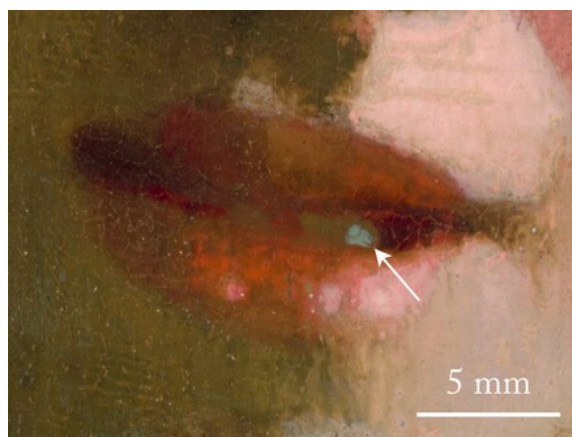


fig. 8 Detail showing blue-green highlight within the mouth, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98

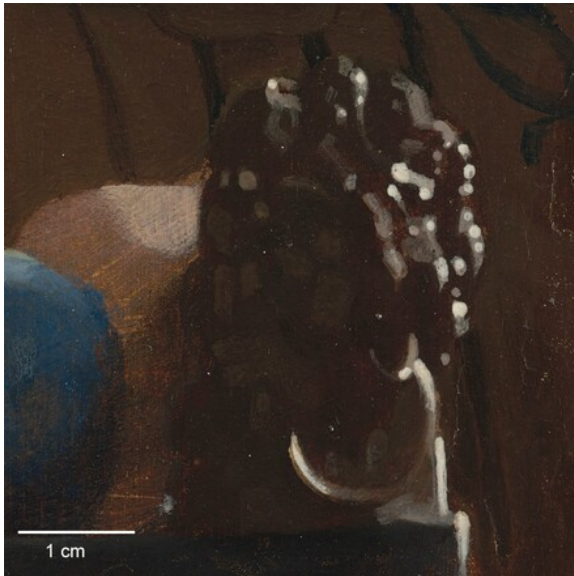


fig. 9 Detail of lion-head finial, Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with the Red Hat*, c. 1669, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.53

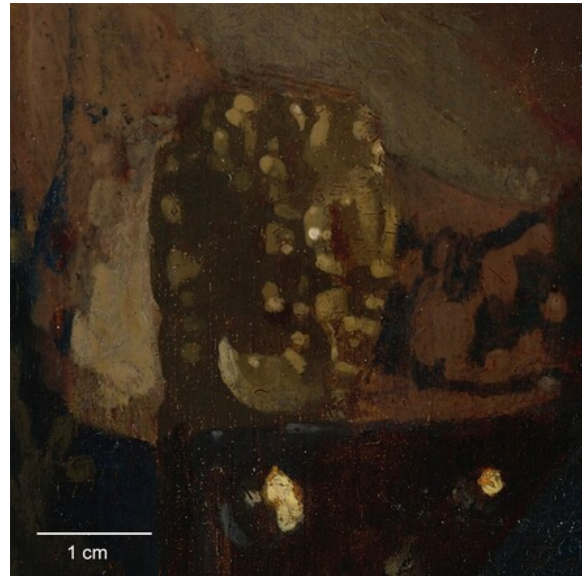


fig. 10 Detail of lion-head finial, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98

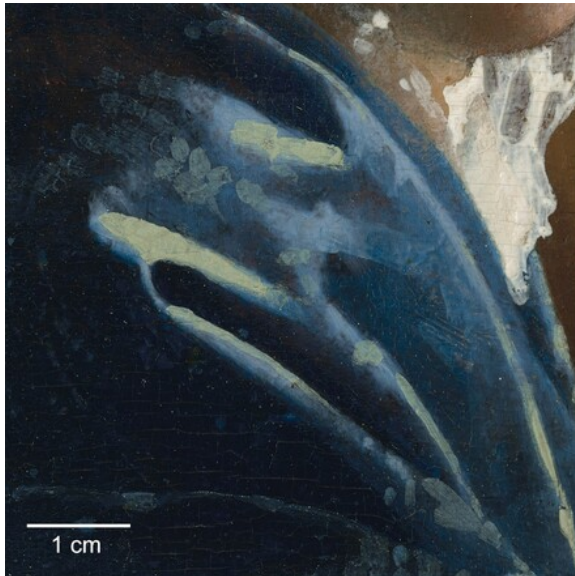


fig. 11 Detail of jacket showing complex pattern of warm and cool highlights on fabric folds, Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with the Red Hat*, c. 1669, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.53

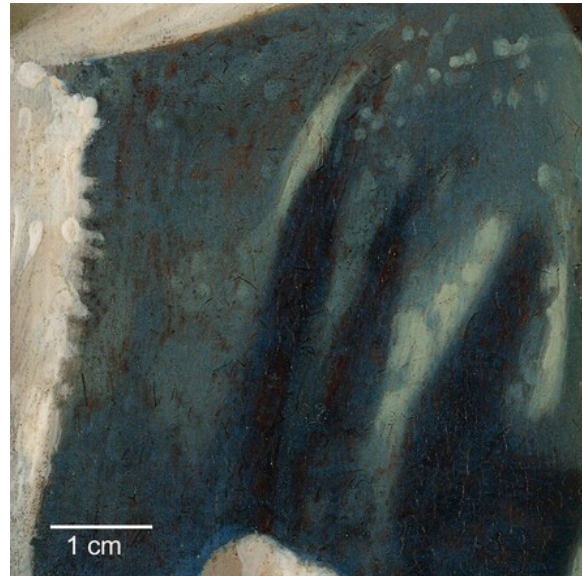


fig. 12 Detail of jacket showing undifferentiated highlights on fabric folds, Studio of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Flute*, c. 1669/1675, oil on panel, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, 1942.9.98

NOTES

[1] Throughout the third quarter of the century, these full-cut, hip-length jackets were worn by women at every level of society. Common versions were made in sturdy fabrics and sensible colors, more elegant ones in silk or plush in a rainbow of shades, often trimmed with bands of snowy white fur. For the nomenclature, see Marieke de Winkel, “The Interpretation of Dress in Vermeer’s Paintings,” in *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker, *Studies in the History of Art* 55 (Washington, DC, 1998), 328. Bianca M. du Mortier has suggested that fur-lined *jakken* may have been a response to particularly cold winters in 1642 and 1658. They were described by the English lexicographer Henry Hexham in 1647–1648 as a “Furred Jacket, or Coat to wear in winter”; see Bianca M. du Mortier, “Costumes in Gabriel Metsu’s Paintings: Mode and Manners in the Mid-Seventeenth Century,” in Adriaan Waiboer et al., *Gabriel Metsu* (Washington, DC, 2010), 132.

[2] The hat has been likened to ones worn by rural women and market sellers

in Netherlandish paintings and prints. Compare, for example, that worn by a vegetable seller in Hendrick Sorgh's *Vegetable Market at Amsterdam* (1662, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, inv. SK-A-717) or the shallow-crowned straw hat and black conical hat worn, respectively, by the vegetable seller and her client in a market scene of about 1590 attributed to Jan Baptist Saive the Elder (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Gemäldegalerie, inv. 7626). Wide-brimmed hats are found frequently in works by Rembrandt and his school, where they give an impression of a distant land or era or simply create dramatic effects of light and shadow.

- [3] Similar hats are depicted in 17th-century illustrated travel guides to China, such as Athanasius Kircher's *China monumentis, qua sacris qua profanis, nec non variis naturæ & artis spectaculis, aliarumque rerum memorabilium argumentis illustrate* (Amsterdam, 1667), 76, 186, 194, 233; published in Dutch as *Toonneel van China, door veel, zo geestelijke als weereeltijke geheugteekenen verscheide vertoningen van de natuur en kunst en blijken van veel andere gedenkwaardige dingen geopent en verheerlykt* (Amsterdam, 1668). For this reference, see Dawn Odell, "Clothing, Customs, and Mercantilism: Dutch and Chinese Ethnographies in the Seventeenth Century," in "Het exotische verbeeld 1550–1950: Boeren en verre volken in de Nederlandse kunst / Picturing the Exotic 1550–1950: Peasants and Outlandish Peoples in Netherlandish Art," ed. Jan de Jong et al., *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek/Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 53 (2002): 138–159.
- [4] Also included in the Widener gift was Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance*. Vermeer's *Girl with the Red Hat* entered the National Gallery in 1937 as part of the Andrew W. Mellon Collection, together with two paintings now considered to be 20th-century forgeries of Vermeer.
- [5] This summary of the discovery of the painting and early reactions to it is taken from Ben Broos's account in Ben Broos and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Johannes Vermeer* (Washington, DC, 1995), 207. See also Ben Broos, "Vermeer: Malice and Misconception," in *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker, *Studies in the History of Art* 55 (Washington, DC, 1998), 25.
- [6] René Gimpel, *Diary of an Art Dealer, 1918–1939*, trans. John Rosenberg (New York, 1987), 216. The De Grez drawings collection, numbering more than four thousand sheets, was given to the Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, in 1913.
- [7] The attribution of this painting to Vermeer was first rejected by P. T. A. Swillens, *Johannes Vermeer: Painter of Delft, 1632–1675* (Utrecht, 1950), 64–65. Albert Blankert, Rob Ruurs, and Willem L. van de Watering, *Johannes Vermeer van Delft, 1632–1675* (Utrecht, 1975), 108–110, 168, considered the work to be a 19th-century imitation, a view Blankert restated

in his *Museum Bredius: Catalogus van de schilderijen en tekeningen* (The Hague, 1978), 172, and in Gilles Aillaud, Albert Blankert, and John Michael Montias, *Vermeer* (Paris, 1986), 200–201. A similar opinion is held by Yvonne Brentjens, “Twee meisjes van Vermeer in Washington,” *Tableau* 7 (February 1985): 54–58. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., in his review of *Johannes Vermeer van Delft, 1632–1675*, by Albert Blankert, Rob Ruurs, and Willem L. van de Watering (Utrecht, 1975), *Art Bulletin* 59 (September 1977): 439–441, argued for the 17th-century origin of the painting, placing the work in the circle of Vermeer. He expanded on this theory in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Zur Technik zweier Bilder, die Vermeer zugeschrieben sind,” *Maltechnik-Restaur* 84 (1978): 242–257, and in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Vermeer* (New York, 1981), 156. John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton, 1989), 265n2, proposed that “the painting was begun by Vermeer and finished after his death by an inferior painter, perhaps by Jan Coelenbier, who bought paintings from Vermeer’s widow soon after his death.” Walter Liedtke, in Ben P. J. Broos et al., *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (The Hague, 1990), 43, on the other hand, defends the attribution to Vermeer. For his more recent support for the attribution to Vermeer, see Walter A. Liedtke, *Vermeer: The Complete Paintings* (Ghent, 2008), no. 25, 140–143. In the 1995 catalog for the exhibition *Johannes Vermeer*, organized by the National Gallery of Art and the Mauritshuis, the attribution of this painting as “Circle of Vermeer” reflects the divergent opinions of the National Gallery and the Mauritshuis at the time of the exhibition. Benjamin Binstock, *Vermeer’s Family Secrets: Genius, Discovery, and the Unknown Apprentice* (New York, 2009), 249–257, considers both this painting and *Girl with the Red Hat* to be self-portraits painted by Vermeer’s daughter Maria.

- [8] There is no indication that the panel has been trimmed, as was first suggested by Wilhelm Martin, “La Jeune Fille à la Flute de Vermeer de Delft,” *L’Arte Flamand et Hollandais* 8 (July 1907): 20–23, and Wilhelm Martin, “Jan Vermeer van Delft: Het Meisje met de Fluit,” *Onze Kunst* 12 (1907): 20, who considered the painting to be a fragment. Not only is the back of the panel beveled along all four edges, but the paint along the edges does not appear fractured in a way that would suggest it had been trimmed.
- [9] As observed by Helen Hollis (formerly of the Smithsonian Institution’s division of musical instruments), although the fipple mouthpiece of the instrument in this painting is correctly indicated by the double highlight, the air hole below the mouthpiece is out of alignment. It should lie on an axis with the upper lip of the mouthpiece, as it does in the recorder hanging on the wall in a painting by Judith Leyster (Dutch, 1609–1660) (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, inv. no. NM 1126). The finger holes seen below the woman’s hand are even farther off this axis, although such a

placement would be allowable if the recorder were composed of two sections.

- [10] See note 7.
- [11] Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Johannes Vermeer/*Girl with a Flute*,” in *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue (Washington, DC, 1995), 388–390. For an overview of the conservation issues, see the Technical Summary.
- [12] Using this premise as his point of departure, John Michael Montias proposed that “the painting was begun by Vermeer and finished after his death by an inferior painter, perhaps by Jan Coelenbier (1600 or 1610–1677), who bought paintings from Vermeer’s widow soon after his death”; *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton, 1989), 265n2 and 338, doc. 362. Montias hypothesized that Coelenbier, a landscape painter who trained under the Haarlem artist Jan van Goyen (1596–1656), tried to bring the work to completion so that it would sell at a higher price. Anthony Bailey repeated this possibility in *A View of Delft: Vermeer Then and Now* (London, 2001), 206.
- [13] Three *tronies* by Vermeer are known today: the National Gallery’s *Girl with the Red Hat*, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (Mauritshuis, The Hague), and *Study of a Young Woman* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). On Vermeer’s *tronies*, see Alexandra Libby, E. Melanie Gifford, Dina Anchin, Marjorie E. Wieseman, Kathryn A. Dooley, Lisha Deming Glinsman, and John K. Delaney, “Experimentation and Innovation in Vermeer’s *Girl with the Red Hat*: New Findings from the National Gallery of Art,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2022), <https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2022.14.2.2>.
- [14] See Technical Summary.
- [15] Pigments identified by Hermann Kühn, “A Study of the Pigments and the Grounds Used by Jan Vermeer,” in *National Gallery of Art Report and Studies in the History of Art*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC, 1968), 194. Natural ultramarine is produced from the semiprecious stone lapis lazuli. It was an expensive pigment prized as much for its intrinsic value as for the luminosity of its blue hue. Around 1830 an artificial means of producing ultramarine was invented in France, which soon supplanted the more expensive natural ultramarine in artists’ palettes. Lead-tin yellow, another pigment frequently found in Vermeer’s paintings, was replaced by Naples yellow after the 17th century. It seems to have been unknown from the mid-18th century until it was rediscovered in 1940. Kühn also inferred the presence of the blue pigment azurite, but this has not been identified in more recent analyses.
- [16] For a detailed technical comparison of *Girl with a Flute* and paintings by Vermeer, particularly *Girl with the Red Hat*, see Marjorie E. Wieseman, Alexandra Libby, E. Melanie Gifford, and Dina Anchin, “Vermeer’s Studio

and the *Girl with a Flute*: New Findings from the National Gallery of Art,”
Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art 14, no. 2 (Summer 2022),
<https://doi.org/10.5092/jhna.2022.14.2.3>.

- [17] The coarse, brushmarked texture is visible in magnified examination of the paint surface and the paint cross sections.
- [18] Brushstrokes in the underpaint were made visible with x-ray fluorescence imaging spectroscopy (XRF). The clumsy, unarticulated strokes were especially evident in the XRF map for the element copper, which reveals the presence of copper-containing pigments, such as verdigris, used either as colorants or as drying agents added to black pigments that were especially slow to cure.
- [19] Drying cracks can occur when an oil-rich paint mixture is applied beneath a leaner mixture. More oil causes paint to dry more slowly, so the upper layer dries first, becoming inflexible, and cracks in this layer appear as the lower layer continues to flex and move as it dries. Wrinkled paint is likely caused by excessive amounts of oil in a paint mixture.
- [20] Areas of wrinkled paint and drying cracks were noted in one of Vermeer’s latest works, *The Guitar Player* (c. 1672, Kenwood House, English Heritage); see David Peggie, “Vermeer and Technique: Drying and Paint Defects,” accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/research/about-research/the-meaning-of-making/vermeer-and-technique/drying-and-paint-defects>. Peggie suggests that some inherent difference in Vermeer’s paint medium might have had an impact on its drying properties. But this damage is not as dramatic as in *Girl with a Flute*, where severely wrinkled paint in the underlayers was scraped off before work on the painting could proceed.
- [21] Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue (Washington, DC, 1995), 388–392; Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Johannes Vermeer/*Girl with a Flute*/probably 1665/1675,” *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions (April 24, 2014), <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/1237/2014-04-24>.
- [22] See Technical Summary. These changes are more extensively described in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., “Johannes Vermeer/*Girl with a Flute*/probably 1665/1675,” *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, NGA Online Editions (April 24, 2014), <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/1237/2014-04-24>.
- [23] The historical record is fragmentary at best, as registers of the servants or apprentices of guild masters in Vermeer’s hometown of Delft have disappeared; see John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft: A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, 1982), 101, 106–111.

[24] John Michael Montias, *Artists and Artisans in Delft: A Socio-Economic Study of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, 1982), 169.

[25] In 1981 Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. remarked, “It seems improbable that he never had a young student (or even one of his own children) come to work under his direction”; Wheelock, *Jan Vermeer* (New York, 1981), 156. Leonard Slatkes similarly noted the “remote possibility” of one of the Vermeer children “being trained to assist and then to follow his father in his profession”; Slatkes, *Vermeer and His Contemporaries* (New York, 1981), 98. More specifically, Martin Bailey wrote, “It has been suggested that the picture [*Girl with a Flute*] could be the work of one of Vermeer’s children”; Bailey, *Vermeer* (London, 1995), 90. One of the few writers to actively consider the existence and function of a Vermeer “studio,” Benjamin Binstock proposed Maria (1654–after 1713), the eldest Vermeer child, as responsible for eight stylistically and qualitatively disparate paintings he considers “misfit” Vermeers, including both *Girl with the Red Hat* and *Girl with a Flute*; Binstock, *Vermeer’s Family Secrets: Genius, Discovery, and the Unknown Apprentice* (New York, 2009), 247–283; for *Girl with the Red Hat* and *Girl with a Flute*, 249–257. Binstock further posited that after Vermeer’s death, several of these works were sold by Maria’s mother, Catherina van Bolnes (1631–1687), under her deceased husband’s name to meet the family’s financial obligations.

TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The support is a single, vertically grained oak panel with beveled edges on the back. Dendrochronology gives a tree felling date in the early 1650s. [1] A thin, smooth, white chalk ground was applied overall, followed by a coarse-textured gray upper ground. A reddish brown painted sketch exists under most areas of the painting and is incorporated into the design in the tapestry. [2]

Full-bodied paint is applied thinly, forming a rough surface texture in lighter passages. In many areas, particularly in the proper left collar and cuff, a distinctive wrinkling, which disturbs the surface, seems to have been scraped down before the final paint layers were applied. Still-wet paint in the proper right cheek and chin was textured with a fingertip, then glazed translucently. The X-radiograph shows extensive design modifications: the proper left shoulder was lowered and the neck opening moved to the viewer’s left; the collar on this side may have been damaged or scraped down before being reworked in a richer, creamy white. The earring was painted over the second collar. These adjustments preceded the completion of the

background tapestry. The proper left sleeve was longer, making the cuff closer to the wrist. Probably at the same time, the fur trim was added to the front of the jacket, covering the lower part of the neck opening. Infrared reflectography at 1.1 to 1.8 microns shows that changes also were made to the shape of the hat and contour of the arm on the figure's proper right side. [3]

The panel has a slight convex warp, a small check in the top edge at the right, and small gouges, rubs, and splinters on the back from nails and handling. The paint is rather abraded in several areas including the decoration of the hat, the sitter's proper left arm, and the girl's necklace. There are a number of small losses and areas of abrasion in the background and there is a large loss in the upper portion of the sitter's proper right collar. The painting was treated in 1995 to remove discolored varnish and inpainting. It had last been treated in 1933 by Louis de Wild. [4]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. based on conservation reports by David Bull, Catherine Metzger, and Melissa Katz

April 24, 2014

TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] Joseph Bauch and Peter Klein of the Universität Hamburg gave earliest possible felling dates of 1653 and 1651, respectively (see reports in NGA Conservation department files: Bauch, November 29, 1977; and Klein, September 29, 1987).
- [2] Hermann Kühn, "A Study of the Pigments and the Grounds Used by Jan Vermeer," *Studies in the History of Art* (Washington, DC, 1968), 194, analyzed the pigments. Robert L. Feller, Carnegie Mellon University, found chalk with perhaps a trace of yellow ocher in the ground (see report, dated July 12, 1974, in NGA Conservation department files).
- [3] Infrared reflectography was performed with a Santa Barbara focal plane array InSb camera fitted with H and J astronomy filters.
- [4] According to a memo dated February 2, 1968, in NGA Conservation files, Louis de Wild "retouch[ed], put down blisters, and revarnish[ed]."
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PROVENANCE

Possibly Pieter Claesz van Ruijven [1624-1674], Delft; possibly by inheritance to his wife, Maria de Knuijt [d. 1681]; possibly by inheritance to her daughter, Magdalena van Ruijven [1655-1682], Delft; possibly by inheritance to her husband, Jacobus Abrahamsz. Dissius [1653-1695], Delft;^[1] (sale, Amsterdam, 16 May 1696, probably no. 39 or 40).^[2] possibly the van Son family; Jan Mahie van Boxtel en Liempde and his wife, Geertruida van Boxtel en Liempde [née van Son, d. 1876], 's-Hertogenbosch; purchased from the estate by their daughter, Jaqueline Gertrude Marie de Grez [Dowager de Grez, née Mahie van Boxtel en Liempde, d. 1917], Brussels, wife of Jonkheer Jean de Grez [1837-1910]; sold by 1911 to (Antiquar E. Jonas, Paris);^[3] sold 16 June 1911 to (Thos. Agnew & Sons, Ltd., London); half-share sold June 1911 to (M. Knoedler & Co., New York, and P. & D. Colnaghi, London); Agnew's half-share sold 21 November 1913 to (M. Knoedler & Co., New York);^[4] Knoedler's three-quarter share sold July 1915 to (P. & D. Colnaghi, London). August Janssen [1863-1918], Amsterdam, after August 1916;^[5] his estate; sold 1919 with the entire Janssen collection to (Jacques Goudstikker, Amsterdam);^[6] purchased jointly April 1921 by (M. Knoedler & Co., New York, and Frederick Muller & Co., Amsterdam);^[7] sold February 1923 to Joseph E. Widener; inheritance from Estate of Peter A. B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, after purchase by funds of the Estate; gift 1942 to NGA.

[1] The 1683 inventory of goods accruing to Jacob Dissius after the death of his wife Magdalena van Ruijven lists twenty paintings by Vermeer. For the complete transactions between her husband Jacob Dissius and his father Abraham Dissius following her death, see John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History*, Princeton, 1989, 246-257, 359-361, docs. 417, 420.

[2] For this sale see John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History*, Princeton, 1989: 363-364, doc. 439. Item no. 38 in the sale is described as "a tronie in antique dress, uncommonly artful"; item no. 39 as "Another ditto Vermeer"; and item no. 40 as "A pendant of the same."

[3] The exact date when the painting was sold by the De Grez family is uncertain; it seems to be either 1911 or 1914. The 1911 date used in the Provenance comes from three sources. The first is a letter of 18 May 1995 from Melissa De Medeiros,

librarian at M. Knoedler (in NGA curatorial files) that says "Under Knoedler #12403 we purchased a 1/2 share in the painting from Thos. Agnew & Sons in June 1911 and sold it in July 1915 to P&D Colnaghi, London." A follow-up letter of 31 May 1995 clarifies the fact that the half share purchased from Agnew's was actually split with Colnaghi. The second is a letter of 25 July 1995 from Fred Bancroft, director of Agnew's Inc., New York (in NGA curatorial files), that says: "According to our stock books, the Vermeer was purchased from E. Jonas on June 16, 1911 and then sold outright to Knoedler on November 21, 1913. There seems to be no record of shares being sold to other dealers." The phrase "sold outright," however, hints that there may have been shares involved, as evidenced by Knoedler's records. The third is a letter of 30 May 1996 from Stephen Rudge, Colnaghi, London (in NGA curatorial files), indicating that, despite the lack of a stock book record, "there is an old record card that confirms both the purchase with Knoedler and the fact that we took it over in July 1915." From these records, it appears that the painting had left the De Grez family by 1911, since Agnew's purchased it from E. Jonas in June of that year.

However, correspondence in the NGA curatorial files from Dr. J. B.V. M.J. van de Mortel, a relation of the Dowager de Grez, consistently relates the story that his father, Henri van de Mortel, who was the Dowager's nephew and handled her affairs, sold the painting for her in 1914 to Antiquar Jonas in Paris (letters to David Finley of 31 October 1946 and to John Walker of 18 November 1946). Because it was his father who was handling the Dowager's affairs, it is possible that Dr. Van de Mortel had the year of the sale wrong. The dealers' records would imply so.

[4] At this point, it appears Knoedler held a three-quarter share and Colnaghi a one-quarter share in the painting.

[5] According to a letter of 30 May 1996 from Stephen Rudge, Colnaghi, London (in NGA curatorial files), the old record "card does mention that it was still present [with Colnaghi] in August 1916."

[6] "Janssen Paintings Sold in Holland," *The Milwaukee Journal* (3 August 1919): 10; Otto Hirschmann, "Die Sammlung August Janssen," *Der Cicerone* 12 (January 1920): 17-18.

[7] Letter of 18 May 1995 from Melissa De Medeiros, librarian at M. Knoedler (in NGA curatorial files). This letter also provides the date of sale to Joseph Widener.

EXHIBITION HISTORY

1907 Loan for display with permanent collection, Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1907.

1919 La Collection Goudstikker d'Amsterdam, Pulchri Studio, The Hague, 1919, no. 131, repro.

1920 Collection Goudstikker d'Amsterdam, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, January-February 1920, no. 15, repro.

1920 Goudstikker Collection, Stockholm; Kristiana, April 1920.

1920 La Collection Goudstikker d'Amsterdam exposee dans les localites de la Rotterdamsche Kunstkring, Rotterdam, May 1920, no. 19, repro.

1921 Loan for display with permanent collection, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, 1921.

1922 Old and More Recent Dutch Paintings, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, 1922, no. 133, repro.

1995 Johannes Vermeer, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Royal Cabinet of Paintings Mauritshuis, The Hague, 1995-1996, no. 23, repro., as Young Girl with a Flute by Circle of Johannes Vermeer.

1998 A Collector's Cabinet, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1998, no. 62.

1999 Johannes Vermeer: The Art of Painting, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1999-2000, not in brochure.

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