

- 1976 Wright: 12, 42, 44, no. 16, repro.  
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 1977b Van Straaten: 48–49, fig. 60.  
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 1981 Slatkes: 70–71, repro.  
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 1989 Montias: 191–192, 196, 256, 259 note 21, 266,  
 repro. 44.  
 1990 The Hague: no. 67.  
 1991 Buijsen: 7–12, repro.  
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 1991 Nash: 34 color repro., 36–37.  
 1993 Frankfurt: no. 85  
 1995 Wheelock: 145, 179, repro.

1937.1.53 (53)

## *Girl with the Red Hat*

c. 1665/1666

Oil on wood (probably oak), 23.2 x 18.1 (9½ x 7⅞)

Andrew W. Mellon Collection

### Inscriptions

At upper center of tapestry: *IVM* (in ligature)

**Technical Notes:** The support is a single wood panel, probably oak, with a vertical grain. A cradle, including a wooden collar around all four sides of the panel, was attached before the painting entered the collection. A partially completed painting exists underneath the present composition oriented 180 degrees with respect to the girl. The x-radiograph reveals the head-and-shoulders portrait of a man wearing a white kerchief around his neck and a button on his garment (see fig. 3). An infrared reflectogram shows a cape across his shoulder, a broad-brimmed hat, locks of long curling hair, and vigorous brushwork in the background (see fig. 4).

The panel was initially prepared with a white chalk ground. The male bust was executed above, dead-colored in a reddish brown paint, before flesh tones were applied to the face and white to the kerchief. The portrait of the young girl was painted directly over the underlying composition, with the exception of the area of the man's kerchief, which Vermeer apparently toned down with a brown paint.

Paint used to model the girl was applied with smoothly blended strokes. Layered applications of paints of varying transparencies and thicknesses, often blended wet into wet, produced soft contours and diffused lighting effects. Paint in the white kerchief around the girl's neck has been scraped back to expose darker paint below.

The painting is in good condition, with only slight abrasion to the thin glazes of the face and a few scattered minor losses. Small amounts of retouching are found on both eyes, the right nostril, the dark corners of the mouth, and the left side of the upper lip. All edges have been overpainted to some degree. In 1933 and 1942 minor treatments were carried out. The painting is now in restoration.

**Provenance:** Possibly Pieter Claesz. van Ruijven [1624–1674], Delft; possibly by inheritance to his wife, Maria de Knuijt [d. 1681], Delft; possibly by inheritance to her daughter, Magdalena van Ruijven [1655–1682], Delft;<sup>1</sup> possibly by inheritance to her husband, Jacobus Abrahamsz. Dissius [1653–1695], Delft;<sup>2</sup> (sale, Amsterdam, 16 May 1696, probably no. 39 or 40).<sup>3</sup> (Sale, Lafontaine, Hôtel de Bouillon, Paris, 10 December 1822, no. 28.) Baron Louis Marie Atthalin [1784–1856], Colmar; by inheritance to his nephew and adopted son Laurent Atthalin; by inheritance to Baron Gaston Laurent-Atthalin [d. 1911], Les Moussets, Limey, Seine-et-Oise; by inheritance to his widow Baroness Laurent-Atthalin, Paris; (M. Knoedler & Co., New York and London); sold November 1925 to Andrew W. Mellon, Pittsburgh and Washington; deeded 30 March 1932 to The A. W. Mellon Educational and Charitable Trust, Pittsburgh.

**Exhibited:** *Loan Exhibition of Dutch Masters of the Seventeenth Century*, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1925, no. 1. *A Loan Exhibition of Twelve Masterpieces of Painting*, M. Knoedler & Co., New York, 1928, no. 12.

THE *Girl with the Red Hat* has a curious status among Vermeer scholars. While it is widely loved and admired, the attribution of this small panel painting to Vermeer has been doubted, and even rejected, by some.<sup>4</sup> The emotional response elicited by the figure is, indeed, different from that found in other of his paintings, for as the girl turns outward, with her mouth half opened, her eyes seem lit with expectancy. The lushness of her blue robes, the almost passionate flaming red of her hat, and the subtle interplay of green and rose tones in her face give her a vibrancy unique in Vermeer's paintings. Unlike most of his figures, she does not exist in a cerebral, abstract world. Situated before a backdrop of a figured tapestry,<sup>5</sup> she communicates directly with us, both staring out and drawing us in.

The pose of a girl looking over her shoulder at the viewer is commonly found in Vermeer's oeuvre, although in no other instance does she lean an arm on the back of a chair. Nevertheless, similar poses are found in the works of other Dutch painters.<sup>6</sup> As he did in other works, including *Woman Holding a Balance* (1942.9.97), Vermeer adjusted his forms to accommodate his composition. In actuality, the lion-head finials of the chair are too close to each other and are not correctly aligned. The left finial is much larger than the right one and is angled too far to the right. The top of the chair, if extended to the left finial, would intersect it above the bottom of the ring that loops through the lion's mouth. The finials, moreover, face toward the viewer, whereas if they belonged to the chair upon which the girl sits, they should face toward her.<sup>7</sup> As in Frans Hals' *Portrait of a Young Man* (1937.1.71), only the back of the lion's head should be visible.



Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with the Red Hat*, 1937-1.53



Fig. 1. Detail of lion-head finial in 1937.1.53



Fig. 2. Experimental photograph of lion-head finial, photo: Harry Beville

The questions raised by the position of the chair and its spatial relationship to the girl have bothered observers of the painting in the past.<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, the spatial discrepancies are not really noticeable until one begins analyzing the painting very closely. Visually, the spatial organization works; Vermeer succeeded in integrating his figure with the chair and at the same time in using the chair to help establish the specific mood he sought.<sup>9</sup>

Despite similarities in the way Vermeer adjusted his forms for compositional emphasis, the *Woman Holding a Balance* (1942.9.97) and this painting are undeniably different. Whereas the *Woman Holding a Balance* is an involved composition, imbued with complex forms and symbolism, the *Girl with the Red Hat* is no more than a bust, portrayed with a feeling of spontaneity and informality that is unique in the artist's oeuvre. It is as though this small painting were a study, or an experiment. Particularly striking are the light reflections on the right lion's finial, which have the diffused characteristic of unfocused points of light in a photograph, called "halation of highlights." It is highly unlikely that Vermeer could have achieved this effect without having witnessed it in a camera obscura.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it may well be that in this painting Vermeer actually attempted to capture the impression of an image seen in a camera obscura.

The hypothesis that Vermeer might have used a camera obscura while painting the *Girl with the Red Hat* was convincingly argued by Seymour.<sup>11</sup> He demonstrated, with the aid of excellent experimental photographs, the close similarity of Vermeer's painterly treatment of the lionhead finial and an unfocused image seen in a camera obscura (figs. 1 and 2). Vermeer exploited this effect to animate his surface and to distinguish different depths of field.<sup>12</sup>

One of the many misconceptions about Vermeer's painting style that has affected theories regarding his use of the camera obscura, including that of Seymour, is that Vermeer was a realist in the strictest sense, that his paintings faithfully record models, rooms, and furnishings he saw before him.<sup>13</sup> As is evident in all of his other mature works, the compositions are the product of intense control and refinement. Figures and their environments are subtly interlocked through perspective, proportions, and color. This same mentality must have dictated his artistic procedure whether he viewed his scene directly or through an optical device like a camera obscura. As has been seen, even in this small *Girl with the Red Hat*, which perhaps most closely resembles the effects of a camera obscura of all his images, he shifted and adjusted his forms to maintain his compositional balance. Thus, even though he must



Fig. 3. X-radiograph of 1937.1.53

have referred to an image from a camera obscura when painting *Girl with the Red Hat*, and sought to exploit some of its optical effects, including the intensified colors, accentuated contrasts of light and dark, and circles of confusion, it is most unlikely that he traced the image directly on the panel.<sup>14</sup> The possibility that he traced his more complex compositions is even more remote.

Vermeer's handling of diffused highlights in his paintings, including the *View of Delft* (Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. no. 92), suggests that he used them creatively, as well, and not totally in accordance with their actual appearance in a camera obscura. In the *Girl with the Red Hat* he has accentuated the diffuse yellow highlights on the girl's blue robes, whereas in a camera obscura reflections off unfocused cloth create blurred images. He even painted some of his diffused highlights in the shadows where they would not appear in any circumstance.

The actual manner in which he applied highlights is comparable to that seen in *The Art of Painting*, c. 1667 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. no. 9128). Not only do the specular highlights on the finial share similarities with those on the chandelier in the latter work, but also the diffused highlights on the robe in *Girl with the Red Hat* are comparable to those on the cloth hanging over the front edge of the table in the Vienna painting. These similarities, as well as the comparably generalized forms of the girls' heads in the two paintings, argue for a close chronological relationship. It seems probable that both works were executed around 1666 to 1667, slightly before *The Astronomer* (Louvre, Paris), which is dated 1668.

Vermeer usually painted on canvas, and it is interesting to speculate on the rationale behind his decision to paint on panel in this particular instance.<sup>15</sup> The explanation may simply be that for such a small study panel was a more appropriate support than canvas. The choice of support, however, may also relate to the use of the camera obscura. He may have chosen a hard, smooth surface to lend to his small study the sheen of an image seen in a camera obscura as it is projected onto a ground glass or tautly stretched oiled paper.

Vermeer selected for his painting a panel that had already been used. The image of an unfinished, bust-length portrait of a man with a wide-brimmed hat lies under the *Girl with the Red Hat*. It is visible in



Fig. 4. Infrared reflectogram of 1937.1.53

x-radiographs of the panel (fig. 3) and, as well, in an infrared reflectogram (fig. 4). Since the man is in the reverse position of the girl it is possible to examine his face in the x-radiograph without too much interference from the surface image. The painting style of this face is very different from that of Vermeer. The face is modeled with a number of bold rapid strokes that have not been blended together. The infrared reflectogram reveals a great flourish of strokes to the right of the face that represented the man's long curly hair.

Although it is impossible to attribute a painting to an artist solely on the basis of an x-ray, certain characteristics of the handling of the paint in the underlying image are remarkably similar to those seen in paintings by Carel Fabritius (c. 1622–1654). The small scale of the panel, the subject matter of a male bust, the rough bold strokes and impasto with which the head is painted are all features found in studies by Fabritius from the late 1640s, such as the *Man with a Helmet* in the Groninger Museum, Groningen.<sup>16</sup> At his death Vermeer owned two *tronien* by Fabritius.<sup>17</sup> Since he was an art dealer and may have studied under Fabritius, he could well have owned others during his lifetime.<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

1. Perhaps the *Girl with the Red Hat* was one of the *tronien* listed with the April 1683 inventory of possessions accruing to Jacob Dissius after her death on 16 June 1682. See Montias 1989, 359, doc. 417.

2. The 1683 inventory of goods accruing to Jacob Dissius after the death of his wife, Magdalena van Ruijven, lists twenty paintings by Vermeer. For the complete transactions between Jacob Dissius and his father Abraham Dissius following Magdalena's death, see Montias 1989, 246–257, 359–360, docs. 417, 420.

3. Montias 1989, 363–364, doc. 439. Item no. 38 in the sale is described as “a *tronie* in antique dress, uncommonly artful”; item no. 39 as “Another ditto Vermeer”; and item no. 40 as “A pendant of the same.”

4. The attribution of the *Girl with the Red Hat* to Vermeer has been doubted by Van Thienen 1949, 23. The painting was rejected by Swillens 1950, 65; Blankert 1975, 167 (1978 English ed.), 172; Brentjens 1985, 54–58; and Aillaud, Blankert, and Montias 1986, 200–201. For reactions to Blankert's rejection of this painting, see the reviews by Christopher Brown (Brown 1977, 56–58) and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr. (Wheelock 1977b, 439–441).

5. Although only a portion of the tapestry is visible, it appears that two rather large-scale figures are depicted behind the girl. The patterned vertical strip on the right is probably the outer border. A. M. Louise E. Muler-Erkelen, keeper of textiles, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, relates this format to late sixteenth-century tapestries of the southern Netherlands. She also notes that the tapestries in Vermeer's paintings belong to the same period (letter in NGA curatorial files).

6. For example, Frans Hals, who apparently invented

the pose, used it often. It is employed in his *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1646/1648 (1937.1.71), to capture an informal, momentary impression of the sitter. He drapes the figure's arm over the chair, subordinating the horizontal for a more active diagonal emphasis. Vermeer minimized the diagonal thrust of the girl's arm by partially obscuring it behind the lion finials of the chair. It is possible that the girl was not sitting on the lion finial chair at all and that Vermeer placed it in the foreground to act as a foil. See Seymour 1964.

7. The first art historian to note this discrepancy was Wilenski 1929, 284–285. He hypothesized that the peculiar arrangement of the finials arose as a result of Vermeer's use of a mirror. His reconstruction of Vermeer's painting procedure, however, is untenable.

8. Blankert 1975, 109, in particular, emphasizes the position of the finials in his arguments against the attribution of the painting to Vermeer.

9. The idea that Vermeer adjusted forms in such a manner is incompatible with those who believe that he totally and faithfully recorded his physical environment. Swillens 1950 was the foremost proponent of this interpretation of Vermeer's manner of painting. This attitude also underlies the writings about Vermeer by Albert Blankert.

10. The literature on Vermeer and the camera obscura is extensive. See in particular Wheelock 1981, note 41.

11. See note 8.

12. He may also have recognized that the peculiarly soft quality of these unfocused highlights would beautifully express the luminosity of pearls. Thus even in paintings like the *Woman Holding a Balance*, whose genesis probably has little to do with the camera obscura, these optical effects are apparent.

13. This misconception lies at the basis of the interpretation of Vermeer's use of the camera obscura advanced by Fink 1971, 493–505. See also note 8.

14. As suggested by Seymour 1964, 323–331.

15. The only other panel painting attributed to Vermeer is the *Young Girl with a Flute* (1942.9.98).

16. Oil on panel, 38.5 x 31 cm; illustrated in Brown 1981, pl. 3.

17. Montias 1989, 339, doc. 364. The term *tronie* had various meanings in the seventeenth century, but generally it denoted a small, relatively inexpensive bust-length figure study. Although such studies could have been commissioned portraits, most were probably figure types, or character studies, produced for the open market.

18. For another small painting in the National Gallery collection where one artist has reused a panel previously painted by another artist by turning the image 180 degrees, see Follower of Rembrandt van Rijn, *Study of an Old Man* (1942.9.63).

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## Attributed to Johannes Vermeer

1942.9.98 (694)

### *Girl with a Flute*

probably 1665/1670  
 Oil on oak, 20 x 17.8 (7<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 7)  
 Widener Collection

**Technical Notes:** The support is a single, vertically grained oak panel with beveled edges on the back. Dendrochronology gives a tree felling date in the early 1650s.<sup>1</sup> The panel has a slight convex warp, a small check in the top edge at the right, and small gouges, rubs, and splinters on the back from nails and handling. A thin, smooth, white chalk ground was ap-

plied overall, followed by a coarse-textured gray ground. A reddish brown dead coloring exists under most areas of the painting and is incorporated into the design in the tapestry.<sup>2</sup>

Full-bodied paint is applied thinly, forming a rough surface texture in lighter passages. Still-wet paint in the proper right cheek and chin were textured with a fingertip, then glazed translucently. The x-radiograph (fig. 1) shows extensive design modifications: the proper left shoulder was lowered and the neck opening moved to the viewer's left; the collar on this side may have been damaged or scraped down before being reworked in a richer, creamy white. The ear-ring was painted over the second collar. These adjustments preceded the completion of the background tapestry. The proper left sleeve was longer, making the cuff closer to the wrist. Probably at the same time, the fur trim was added to