



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.)

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 stairs 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, stairs, 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. Visible pentimenti on the right side of the wall in the National Gallery of Art painting may be traces of the structure visible in the courtyard scene in London. While it is unlikely that any of these

scenes represent an actual location, 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.

Arthur K. Wheelock Jr.

April 24, 2014

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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[1] with an irregular weave pattern. The fabric was prepared with a double ground consisting of a smooth white layer followed by a gray layer. The presence of white lead, probably in the ground layers obscures the paint image in the X-radiographs.[2]

Paint is applied thinly and smoothly with slightly impasted highlights. The paint surface is in poor condition with extensive abrasion and retouching due to flaking paint. A number of elements have been reconstructed, including the features of the woman and the delineation of the bricks. The sky is heavily glazed. A discolored pigmented varnish covers the surface, masking the extent of damage. In 1944 the painting was attached to a cradled wood panel.[3]

[1] Average densities of 11.0 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).

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[2] The pigments and ground were analyzed by the NGA Scientific Research department using air-path X-ray Fluorescence spectroscopy (see report dated October 26, 1978, in NGA Conservation department files).

[3] When this treatment was undertaken a double-fabric lining, attached in 1942, was removed. That lining had replaced an earlier one.

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## PROVENANCE

(Messrs. 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.

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