

August 2011

Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence

5 October 2011 to 15 January 2012 | The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Guest curated by Dr Marjorie E. Wieseman, Curator of Dutch Paintings at the National Gallery

A new exhibition on the 17th-century Dutch master Johannes Vermeer will explore the mysterious appeal of the women in his paintings. *Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence* features 28 works by master painters of the Dutch Golden Age and four iconic works by Vermeer, including *The Lacemaker* from the Musée du Louvre in Paris, on show in the UK for the first time.

Women are one of the key subjects in Vermeer's works: whether gazing out wistfully at the viewer, or focusing on an activity with an almost eerie calm, they possess a powerful allure. This exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum is the first to focus on Vermeer's domestic interiors and, by examining them in the context of paintings by other Dutch Golden Age masters, explores the enigma of these women who seem crystallised in a moment in time.

The vivid realism of these paintings provides a remarkable window into the private world of women in the 17th-century Dutch Republic. These scenes about the home seem hauntingly familiar even today: from the meditative calm of needlework, playing music, reading or simply daydreaming to such mundane domestic activities as cooking, shopping, washing and dressing, minding children, gossiping and eavesdropping. Often framed with a painted window or doorway, the viewer has the impression of having stumbled upon a private moment hidden behind closed doors.

Revealing the Dutch Golden Age ideals of the home, feminine beauty and domesticity, the exhibition also explores how artists subtly altered and augmented reality to enhance the magnetic appeal and symbolic import of these painted worlds.

At the heart of this stunning exhibition is Vermeer's extraordinary painting *The Lacemaker* (c.1669-70), one of the Musée du Louvre's most treasured works, rarely seen outside Paris and now on loan to the UK for the first time.



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675)
The Lacemaker (c.1669-70)
Musée du Louvre, Paris
© Réunion des Musées Nationaux/ Gérard Blot



Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675)
A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal c. 1670-2
© The National Gallery, London
Salting bequest, 1910



Quiringh Gerritsz. van Brekelenkam
Confidential Conversation, 1661
© Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
Jonkheer J.S.H. van de Poll Bequest

Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1RB
England

01223 332900
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Press enquiries: email
fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk

Press Release | The Fitzwilliam Museum

Complementing this painting are three further works representing the pinnacle of Vermeer's mature career: *A lady at the virginals with a gentleman* *The Music Lesson* (c.1662-5) on loan from The Royal Collection; *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (c.1670) from the National Gallery, London; and *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (private collection, New York). Joining these are 28 masterpieces of genre painting from such artists as Cornelis de Bisschop, Gerard ter Borch, Esaias Boursse, Quiringh van Brekelenkam, Gerrit Dou, Pieter de Hooch, Samuel van Hoogstraten, Nicolaes Maes, Cornelis de Man, Eglon van der Neer, Jacob van Ochtervelt, Godfried Schalcken, Jan Steen and Jacobus Vrel.



Pieter de Hooch (1629-1684)
The Courtyard of a House in Delft, 1658
© The National Gallery, London
Bought, 1871

Dr Timothy Potts, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, commented: "*Vermeer's Women* will be a rare opportunity to enjoy some of Vermeer's most ravishingly beautiful paintings of the intimacy of the Dutch household - frozen moments captured in Vermeer's uniquely luminous style. Although domestic scenes constitute the principal subject of Vermeer's work and that of many of his contemporaries, and are one of the most distinctive and evocative aspects of Dutch art of the Golden Age, this will be the first exhibition to focus exclusively on them, and to explore their hidden significance in terms of contemporary Dutch mores.



Jacobus Vrel (fl. 1654-1670?)
Woman at a Window, waving at a Girl c. 1650
© Fondation Custodia, Collection Frits Lugt, Paris

"Equally importantly, *Vermeer's Women* will reveal the extraordinary subtlety and skill of Vermeer's finest contemporaries, many of whom were far more famous than Vermeer during their lifetimes."

The exhibition is guest curated by Dr Marjorie E. Wieseman, Curator of Dutch Paintings at the National Gallery, London. A new catalogue will be accompanying the exhibition, with essays by Dr Wieseman and two other internationally recognised experts in the field, Dr Wayne E. Franits, professor and chair of the Department of Fine Arts, Syracuse University, and Dr H. Perry Chapman, professor of art history at the University of Delaware.

Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence features works from museums and collections around the world, including the National Gallery, London; The Royal Collection; the Musée du Louvre; the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; the Mauritshuis, The Hague; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

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For further information and images please contact:

Sue Bond Public Relations
Hollow Lane Farmhouse, Hollow Lane, Thurston, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP31 3RQ, UK
Tel. +44 (0)1359 271085, Fax. +44 (0)1359 271934
E-mail. info@suebond.co.uk, Website. www.suebond.co.uk

Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1RB
England

01223 332900
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Press enquiries: email
fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk

FACT SHEET

Exhibition title: *Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence*

Dates: 5 October 2011 – 15 January 2012

Location: The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk
Telephone: +44 (0)1223 332900

Admission: FREE

Opening hours: OPEN: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 – 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00

CLOSED: 24, 25, 26 and 31 December 2011 and 1 January 2012

Permanent collection: The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's art collection and is a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints. The Fitzwilliam's treasures range from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21st century and include masterpieces by Titian, Canaletto, Stubbs, Constable, Monet, Renoir and Picasso, one of the world's foremost Rembrandt print collections, Handel music manuscripts and the famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, one of the most significant collections of Korean ceramics outside South-East Asia, medieval illuminated manuscripts and outstanding collections of pottery, porcelain and medieval coins. The Fitzwilliam Museum welcomes over 350,000 visitors a year, offers a wide-ranging programme of temporary exhibitions and events, and has an award-winning Education Service.

For all press enquiries relating to the permanent collection please contact Lucy Theobald at the Fitzwilliam Museum: Tel. +44(0)1233 332941
E-mail: press@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Catalogue: *Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence*
Publication date: 5 October 2011, Price: £20
Centering on the extraordinary Lacemaker from the Musée du Louvre, this beautiful book investigates the subtle and enigmatic paintings by Johannes Vermeer that celebrate the intimacy of the Dutch household. Three internationally recognised experts in the field explain why women engaged in mundane domestic tasks, or in pleasurable pastimes such as music making or writing letters, in some of the most popular Dutch paintings of the 17th century. The book also features works by some of the most important masters of 17th-century Dutch genre painting, among them Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou, Pieter de Hooch, Nicolaes Maes, and Jan Steen.

With essays by:
Dr Marjorie E. Wieseman, curator of Dutch paintings 1600-1800 at the National Gallery, London.
Dr Wayne E. Franits, professor and chair of the Department of Fine Arts, Syracuse University
Dr H. Perry Chapman, professor of art history at the University of Delaware

All press enquiries about the book to Heather Nathan at Yale University Press:
Tel. 020 7079 4900, E-mail. heather.nathan@yaleup.co.uk

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