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Landmark Exhibition Brings to Light Relationships Between Vermeer and his Contemporaries



Johannes Vermeer, *The Love Letter*, c. 1669-70
oil on canvas
Rijksmuseum, purchased with the support of Vereniging Rembrandt

Washington, DC—More than 20 years after the legendary exhibition *Johannes Vermeer*, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, presents *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry*. On view in the West Building from October 22, 2017, through January 21, 2018, the exhibition examines the artistic exchanges among Dutch Golden Age painters from 1650 to 1675, when they reached the height of their technical ability and mastery at depicting domestic life.

Some 65 masterpieces by Johannes Vermeer and his contemporaries—including Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou, Pieter de Hooch, Nicolas Maes, Eglon van der Neer, Caspar Netscher, and Jacob Ochtervelt—are grouped by theme, composition, and technique, thereby demonstrating how these painters admired, challenged, and pushed each other to greater artistic achievement. The paintings also reflect how these masters responded to the changing artistic climate of the Dutch Republic in the third quarter of the 17th century, particularly in Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, Deventer, Rotterdam, and Delft.

Since 1995 the Gallery's curator of northern baroque paintings, Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., has mounted more than a dozen exhibitions on Dutch artists, including several featured in this exhibition. Among them are Johannes Vermeer (1995), Jan Steen (1996), Gerrit Dou (2000), Gerard ter Borch (2004–2005), Frans van Mieris (2006), and Gabriel Metsu (2011). As the culmination of these monographic exhibitions, *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting* reveals how these painters were artistically more connected than has previously been understood.

"The 1995 *Johannes Vermeer* show endures as one of the most significant exhibitions in the Gallery's history. *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting* will undoubtedly have the same impact while also deeply enriching our understanding of the web of influence among 17th-century Dutch artists," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "This exhibition would not have been possible without the incredible generosity of the lenders, both museums and private collectors, or the support of the Hata Foundation, Dr. Mihael and Mrs. Mahy Polymeropoulos, The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art, and BP p.l.c."

Exhibition Support

BP p.l.c. is proud to sponsor this exhibition as part of its support of the arts in the U.S. and U.K.

"As the nation's largest energy investor, BP's commitment to America goes well beyond providing the energy and jobs that fuel economic prosperity. We also have a long history of supporting the arts and cultural activities in the U.S. and around the world," said Geoff Morrell, Senior Vice President, U.S. Communications & External Affairs, BP America. "We are especially delighted to be able to play a part in helping the National Gallery of Art make this historic exhibition possible, and we hope it will be a tremendous success for the museum and a memorable experience for all who see it."

The exhibition is also generously supported by the Hata Foundation, Dr. Mihael and Mrs. Mahy Polymeropoulos, and The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Exhibition Organization and Curators

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, and the Musée du Louvre, Paris. The exhibition is on view at the Musée du Louvre from February 20 through May 22, 2017 and at the National Gallery of Ireland from June 17 through September 17, 2017.

The exhibition is curated by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., curator of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington; Adriaan Waiboer, head of collections and research, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin (who initiated the exhibition concept); and Blaise Ducos, curator of Dutch and Flemish paintings, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Exhibition Highlights

Dutch genre painting reached the pinnacle of its popularity and technique during the third quarter of the 17th century as a network of artists working in different cities found success depicting scenes of the daily life of the elite. *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting* makes clear that artists often studied and emulated paintings by other masters. While little is known about exactly when artists saw paintings by those working in different cities, travel across The Netherlands was relatively easy at the time with the country's efficient infrastructure of roads and canals. Artists would have been able to make short journeys to visit painters' studios as well as the homes of collectors and art dealers. There are also specific instances of contact between artists such as cosigned documents, as with Vermeer and Ter Borch; a few known teacher-student relationships, including Dou and Van Mieris; and anecdotes—for example, that Steen and Van Mieris were reputedly drinking buddies.

The paintings in the exhibition are presented in groups that illustrate how artists inspired each other in their subject matter, figural motifs, stylistic decisions, and painting techniques. Subjects include women writing letters, musical duets, astronomers, lace makers, and a woman holding a parrot. One group compares three paintings of women with lutes by Van Mieris, Van Der Neer, and Vermeer while another demonstrates how a number of artists adapted an important pictorial motif in their work—a female figure standing with her back to the viewer. The motif was introduced by Ter Borch in his famous *Gallant Conversation ("The Paternal Admonition")* (c. 1654, Rijksmuseum) and then utilized in a variety of ways by De Hooch, Steen, and Ochtervelt.

The direction of influence did not strictly flow from masters to their followers. In many ways, Ter Borch and Dou were the forefathers of high-life genre painting in The Netherlands. They were incredibly influential to the younger generation of artists, many of whom were their pupils. However, the two painters also studied and emulated the work of their admirers. For instance, Dou, in his painting *The Dropsical Woman* (1663, Musée du Louvre), looked carefully at Van Mieris's earlier depiction of that same theme, but enlarged his interior setting and increased the number of figures to create a more ambitious work than his former pupil produced.

Vermeer, no less than his contemporaries, looked carefully at paintings by different artists, and most of the groups in this exhibition include at least one work by the Delft master. A particularly interesting connection exists between Vermeer's *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (c. 1662–1665, Gemäldegalerie) and Van Mieris's *Woman before a Mirror* (c. 1662, Gemäldegalerie). The similar subjects of these paintings, in which a woman is shown standing in profile before a table and adjusting her necklace, was not their invention but that of Ter Borch in his *Young Woman at her Toilet with a Maid* (c. 1650–1651, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Through such juxtapositions, one is able to understand the distinctive qualities that each of these artists brought to their subjects. For example, the woman in Vermeer's *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* has a timelessness that evokes inner strength and purity, thus providing this genre scene with a moral and philosophical underpinning more traditionally associated with history paintings.

Catalog and Related Programs

Published by the National Gallery of Art, Ireland, National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Musée du Louvre, Paris, in association with Yale University Press, a fully illustrated catalog features essays by the curators and an esteemed group of international scholars. The catalog also includes a timeline of the recorded and conjectured visits of ten of these artists and 22 entries discussing the various thematic groupings of paintings. Featuring 180 color illustrations, the 320-page catalog will be available in both hardcover and softcover at shop.nga.gov/, or by calling (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; faxing (202) 789-3047; or emailing mailorder@nga.gov.

Lecture

Introduction to the Exhibition—Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry

October 22 at 2:00 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., curator of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington and Adriaan Waiboer, head of collections and research, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. A signing of the exhibition catalog follows.

A livestream of the lecture will be available in additional locations in the Gallery and on nga.gov.

Additional Programs

Innovation, Competition, and Fine Painting Technique: Marketing High-Life Style in the Dutch 17th-Century

October 30 at 12:10 and 1:10 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Melanie Gifford, research conservator, and Lisha Glinsman, conservation scientist, both National Gallery of Art, Washington. Part of the lunchtime Works in Progress series, this 30-minute talk is followed by a question-and-answer period.

More than Mimicry: The Parrot in Dutch Genre Painting

November 20 at 12:10 and 1:10 p.m.

East Building Auditorium

Kristen H. Gonzalez, curatorial assistant, department of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington. Part of the lunchtime Works in Progress series, this 30-minute talk is followed by a question-and-answer period.

*A Message From the Chair: Furniture in Dutch Genre Painting**

Eric Denker, senior lecturer, National Gallery of Art, Washington

*Striking the Right Chord: Seeing Music in Dutch Genre Painting**

Jennifer Henel, curatorial coordinator for digital content, National Gallery of Art, Washington

*Time and Timelessness in the art of Vermeer and his Contemporaries**

Alexandra Libby, assistant curator, department of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington

*Wine: Booze for Bacchus – a Status Symbol for the Dutch Elite**

Henriette Rahusen, exhibition research assistant, department of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Introduction to Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry

West Building Lecture Hall

Introductory slide overviews of the exhibition, by education staff lecturers, will be offered regularly in November and December. Exact dates and times to be determined.

*Time and location to be determined

Online Content

An exhibition feature on nga.gov will expand upon select themes from ***Vermeer and the Masters of Genre*** Painting. The feature will also present select lectures and programs.

Visitor Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art, Washington is always free. Passes/tickets will not be required to see ***Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting***. Tours will not be permitted in the exhibition. The Gallery is open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and is closed on December 25 and January 1.

Press Contact:

Isabella Bulkeley, (202) 842-6864 or i-bulkeley@nga.gov

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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PRESS KIT

[Exhibition Press Release](#)

[Exhibition Checklist](#) (PDF 202kb)

CURATOR BIOGRAPHY

[Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr.](#)

Curator of Northern Baroque Paintings

ONLINE RESOURCES

[Exhibition page](#)

RELATED EXHIBITIONS

[Vermeer's "Woman in Blue Reading a Letter" from the Rijksmuseum](#)

(September 19 – December 1, 2015)

[Gabriel Metsu, 1629–1667](#)

(April 10 – July 24, 2011)

[Amorous Intrigues and Painterly Refinement: The Art of Frans van Mieris](#)

(February 26 – May 21, 2006)

[Gerard ter Borch](#)

(November 7, 2004 – January 30, 2005)

[Gerrit Dou \(1613-1675\): Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt](#)

(April 16 – August 6, 2000)

[Johannes Vermeer's The Art of Painting](#)

(November 24, 1999 – February 8, 2000)

[Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller](#)

(April 28 – August 16, 1996)

[Johannes Vermeer](#)

(November 12, 1995 – February 11, 1996)

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

[Johannes Vermeer catalog \(1995\)](#)

[Gerrit Dou \(1613-1675\): Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt catalog \(2000\)](#)

[Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller catalog \(1996\)](#)

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