



Pieter de Hooch  
Dutch, 1629 - 1684

## *The Bedroom*

1658/1660

oil on canvas

overall: 51 x 60 cm (20 1/16 x 23 5/8 in.)

framed: 73 x 82.6 x 8.9 cm (28 3/4 x 32 1/2 x 3 1/2 in.)

Widener Collection 1942.9.33

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### ENTRY

De Hooch painted this intimate scene of domestic life around 1658 to 1660, during the last years of his Delft period. The painting depicts an everyday occurrence, in which a child opens a door to an inner room, where its mother, busy with her household chores, airs out the bedcovers. The scene, however, is instilled with a sense of intimacy and warmth that transcends the mundane subject matter.

De Hooch achieved this effect through his treatment of light and his sensitive arrangement of the interior space. Light enters the room from two sources: the double windows on the left and the open door and window at the front of the house. As the light streams through the child's hair, it illuminates the youngster with a palpable, radiant glow. It also enlivens the interior space in the way it plays across a variety of surfaces. De Hooch suggests, for example, the different character of light as it passes through an exterior window, through an interior window, and through both an exterior and interior window. He deftly differentiates between the sheen of reflections off the marble floor and the more spectacular highlights on the orange tile floor. He also captures the nuances of tone in the shadows, which vary because of the multiple light sources.

The extreme naturalism of these optical effects suggests that De Hooch painted this scene, or at least the room, from life. The same room is found in two similar but independent works, *A Woman Delousing a Child's Hair* [fig. 1] and *Kolf Players* [fig. 2], both of which were also painted from 1658 to 1660. The landscape seen through the doorway, however, differs in each example.

Another version of this painting, signed with a monogram, is in the Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe. The only difference between the two is that the mirror on the wall between the figures has ornaments on its top and bottom in the Karlsruhe version that do not appear here. In 1929 Valentiner wrote that the Washington version is an autograph replica of the Karlsruhe painting. [1] Sutton, though he believes that the Karlsruhe painting is the better of the two works, does not feel that one can designate either as the original version. His 1980 assessment that the Washington painting is “of the highest quality” was borne out in 1982 when the darkened varnish that had obscured many of the painting’s nuances was removed. [2] X-radiographs [see X-radiography] taken at that time show no significant *Pentimenti*, although the pattern of light falling on the wall from the window on the left has a more defined rectangular shape than that apparent in the final composition. Little is known about the creation of autograph replicas by seventeenth-century Dutch artists. As yet unanswered is whether such works were painted for commission or for the art market. [3]

Bode sought to identify the woman, who reappears in a number of De Hooch’s paintings, as the artist’s wife, Jannetje van der Burch, and the child as one of their own. [4] Most authors are quite circumspect when it comes to naming the gender of the child, for distinguishing between young boys and girls is notoriously difficult given the similarity of their dress at this time. In any event, De Hooch and his wife did have both a son and a daughter, born in 1655 and 1656 respectively, either of whom could have served as the model. [5] Given that the same child appears in the Polesden Lacey painting with a slightly older boy in the background, the child in this painting may well be a depiction of De Hooch’s daughter, Anna. In the Polesden Lacey painting the child carries a *kolf* stick, used in a popular game at the time, which she has been playing outdoors with the boy. [6] In the Washington painting the child holds a ball, probably a *kolf* ball. De Hooch has situated the child in a doorway flanked by rows of Dutch tiles depicting children’s games.

As Broos has emphasized, the traditional title of this painting, *The Bedroom*, is slightly misleading, for it suggests that Dutch homes had rooms with separate functions. [7] To the contrary, box beds, situated against one wall, frequently were

part of a multifunction room. Nevertheless, the activities of the woman, who straightens the bed and tends the chamber pot, were part of the morning ritual that Dutch housewives faced as they prepared the central room of the house for its daytime functions. The Dutch prided themselves on orderliness and cleanliness, virtues that were seen as metaphors of spiritual purity. [8]

The harmonious character of the scene and the emphasis on the mother's dual responsibilities of child nurturing and caring for the home embody an ideal of Dutch domestic felicity that is nowhere better represented than in the paintings of Pieter de Hooch. These ideals, which had by mid-century been well formulated in the writings of Jacob Cats, [9] are also to be found in many of the moralizing messages in the extensive emblematic literature of the day. While reality may not have lived up to the images evoked by De Hooch and Cats, the Dutch concern for orderliness and cleanliness, as well as their sympathetic manner of child rearing, was often remarked upon by foreign travelers. [10]

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** Pieter de Hooch, *A Woman Delousing a Child's Hair*, 1658–1660, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.  
Photo © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



**fig. 2** Pieter de Hooch, *Kolf Players*, 1658–1660, oil on panel, Polesden Lacey, Surrey. Photo: National Trust

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## NOTES

- [1] Wilhelm R. Valentiner, *Pieter de Hooch: The Master's Paintings*, trans. Alice M. Sharkey and E. Schwandt (London and New York, 1930), no. 59.
- [2] Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1980), 87.
- [3] Aside from these two versions, a third version was tentatively listed by Sutton as an autograph and it was auctioned in New York on February 29, 1956, no. 17, repro. The large number of copies of the composition that Sutton lists further attests to its popularity (see Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* [Oxford, 1980], 87–88).
- [4] Wilhelm von Bode, *Rembrandt und seine Zeitgenossen....* (Leipzig, 1906), 58.

- [5] For the difficulty of using a costume to determine a young child's gender, see J. B. Bedaux and Rudi Ekkart, *Pride and Joy: Children's Portraits in the Netherlands, 1500–1700* (Amsterdam, 2000), 78–82. De Hooch's eldest son, Peter, was baptized on February 2, 1655, and a daughter, Anna, was baptized on November 14, 1656. Ben P. J. Broos et al., *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (The Hague and Zwolle, 1990), 303, assumes that the child is a boy and postulates that it may represent Peter.
- [6] For the history of *kolf*, see Sten J. H. Van Hengel, *Early Golf* (Vaduz, 1985). Although most depictions of *kolf* players represent boys and men, the game was enjoyed by all. For a portrait of a girl holding a *kolf* stick and ball, see Sten J. H. Van Hengel, *Early Golf* (Vaduz, 1985), 29, fig. 16.
- [7] Ben P. J. Broos et al., *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (The Hague and Zwolle, 1990), 304.
- [8] Ben P. J. Broos et al., *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (The Hague and Zwolle, 1990), 304.
- [9] An extremely important and influential expression of Cats' ideal of family existence is found in his *Houwelyck, dat is, de gantsche gheleghentheydt des echten-staets* (Middelburg, 1625). For a particularly insightful quotation from this poetic treatise, see Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1980), 46.
- [10] See Peter Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1980), 47–48.
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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The original support, a medium-weight, plain-weave fabric [1] has been lined with the tacking margins trimmed. Cusping appears along the top, right, and bottom edges but not on the left edge. Paint is applied over a smooth white ground in thin layers followed by thin glazes and scumbles. Lining has flattened the impasted highlights. The paint is in good condition with no abrasion and losses confined to the edges. Discolored varnish was removed when conservation treatment was carried out in 1982.

[1] Average densities of 11.1 threads per centimeter horizontally and 11.6 threads per centimeter vertically were measured by the Thread Count Automation Project of Cornell University and Rice University (see report dated May 2010 in Conservation department files).

## PROVENANCE

Possibly S.J. Stinstra collection, Amsterdam; possibly (sale, S.J. Stinstra, Amsterdam, 1822, no. 86);[1] William Waldegrave, Admiral Lord Radstock [1753-1825]; (sale, Christie's, 12-13 May 1826, 2nd day, no. 14); George Granville Leveson-Gower, 2nd marquess of Stafford and 1st duke of Sutherland [1783-1833], Stafford House, London; by inheritance to his son, George Granville Sutherland-Leveson-Gower, 2nd duke of Sutherland [1786-1861], Stafford House; (Emery Rutley, London), in 1846;[2] Morant.[3] Robert Field, London; (sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 6 June 1856, no. 520). Charles Scarisbrick [d. 1860], Scarisbrick Hall, Lancashire; (his sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 10 May 1861, no. 119); (Francis Nieuwenhuys, London);[4] Adrian John Hope [1811-1863], London; (his estate sale, Christie, Manson & Woods, London, 30 June 1894, no. 32); (Charles J. Wertheimer, London and Paris); (Charles Sedelmeyer, Paris); sold 30 July 1894 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. Hawke, London, 1907-1927: 1:498, no. 78, includes a reference to this sale in his provenance of *The Bedroom*. The De Hooch painting in that sale, however, need not necessarily refer to NGA 1942.9.33, since other versions of the composition exist.

[2] According to a note by John Smith contained in Hofstede de Groot's typescript supplement, ad. no. 78, to Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, 8 vols., trans. Edward G. Hawke, London, 1907-1927, in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague.

[3] The Getty Provenance Index indicates that Rutley purchased the painting from Sutherland for Morant, but also notes that the entry for the painting in Ben P.J.

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Broos et al., *Great Dutch Paintings from America* (Exh. cat., Mauritshuis, The Hague; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1990-1991: no. 35) has Morant buying for Rutley.

[4] According to the Getty Provenance Index, Christie's copy of the 1861 sale catalogue is marked "FN" and Peter C. Sutton, *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition with a Catalogue Raisonné*, Oxford, 1980: no. 40B, gives the buyer as "Nieuwenhuys."

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## EXHIBITION HISTORY

1909 The Hudson-Fulton Celebration, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1909, no. 55.

1990 Great Dutch Paintings from America, Mauritshuis, The Hague; The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, 1990-1991, no. 35, color repro., as The Box Bed.

1998 Pieter de Hooch, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1998-1999, no. 21, repro.

1999 Johannes Vermeer: The Art of Painting, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1999-2000, not in brochure.

2000 The Public and the Private in the Age of Vermeer, Osaka Municipal Museum of Art, 2000, no. 23, repro.

2003 Vermeer y el interior holandés, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2003, no. 12, repro.

2009 Loan for display with permanent collection, Gemeente Musea / Stedelijk Museum het Prinsenhof, Delft, 2009.

2012 Vermeer: Il secolo d'oro dell'arte olandese, Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, 2012-2013, no. 28, repro.

2019 Pieter de Hooch in Delft. From the Shadow of Vermeer, Museum Prinsenhof, Delft, 2019-2020, no. 15a, repro.

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