

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Ruth Kaplan
Deborah Ziska
(202) 842-6353

FIRST EXHIBITION DEVOTED TO MASTERPIECES BY JOHANNES VERMEER

AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, EXCLUSIVE U.S. VENUE

NOVEMBER 12, 1995 - FEBRUARY 11, 1996

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The first exhibition ever devoted solely to the art of the extraordinary Dutch painter, Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), will be presented November 12, 1995, through February 11, 1996, in the National Gallery of Art's West Building, the show's exclusive venue in the United States. Only thirty-five works are known to have been painted by this master, who lived and worked in Delft in the mid-seventeenth century. It is remarkable that twenty of those paintings, representing a large number of the works that are allowed to travel, have been confirmed for the exhibition to date. Johannes Vermeer is co-organized by the National Gallery of Art and the Mauritshuis, The Hague, where the show will be presented at its only European venue, March 1 through June 2, 1996.

The exhibition in Washington is made possible by United Technologies Corporation.

"This exhibition of paintings by Johannes Vermeer, one of

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vermeer . . . page 2

the most beloved and revered of all artists, is a once-in-a-lifetime event," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "In partnership with the Mauritshuis and the generous lenders and supporters, we will present more than half of Vermeer's known oeuvre, which we may never be able to see again all in one place."

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., National Gallery curator of northern baroque paintings, and Frederik J. Duparc, director of the Mauritshuis, jointly organized the exhibition. By bringing a number of Vermeer's early history paintings together with his later genre scenes, cityscapes, and allegories, Wheelock and Duparc hope to "demonstrate a continuity in Vermeer's approach to subject matter." They maintain that throughout his work there exists "a sense of gravity and timelessness related to seventeenth-century classicizing traditions that is fundamentally different from that of an artist who wanted only to record everyday life."

Vermeer has been admired through the centuries for the quiet intimacy of his paintings, whether they depict a young girl in a turban, a woman with a water pitcher, a quiet street scene in Delft, or a music lesson. Equally admired is the sensitivity of his painting technique, his superb depiction of light and shadow, and his illusionism, all of which will become even more apparent in nine of the paintings recently restored for the exhibition. They include Vermeer's masterpiece View of Delft (c. 1660-1661),

vermeer . . . page 3

which has never been seen outside of Europe, and Girl with a Pearl Earring (c. 1665-1666), both from the Mauritshuis; Christ in the House of Mary and Martha (c. 1655), National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; A Lady at the Virginal with a Gentleman (The Music Lesson) (c. 1662-1664), lent by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II; and A Lady Writing (c. 1665), Woman Holding a Balance (c. 1664), The Girl with the Red Hat (c. 1665), and Young Girl with a Flute (c. 1665/1670), all from the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The National Gallery of Ireland's Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid (c. 1670), which was recently recovered after a theft a few years ago, has also been restored.

The other paintings in the show to date are The Geographer (c. 1668-1669), which has never previously been lent by the Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt; The Lacemaker (c. 1669-1670), from the Musée du Louvre, Paris; Woman with a Pearl Necklace (c. 1664-1665) from the Staatliche Museum, Berlin; A Lady Seated at the Virginal (c. 1675) and A Lady Standing at the Virginal (c. 1672-1673), both from the National Gallery, London; The Little Street (c. 1657-1658) and Woman in Blue Reading a Letter (c. 1663-1664), both from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Diana and Her Companions (c. 1655-1656) from the Mauritshuis; Saint Praxedis (1655) from The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection Foundation, Princeton, New Jersey; and Young Woman with a Water Pitcher (c. 1664-1665) and Allegory of Faith (c. 1671-1673), both from The Metropolitan Museum of

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vermeer . . . page 4

Art, New York.

A special display, including a map of The Netherlands in the seventeenth century, will provide visitors with information about the environs in which Johannes Vermeer spent his life. Very little is known about Vermeer. He was born in Delft in 1632, the son of an innkeeper who was also an art dealer. After his apprenticeship years Vermeer became a member of the painters' guild of Saint Luke in Delft in 1653 at the age of twenty-one. While his teacher is not known, it is likely that Vermeer was influenced by Carel Fabritius, a pupil of Rembrandt and a talented painter working in Delft. In 1662-1663 and 1671-1672 Vermeer was headman of the guild of Saint Luke, which indicates that he was recognized as an important artist during his lifetime. Aside from the income he earned as a painter, he supported his wife and eleven children by selling and appraising paintings. At the end of his life his financial situation deteriorated and he left his family destitute when he died on December 15, 1675.

After his death Vermeer's paintings were collected by a small group of connoisseurs, most of whom lived in The Netherlands. His widespread fame came only in the late nineteenth century when the French writer and critic Thoré-Bürger enthusiastically wrote about his art. Since then his paintings have been viewed as some of the supreme achievements of the Dutch golden age.

The exhibition catalogue will present new insights into the ways in which Vermeer worked, as well as an assessment of his

vermeer . . . page 5

technical innovations, stylistic evolution, and the iconographic and thematic relationships of his paintings to those of his contemporaries. The history and appreciation of his paintings since the seventeenth century is also examined. The scholarly catalogue has been written by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. and Ben Broos, research curator from the Mauritshuis. Among the contributors are Vermeer specialist Albert Blankert and Jørgen Wadum, chief paintings conservator at the Mauritshuis.

For visitor information call (202) 842-6684.

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