



Pieter de Hooch  
Dutch, 1629 - 1684

## *Woman and Child in a Courtyard*

1658/1660

oil on canvas

overall: 73.5 x 66 cm (28 15/16 x 26 in.)

framed: 102.24 x 93.98 x 14.61 cm (40 1/4 x 37 x 5 3/4 in.)

Inscription: lower left on trough: P D Hooch

Widener Collection 1942.9.34

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### ENTRY

Near the old town wall of Delft, the site of many of De Hooch's courtyard paintings, two gentlemen and a woman are seated in a small wooden arbor, drinking wine. A maidservant carrying an earthenware jug and a basket, covered with a white cloth, and a little girl holding a birdcage cross the courtyard on their way toward a water pump that is attached to the house on the left. The two sets of steps seen through the open doors behind them seem to lead to the city ramparts.

This idyllic view of city life with spacious courtyards, trees, and vines contains compositional elements that are found in two other of De Hooch's paintings of this period. The arbor, the wall, and the steps leading to the door in the wall form the setting for his painting *A Family in a Courtyard*, 1658–1660, in Vienna [fig. 1]. That work reveals that the arbor projects out from the wall and that its columns and capitals are made of flat boards attached to a wooden framework. The same arbor, wall, steps, and water pump are also visible in *A Woman and a Maid in a Courtyard*, c. 1660 (the last digit is illegible), in the National Gallery, London [fig. 2]. In both of those works, however, the relationship of the objects to the site varies, and neither of them contains the building to the left of the doorway. In the London painting, a small garden house is situated just to the right of the arbor, and the pump is in a totally different location. [1]

These variations among the works confirm that De Hooch felt free to alter architectural elements for compositional reasons. Technical imaging reveals that he made significant adjustments to features in the present work through

successive layers of thinly-applied paint (see Technical Summary). This process became visible to the naked eye after conservation treatment in 2016 removed nonoriginal discolored varnish and overpaint. The building at left, for example, did not initially extend to the top of the composition. Instead De Hooch had envisioned a smaller structure with a gabled roof and a second structure behind it. Visible pentimenti on the right side of the wall also indicate compositional changes that are reminiscent of the architecture in the courtyard scene in London. While it is unlikely that any of these scenes represent an actual location, faint, incised lines along the left wall and at either side of the doorway indicate De Hooch's efforts to produce convincing, illusionistic spaces. MacLaren is undoubtedly correct in stressing that many of these views were based on views from gardens behind the houses on the west side of Delft's main canal, the Oude Gracht. [2] De Hooch's wife lived in this area, near the Binnenwatersloot, before they were engaged, and presumably De Hooch moved there after their marriage.

In this painting, as in other of De Hooch's courtyard scenes, one senses a harmonious relationship between the serving woman and her employers. Although no commissions for these works are known, one wonders if De Hooch's interest in the theme stems from his own experiences working as a servant for the linen merchant Justus de la Grange in the early 1650s. De Hooch's sensitivity to the relationship of women to children may also relate to his own family experiences: a son, born in 1655, and a daughter, born in 1656, would have been approximately the ages of the children he so often represented in his paintings from the end of that decade.

Original entry by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., April 24, 2014.

Revised by Alexandra Libby to incorporate information from a new technical examination.

December 9, 2019

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Pieter de Hooch, *A Family in a Courtyard*, 1658–1660, oil on canvas, Akademie der bildenden Künste, Vienna



**fig. 2** Pieter de Hooch, *A Woman and a Maid in a Courtyard*, c. 1660, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London. Photo © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY

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## NOTES

[1] First noted by Neil MacLaren, *The Dutch School* (London, 1960), 186.

[2] Neil MacLaren, *The Dutch School* (London, 1960), 185.

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support is a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric with an irregular weave pattern. [1] During past treatments, the painting was lined and later mounted to a cradled panel. At some point during these treatments, the original tacking margins were removed.

The canvas was prepared with a three-layered ground. The two lower layers are warm tan in color, and the uppermost layer is a cooler tan, containing small black particles. Many of the forms within the composition were blocked out with a semitransparent, medium-rich, monochromatic layer that varies from brown to brown-black in color. A thin brown painted line, similar in color to the blocking-out layer, can be seen along the edges of the trees in the bottom right corner of the composition, as well as delineating the shape of the house on the left side of the painting. These visible traces are part of a painted sketch of the composition. The ground, blocking-out layer, and painted sketch are visible throughout and integral to the final composition, used as a highlight, mid-tone, or even shadow in modeling form. Finally, throughout the composition there are a number of incised lines that follow painted forms, mainly the architectural elements. Paint layers were built up thinly on top of the ground or blocking-out layer, with minimal modeling and paint layering. Final highlights are thoughtfully placed small dots and dabs of paint.

Overall, the painting is in good condition. It was treated in 2015–2016, and grime and thick layers of discolored varnish and overpaint were removed. The painting was revarnished and inpainted with stable and reversible materials. During the same treatment, cross-section analysis, scanning electron energy dispersive x-ray spectroscopy, x-ray fluorescence spectroscopy, Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy, and multispectral infrared reflectography (MS-IRR) were performed in order to better understand the painting technique and materials. [2] MS-IRR revealed numerous compositional changes to the architectural structures on the left side of the composition. [3] In an earlier version of this composition, the building on the left was smaller and didn't cover the entire upper left corner. Instead it had a triangular roof that came to a point and another roof could be seen behind it. The details of this other roof suggest that the building is likely the Oude Kerk in Delft. It also appears that the Delft wall extended further to the left, in front of the original positioning of the church. The trellis was originally higher, coming up to the same height as the red gate to the right. Finally, near the right edge of the composition, a garden house originally appeared where the Delft wall currently extends. The top edge of the red roof wasn't thoroughly painted out and can still be seen, extending into the trees above the Delft wall. This structure is also found in another composition by De Hooch: *A Woman and a Maid in a Courtyard* in the collection of The National Gallery, London (see Entry, fig. 2).

Dina Anchin, based on the examination report by Carol Christenson and science reports by Michael Palmer.

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## TECHNICAL NOTES

- [1] Earlier technical summaries of this work were prepared by Melissa Katz and Catherine Metzger.  
Average densities of 11 threads per centimeter horizontally and 13.3 threads per centimeter vertically were measured by the Thread Count Automation Project of Cornell University and Rice University (see report dated May 2010 in NGA conservation department files).
- [2] The pigments and ground were analyzed by the NGA scientific research department (see NGA conservation department files).
- [3] Multispectral infrared reflectography: composite of three registered infrared images, in wavelength bands 1100–1400 nm (blue), 1500–1800 nm (green), and 2100–2400 nm (red). Courtesy of John Delaney, Kate Dooley, and Giorgio Trumpy, scientific research department, National Gallery of Art, Washington.
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## PROVENANCE

(Mssrs. Lawrie & Co., London, 1903);<sup>[1]</sup> (Arthur J. Sulley & Co., London); (M. Knoedler & Co., London, Paris, and New York, 1904-1905); sold 1905 to Peter A.B. Widener, Lynnewood Hall, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; inheritance from Estate of Peter A.B. Widener by gift through power of appointment of Joseph E. Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania; gift 1942 to NGA.

[1] Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, 8 vols., trans. Edward G. Hawkes, London, 1907-1927: 1 no. 294, noted that he saw the painting with this dealer in March of 1903.

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1909 The Hudson-Fulton Celebration, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1909, no. 54.

2011 Human Connections in the Age of Vermeer, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art; The Miyagi Museum of Art, Sendai; The Bunkamura Museum of Art, Tokyo, 2011-2012, no. 19, repro.

2012 Vermeer: Il secolo d'oro dell'arte olandese, Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, 2012-2013, no. 19, repro.

2016 Vermeer's Little Street Discovered!, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof, Delft, 2015-2016, no. 46, repro. (shown only in Delft).

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