

Dutch Art, 17th century

The Dutch Golden Age was a period in the history of the Netherlands, roughly spanning the 17th century, in which Dutch trade, science, military, and art were among the most acclaimed in the world. The first section is characterized by the Thirty Years' War, which ended in 1648. The Golden Age continued in peacetime during the Dutch Republic until the end of the century.

The transition by the Netherlands to the foremost maritime and economic power in the world has been called the "Dutch Miracle" by historian K. W. Swart.

Adriaen van Ostade (1610 – 1685) was a Dutch Golden Age painter of genre works.

He and his brother were pupils of Frans Hals and like him, spent most of their lives in Haarlem.



A01 *The Painter in his Workshop* 1633



A02 *Resting Travelers* 1671

David Teniers the Younger (1610 – 1690) was a Flemish painter, printmaker, draughtsman, miniaturist painter, staffage painter, copyist and art curator. He was an extremely versatile artist known for his prolific output. He was an innovator in a wide range of genres such as history, genre, landscape, portrait and still life. He is now best remembered as the leading Flemish genre painter of his day. Teniers is particularly known for developing the peasant genre, the tavern scene, pictures of collections and scenes with alchemists and physicians.



A03 *Peasant Wedding* 1650



A04 *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his gallery in Brussels*

Gerrit Dou (1613 – 1675), also known as Gerard and Douw or Dow, was a Dutch Golden Age painter, whose small, highly polished paintings are typical of the Leiden fijnschilders. He specialised in genre scenes and is noted for his trompe l'oeil "niche" paintings and candlelit night-scenes with strong chiaroscuro. He was a student of Rembrandt.

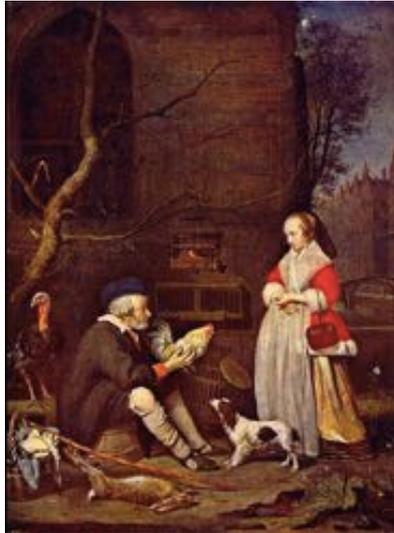


A05 *Scholar Sharpening a Pencil*

Gabriël Metsu (1629–1667) was a Dutch painter of history paintings, still lifes, portraits, and genre works. He was "a highly eclectic artist, who did not adhere to a consistent style, technique, or one type of subject for long periods." Only 14 of his 133 works are dated.



A06 *Man Writing a Letter* 1662/65



A07 *The Poultry Seller* 1662

Metsu was taught by **Gerard Dou**. Around 1653-4, Metsu began placing his figures in domestic interiors and specialized in genre scenes on small panels. Old people were among Metsu's favorite thematic borrowings from Dou during his first years in Amsterdam. Metsu often painted young (single) women who either feed pets, sold goods at market (fruit, vegetables, fish, poultry, or meat) or were grocery-shopping themselves for these things. Houbraken ends his biography with the comment that he was "of impeccable reputation", but he may have meant this ironically. Often, the subject of a Metsu painting was based on a popular emblem from an emblem book. This can give the painting a double meaning, such as in *The Poultry seller*, 1662, showing an old man offering a rooster to a young girl in a symbolic pose that is based on a lewd engraving by Gillis van Breen (1595–1622), with the same scene. The accompanying verse is:

“ How much for the bird, birdman? It's sold. Where?
To an innkeeper, to whom I sell birds/that I have sex with the whole year through.”

Aelbert Jacobsz Cuyp, (1620 – 1691) was one of the leading Dutch landscape painters of the Dutch Golden Age in the 17th century. The most famous of a family of painters, he is especially known for his large views of the Dutch countryside in early morning or late afternoon light.



B01 **Piping Shepherds** c1643



B02 **Cattle Near Maas with Dordrecht in the Distance**

Known as the Dutch equivalent of Claude Lorrain, he went on to inherit a considerable fortune. His family were all artists, with his uncle Benjamin and grandfather Gerrit being stained glass cartoon designers. Jacob Gerritsz Cuyp, his father, was a portraitist.



B03 **van Goyen, Dunes** 1629

Cuyp took from **van Goyen** the straw yellow and light brown tones that are so apparent in his Dunes (1629) and the broken brush technique also very noticeable in that same work. This technique, a precursor to impressionism, is noted for the short brush strokes where the colors are not necessarily blended smoothly. In Cuyp's *River Scene, Two Men Conversing* (1641) both of these van Goyen-influenced stylistic elements are noticeable.



B04 **van Goyen, River Scene** 1652



B05 **van Guyen, Dune Landscape** 1634



B06 **Jan Both, Landscape Chiaroscuro** 1646

The next phase in the development of Cuyp's increasingly amalgamated style is due to the influence of **Jan Both**. In Rome, Both had developed a new style of composition due, at least in part, to his interaction with Claude Lorrain. This new style was focused on changing the direction of light in the painting. Instead of the light being placed at right angles in relation to the line of vision, Both started moving it to a diagonal position from the back of the picture. In this new form of lighting, the artist (and viewer of the painting) faced the sun more or less contre-jour. Both, and subsequently Cuyp, used the advantages of this new lighting style to alter the sense of depth and luminosity possible in a painting. To make notice of these new capabilities, much use was made of elongated shadows.



B07 *Landscape with Three Cows and a Shepherd Boy*



B08 *Herdsman With Cows* 1645

Cuyp was one of the first Dutch painters to appreciate this new leap forward in style and while his own Both-inspired phase was quite short (limited to the mid-1640s) he did, more than any other contemporary Dutch artist, to maximise the full chromatic scale for sunsets and sunrises.

Sunlight in his paintings rakes across the panel, accentuating small bits of detail in the golden light. In large, atmospheric panoramas of the countryside, the highlights on a blade of meadow grass, the mane of a tranquil horse, the horn of a dairy cow reclining by a stream, or the tip of a peasant's hat are all caught in a bath of yellow ochre light. The richly varnished medium refracts the rays of light like a jewel as it dissolves into numerous glazed layers. Cuyp's landscapes were based on reality and on his own invention of what an enchanting landscape should be.



B09 *The Maas at Dordrecht* 1650



B10 *View of the Maas at Dordrecht* c. 1645

Jan Havickszoon Steen (c. 1626 – 1679)

A Dutch genre painter of the 17th century (also known as the Dutch Golden Age). His works are known for their psychological insight, sense of humour and abundance of colour.

In 1648 Jan Steen and Gabriël Metsu founded the painters' Guild of Saint Luke at Leiden. Soon after he became an assistant to the renowned landscape painter Jan van Goyen and moved into his house on the Bierkade in The Hague. On Oct 3, 1649 he married van Goyen's daughter Margriet, with whom he would have eight children.



C01 **Tobias and Sarah** c1660



C02 **Beware of Luxury** 1663

Like his even more famous contemporary Rembrandt van Rijn, Jan Steen attended the Latin school and became a student in Leiden. He received his painterly education from Nicolaes Knupfer (1603–1660), a German painter of historical and figurative scenes in Utrecht. Influences of Knupfer can be found in Steen's use of composition and colour. Other sources of inspiration were Adriaen van Ostade and Isaac van Ostade, painters of rural scenes, who lived in Haarlem.



C03 **The Merry Family** 1668



C04 **The Feast of St. Nicholas** c1665-68

Daily life was Jan Steen's main pictorial theme. Many of the genre scenes he portrayed, as in *The Feast of Saint Nicholas*, are lively to the point of chaos and lustfulness, even so much that "a Jan Steen household", meaning a messy scene, became a Dutch proverb (een huishouden van Jan Steen). Subtle hints in his paintings seem to suggest that Steen meant to warn the viewer rather than invite him to copy this behaviour. Many of Steen's paintings bear references to old Dutch proverbs or literature.



C05 **Woman at her Toilet** 1663

He also painted other themes: historical, mythological and religious scenes, portraits, still lifes and natural scenes. His portraits of children are famous. He is also well known for his mastery of light and attention to

detail, most notably in Persian rugs and other textiles.

Steen was prolific, producing about 800 paintings, of which roughly 350 survive. His work was valued much by contemporaries and as a result he was reasonably well paid for his work.



C06 *Rhetoricians at a Window* c1661-66 C07 *The Doctor's Visit* c1665

A major influence on Jan Steen's work was the guild of the Rhetoricians or Rederijkers and their theatrical endeavors.

It is often suggested that Jan Steen's paintings are a realistic portrayal of Dutch 17th-century life. However, not everything he did was a purely realistic representation of his day-to-day environment. Many of his scenes contain idyllic and bucolic fantasies and a declamatory emphasis redolent of theatre. Steen's numerous paintings of a theme most commonly entitled *The Doctor's Visit*, such as the composition of 1665–70 in the Rijksmuseum, illustrate his theatrical approach. The story is simple: a doctor attending a young maiden discovers that she is not ill but is in fact pregnant with child. The doctor is a comical character who wears a biretta, a doublet and a small pleated ruff. In fact, he is dressed in the fashion of 1570, not 1670. In contrast, the girl wears what would be the height of fashion at the time of the painting, a Japanese-styled loose kimono robe.

Pieter de Hooch (1629 – 1684) A Dutch Golden Age painter famous for his genre works of quiet domestic scenes with an open doorway. He was a contemporary of Jan Vermeer. Born in Rotterdam. The early work of de Hooch was mostly composed of scenes of soldiers and peasants in stables and taverns in the manner of Adriaen van Ostade, though he used these to develop great skill in light, color, and perspective rather than to explore an interest in the subject matter.



D01 *The Empty Glass* c1652

D02 *Maes, Old woman Dozing* 1656

De Hooch was married in Delft in 1654 to Jannetje van der Burch, by whom he fathered seven

children. While in Delft, de Hooch is also believed to have learned from the painters **Carel Fabritius** and **Nicolaes Maes**, who were early members of the Delft School. He became a member of the painters' guild of Saint Luke in 1655 (two years after Vermeer).



D03 **Fabritius**, *The Sentry* 1654



D04 **Fabritius**, *The Goldfinch* 1654

The Delft Explosion, also known in history as the Delft Thunderclap, occurred on 12 October 1654 when a gunpowder store exploded, destroying much of the city. Over a hundred people were killed and thousands were wounded.

Today, the explosion is remembered primarily for killing Rembrandt's most promising pupil, Carel Fabritius, and destroying almost his entire oeuvre; a pivotal event in Donna Tartt's Pulitzer Prize-winning 2013 novel *The Goldfinch*.

The painting is a trompe-l'œil of a European goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis*) on top of its feeder that is attached to the wall. The feeder consists of two half-rings and a blue container. The bird is sitting on the top ring, to which it is chained by its foot. The painting is signed "C. fabritius 1654" at the bottom. In the 17th century, goldfinches were popular pets because they could be trained to draw water from a bowl with a miniature bucket.

De Hooch also shared themes and compositions with **Emanuel de Witte**, though De Witte soon devoted himself mainly to painting church interior scenes after moving to Amsterdam in 1651. De Witte seems more preoccupied with the rooms themselves, filling his paintings with objects, and De Hooch is more interested in people and their relationships to each other, leaving his rooms empty of any extra objects that don't support the scene.

Emanuel de Witte (1617–1692) was a Dutch perspective painter. In contrast to **Pieter Jansz Saenredam**, who emphasized architectural accuracy, De Witte was more concerned with the atmosphere of his interiors.



D05 **de Witte**, *Interior of a Church* c1660



D06 **Saenredam**, *Interior of the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem* 1652

Continuing with de Hooch:



D07 **Woman With a Baby on Her Lap** 1658

After starting his family in the mid-1650s, de Hooch switched his focus to domestic scenes. These were possibly of his own family, though his works of well-to-do women breastfeeding and caring for children could also indicate that he had attended his mother on her rounds as a midwife.



D08 **Courtyard of a House in Delft** 1658



D09 **Courtyard With an Arbour** 1658

This is a masterpiece of clear and direct depiction of domestic architecture typical of de Hooch's middle period. The building and courtyard seem to take precedence over the strangely detached figures in the painting.

There are some subtle effects that are at variance with the overall impression of harmony. The brickwork of the wall on the right is in a sad state compared to the house on the left; there is an interesting double perspective that differentiates the two halves that are divided by the right edge of the archway and building above. Nature is making incursions to the well swept courtyard from the plant border on the right, the shrub above the couple's head and the vine obscuring the stone tablet.

His work showed astute observation of the mundane details of everyday life while also functioning as well-ordered morality tales. These paintings often exhibited a sophisticated and delicate treatment of light similar to those of Vermeer, who lived in Delft at the same time.



D10 ***Woman Drinking with Soldiers*** 1658 D11 ***Cardplayers in a Sunlit Room*** 1658

Cardplayers in a Sunlit Room is one of the finest of the master's works. " The extraordinary luminous effect which pervades this picture renders it the admiration of every beholder. It is painted with singular mastery of hand, and exhibits throughout a consummate knowledge of the principles of art"

In the 1660s, he began to paint for wealthier patrons in Amsterdam.

During his time in Amsterdam, he continued to make his domestic scenes, but both the interiors and their occupants appear more opulent.



D12 ***A Boy Bringing Bread*** 1663

A boy offers a basket of bread to a lady in an interior; behind them a tiled courtyard leads into another dark interior, beyond which can be seen a canal with a second woman, possibly the boy's mother, watching the transaction from afar. With its masterly illusion of receding depth, the picture demonstrates De Hooch's sensitivity to differing effects of daylight in adjoining spaces, in this case through a series of indoor and outdoor spaces. Originally a girl reading a book sat in the doorway, but she was painted out in

favour of the lady and the boy, whose stance echoes the verticality of the architecture and prompts the eye to travel upwards into the picture space. By paring down his composition De Hooch focuses the viewer's attention and imbues the scene with intensified quietude.



D13 ***A Game of Ninepins*** c1665

De Hooch also depicted courting couples playing skittles. The highest quality version can be seen at Waddesdon Manor. It was produced shortly after de Hooch moved to Amsterdam and is a good example of his depictions of early country house gardens which replaced his earlier simple Delft courtyards. The theme of skittle playing relates to 'Garden of Love' and 'Game of Love' imagery found in both high art and popular print culture. The woman looking out at the viewer is the protagonist in this sport of Love.

Jacob Isaackszoon van Ruisdael (c.1629 – 1682) A Dutch painter, draughtsman, and etcher. He is generally considered the pre-eminent landscape painter of the Dutch Golden Age, a period of great wealth and cultural achievement when Dutch painting became highly popular.

Prolific and versatile, Ruisdael depicted a wide variety of landscape subjects. From 1646 he painted Dutch countryside scenes of remarkable quality for a young man. After a trip to Germany in 1650, his landscapes took on a more heroic character. In his late work, conducted when he lived and worked in Amsterdam, he added city panoramas and seascapes to his regular repertoire. In these, the sky often took up two-thirds of the canvas. In total he produced more than 150 Scandinavian views featuring waterfalls.



E01 ***View of Haarlem with Bleaching Fields*** c 1665



E02 ***The Windmill at Wijk*** 1670

Johannes, Jan or Johan Vermeer (1632 – 1675). Specialised in domestic interior scenes of middle-class

life. Vermeer was a moderately successful provincial genre painter in his lifetime. He evidently was not wealthy, leaving his wife and children in debt at his death, perhaps because he produced relatively few paintings.

Vermeer worked slowly and with great care, and frequently used very expensive pigments. He is particularly renowned for his masterly treatment and use of light in his work. He painted mostly domestic interior scenes. "Almost all his paintings are apparently set in two smallish rooms in his house in Delft; they show the same furniture and decorations in various arrangements and they often portray the same people, mostly women." [1]

He was recognised during his lifetime in Delft and The Hague, but his modest celebrity gave way to obscurity after his death.



F01 *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* c1654-5



F02 *The Procuress* 1656

Painted at the age of 24, *The Procuress* is his first genre painting and shows a scene of contemporary life, an image of mercenary love perhaps in a brothel. It differs from his earlier biblical and mythological scenes.

According to Benjamin Binstock the painting could be understood as a psychological portrait of his adopted family. Vermeer is in the painting as a musician, in the employ of the madam. In his rather fictional book Binstock explains Vermeer used his family as models; the whore could be Vermeer's wife Catherina and the lewd soldier her brother Willem.

In April 1653 Vermeer married a Catholic girl, Catharina Bolnes (Bolnes). His new mother-in-law Maria Thins was significantly wealthier than he, and it was probably she who insisted that Vermeer convert to Catholicism before the marriage. At some point, the couple moved in with Catharina's mother, who lived in a rather spacious house at Oude Langendijk, almost next to a hidden Jesuit church. He lived there for the rest of his life, producing paintings in the front room on the second floor. His wife gave birth to 15 children, four of whom were buried before being baptised.

On 29 December 1653, Vermeer became a member of the Guild of Saint Luke, a trade association for painters. The guild's records make clear that Vermeer did not pay the usual admission fee. It was a year of plague, war, and economic crisis; Vermeer was not alone in experiencing difficult financial circumstances. In 1654, the city suffered the terrible explosion known as the Delft Thunderclap, which destroyed a large section of the city.



F03 ***The Little Street*** c1657

The Little Street, shows a quiet street, depicting a typical aspect of the life in a Dutch Golden Age town. It is one of only three Vermeer paintings of views of Delft, the others being *View of Delft* and the now lost *House Standing in Delft*. This painting is considered to be an important work of the Dutch master.

Straight angles alternate with the triangle of the house and of the sky giving the composition a certain vitality. The walls, stones and brickwork are painted in a thick colour, that it makes them almost palpable.



F04 ***The Music Lesson*** c1662-65

or ***Lady at the Virginals with a Gentleman***

This is a mature work of Vermeer and his handling of colour and his choice of painting materials is but one of the aspects proving his mastery. The painting is dominated by dark areas such as the bluish-black floor painted in bone black with addition of natural ultramarine.

The 2013 documentary film *Tim's Vermeer* documents inventor and entrepreneur Tim Jenison's attempt to recreate *The Music Lesson* to test his theory that Vermeer painted with the help of optical devices. The film's claim that Vermeer used something similar to Jenison's technique has been derided by art critics Jonathan Jones and Bendor Grosvenor.

Vermeer worked slowly, probably producing three paintings a year on order. Balthasar de Monconys visited him in 1663 to see some of his work, but Vermeer had no paintings to show. The diplomat and the

two French clergymen who accompanied him were sent to Hendrick van Buyten, a baker who had a couple of his paintings as collateral.



F05 *The Milkmaid* c1658

Vermeer, who was age twenty-five when he painted this work, was said to be "shopping around in Dutch art for different styles and subjects".

Despite its traditional title, the picture clearly shows a kitchen or housemaid, a low-ranking indoor servant, rather than a milkmaid who actually milks the cow, in a plain room carefully pouring milk into a squat earthenware container (now commonly known as a "Dutch oven") on a table. Also on the table are various types of bread. She is a young, sturdily built woman wearing a crisp linen cap, a blue apron and work sleeves pushed up from thick forearms. A foot warmer is on the floor behind her, near Delft wall tiles depicting Cupid (to the viewer's left) and a figure with a pole (to the right). Intense light streams from the window on the left side of the canvas.

The painting is strikingly illusionistic, conveying not just details but a sense of the weight of the woman and the table. Karen Rosenberg, an art critic for The New York Times wrote: "The light, though bright, doesn't wash out the rough texture of the bread crusts or flatten the volumes of the maid's thick waist and rounded shoulders",. Yet with half of the woman's face in shadow, it is "impossible to tell whether her downcast eyes and pursed lips express wistfulness or concentration."

In Dutch literature and paintings of Vermeer's time, maids were often depicted as subjects of male desire —dangerous women threatening the honor and security of the home, the center of Dutch life—although some Vermeer contemporaries, such as Pieter de Hooch, had started to represent them in a more neutral way, as did Michael Sweerts. Vermeer's painting is one of the rare examples of a maid treated in an empathetic and dignified way, although amorous symbols in this work still exemplify the tradition.

Use of symbols: one of the Delft tiles at the foot of the wall behind the maid, near the foot warmer, depicts Cupid – which can imply arousal of a woman or simply that while she is working she is daydreaming about a man. Other amorous symbols in the painting include a wide-mouthed jug, often used as a symbol of the female anatomy. The foot warmer was often used by artists as a symbol for female sexual arousal because, when placed under a skirt, it heats the whole body below the waist. The coals enclosed inside the foot warmer could symbolize "either the heat of lust in tavern or brothel scenes, or the hidden but true burning passion of a woman for her husband". Yet the whitewashed wall and presence of milk seem to indicate that the room was a "cool kitchen" used for cooking with dairy products, such as milk and butter, so the foot warmer would have a pragmatic purpose there. Since other Dutch paintings of the period

indicate that foot warmers were used when seated, its presence in the picture may symbolize the standing woman's "hardworking nature".

Narrative and thematic elements

According to art historian Harry Rand, the painting suggests the woman is making bread pudding, which would account for the milk and the broken pieces of bread on the table. ...

By depicting the working maid in the act of careful cooking, the artist presents not just a picture of an everyday scene, but one with ethical and social value. The humble woman is using common ingredients and otherwise useless stale bread to create a pleasurable product for the household. "Her measured demeanor, modest dress and judiciousness in preparing her food conveys eloquently yet unobtrusively one of the strongest values of 17th-century Netherlands, domestic virtue", according to the Essential Vermeer website.

"In the end, it is not the allusions to female sexuality that give this painting its romance or emotional resonance — it is the depiction of honest, hard work as something romantic in and of itself," Raquel Laneri wrote in Forbes magazine. "The Milkmaid elevates the drudgery of housework and servitude to virtuous, even heroic, levels."

Compositional strategy

An impression of monumentality and "perhaps a sense of dignity" is lent to the image by the artist's choice of a relatively low vantage point and a pyramidal building up of forms from the left foreground to the woman's head, according to a web page of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. According to the Rijksmuseum, the painting "is built up along two diagonal lines. They meet by the woman's right wrist." This focuses the attention of the viewer on the pouring of the milk.

Characteristic of Delft artistry and of Vermeer's work, the painting also has a "classic balance" of figurative elements and an "extraordinary treatment of light". The wall on the left "gets you very quickly in the picture—that recession from the left and then the openness to the right—and this sort of left-corner scheme was used for about 10 years before Vermeer, and he was very quick to pick up the latest thing."

"Nowhere else in his oeuvre does one find such a sculptural figure and such seemingly tangible objects, and yet the future painter of luminous interiors has already arrived." The "pointillé pattern of bright dots on the bread and basket" are the "most effusive" use of that scheme in any Vermeer painting, and it appears to be used to suggest "scintillating daylight and rough textures at the same time." ("Vermeer's Masterpiece The Milkmaid ". Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

Vermeer painted over two items originally in the painting. One was a large wall map behind the upper part of the woman's body. (A wall map may not have been very out of place in a humble workroom such as the cold kitchen where the maid toiled: large maps in 17th-century Holland were inexpensive ways of decorating bare walls.) He originally placed a large, conspicuous clothes basket near the bottom of the painting, behind the maid's red skirt, but then the artist painted it over, producing the slight shift in tone (pentimento) on the wall behind the foot warmer. The basket was later discovered with an X-ray. Other Vermeer paintings also have images removed. Some art critics have thought the removals may have been intended to provide the works with better thematic focus.

"There is a tactile, visceral quality to The Milkmaid — you can almost taste the thick, creamy milk

escaping the jug, feel the cool dampness of the room and the starchy linen of the maid's white cap, touch her sculptural shoulders and corseted waist. She is not an apparition or abstraction. She is not the ideal, worldly housewife of Vermeer's later *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher* or the ethereal beauty in *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. She is not the cartoonish buxom vixen in Leyden's drawing. She is real — as real as a painting can get anyway.” (Raquel Laneri, 12 September 2009: "Vermeer's Timeless Heroine – A New Exhibit Recasts the Enduring Appeal of the Dutch Master's 'Milkmaid'")



F06 ***View of Delft*** 1660- 61

The painting of the Dutch artist's hometown is among his most popular, painted at a time when cityscapes were uncommon. It is one of three known paintings of Delft by Vermeer, along with *The Little Street* and the lost painting *House Standing in Delft*. The use of pointillism in the work suggests that it postdates *The Little Street*.



F07 ***Girl With a Pearl Earring*** 1665

The painting is a *tronie*, the Dutch 17th-century description of a 'head' that was not meant to be a portrait. It depicts a European girl wearing an exotic dress, an oriental turban, and an improbably large pearl earring. In 2014, Dutch astrophysicist Vincent Icke raised doubts about the material of the earring and argued that it looks more like polished tin than pearl on the grounds of the specular reflection, the pear shape and the large size of the earring.

During the restoration, it was discovered that the dark background, today somewhat mottled, was initially intended by the painter to be a deep enamel-like green. This effect was produced by applying a thin transparent layer of paint, or glaze, over the present-day black background. However, the two organic pigments of the green glaze, indigo and weld, have faded.



F08 **Art of Painting** c1666-68; also known as
The Allegory of Painting, or Painter in his Studio

Described as "a virtuoso display of the artist's power of invention and execution, staged in an imaginary version of his studio ..." [2] According to Albert Blankert "No other painting so flawlessly integrates naturalistic technique, brightly illuminated space, and a complexly integrated composition." [3] Many art historians think that it is an allegory of painting, hence the alternative title of the painting. Its composition and iconography make it the most complex Vermeer work of all.

Two people: the painter and his subject, a woman with downcast eyes. The painter was thought to be a self-portrait of the artist; it has been suggested that the young woman could be his daughter.

The map shows the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands, flanked by 20 views of prominent Dutch cities. The representation of light on it is remarkable.

Experts attribute symbols to various aspects of the painting:

A number of the items, a plaster mask, perhaps representing the debate on *paragone*,* the presence of a piece of cloth, a folio, and some leather on the table have been linked to the symbols of Liberal Arts. The representation of the marble tiled floor and the splendid golden chandelier are examples of Vermeer's craftsmanship and show his knowledge of perspective. Each object reflects or absorbs light differently, getting the most accurate rendering of material effects.

[*\[Paragone \(Italian: paragone, meaning comparison\), is a debate from the Italian Renaissance in which one form of art \(architecture, sculpture or painting\) is championed as superior to all others. Leonardo da Vinci's treatise on painting, noting the difficulty of painting and supremacy of sight, is a noted example. Giorgio Vasari argues that drawing is the father of all arts, and as such, the most important one.\]](#)

The subject is presumed to be Fama, Pictura, or Clio, the Muse of History, evidenced by her wearing a laurel wreath, holding a trumpet, possibly carrying a book by Herodotus or Thucydides.

There is another explanation; he mentions history and poetry as the main resources of a painter. The woman in blue could be representing poetry, pointing to Plutarch who observed that "Simonides calls painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks", later paraphrased by the Latin poet Horace as *ut pictura poesis*. If so, the map is representing history.

The double-headed eagle, symbol of the Habsburg Holy Roman Empire, which possibly adorns the central golden chandelier, may represent the former rulers of the Low Countries. The large map on the

back wall has a prominent crease that divides the Seventeen Provinces into the north and south. (West is at the top of the map.) The crease may symbolize the division between the Dutch Republic to the north and southern provinces under Habsburg rule. The map shows the earlier political division between the Union of Utrecht to the north, and the loyal provinces to the south. This interpretation might have appealed to Hitler who owned the painting during the war. After Vermeer's *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* it is his largest work.



D09 ***The Astronomer*** c1668

Portrayals of scientists were a favourite topic in 17th-century Dutch painting and Vermeer's oeuvre includes both this astronomer and the slightly later *The Geographer*. Both are believed to portray the same man.

The astronomer's profession is shown by the celestial globe (version by Jodocus Hondius) and the book on the table, the 1621 edition of Adriaan Metius's *Institutiones Astronomicae Geographicae*. Symbolically, the volume is open to Book III, a section advising the astronomer to seek "inspiration from God" and the painting on the wall shows the Finding of Moses—Moses may represent knowledge and science ("learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians").

In December 1675, Vermeer died after a short illness. He was buried in the Protestant Old Church on 15 December 1675. In a petition to her creditors, his wife later described his death as follows: "...during the ruinous war with France he not only was unable to sell any of his art but also, to his great detriment, was left sitting with the paintings of other masters that he was dealing in. As a result and owing to the great burden of his children having no means of his own, he lapsed into such decay and decadence, which he had so taken to heart that, as if he had fallen into a frenzy, in a day and a half he went from being healthy to being dead."



F10 ***Lady Seated at a Virginal*** c1672

The picture shows a woman facing left and playing a virginal. In the left foreground is a viola da gamba holding a bow between its strings. A landscape is painted on the inside lid of the virginal, and the painting on the wall is either the original or a copy of *The Procuress* by Dirck van Baburen (now in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston), which belonged to Vermeer's mother-in-law. Vermeer had already featured this painting in *The Concert*, perhaps six years earlier. It is unclear whether or how much the subject of *The Procuress* is intended to reflect on the meaning of this work, although "It is probable that a more general association between music and love is intended." At the upper left, a tapestry is used to frame the scene, and in the lower right the foot of the back wall is decorated with Delft tiles.

Meindert Hobbema (1638 – 1709) Was a Dutch Golden Age painter of landscapes, specializing in views of woodland, although his most famous painting, *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (1689, National Gallery, London), shows a different type of scene.

Hobbema was a pupil of Jacob van Ruisdael, the pre-eminent landscape painter of the Dutch Golden Age, and in his mature period produced paintings developing one aspect of his master's more varied output, specializing in "sunny forest scenes opened by roads and glistening ponds, fairly flat landscapes with scattered tree groups, and water mills", including over 30 of the last in paintings.



F10 ***The Avenue at Middelharnis*** 1669

[1] Hans Koningsberger, 1977. *The World of Vermeer*, New York: Time-Life Books,

[2] Walter Arthur Liedtke, Jr. (1945 – 2015) was an American art historian, writer and Curator of Dutch and Flemish Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He was known as one of the world's leading scholars of Dutch and Flemish paintings.

[3] Albert Blankert (born 1940) is a Dutch art historian and expert in 17th century Dutch painting and the

art of Johannes Vermeer. He was Slade Professor of Fine Art at the University of Cambridge from 1999 to 2000.