

VERMEER

and the

MASTERS of GENRE PAINTING

Inspiration and Rivalry

From the 1650s, Dutch artists created hundreds of exquisite genre paintings that depict intimate scenes in the daily life of elegant ladies and gentlemen. In these paintings women in their bedchambers adjust their necklaces, tighten the laces of their bodices, or fix their hair; young lovers write letters or perform musical duets; refined ladies in opulent gowns receive suitors in luxuriously furnished rooms; astronomers and geographers engage in scientific inquiry; and solitary figures concentrate on tasks such as lacemaking, oblivious to their surroundings. The introduction of such quiet scenes unfolding in private household spaces was among the most striking innovations of Dutch painting.

High-life genre painting is today most often associated with Johannes Vermeer of Delft, whose mesmerizingly tranquil

compositions evoke a genteel world of perfect harmony and balance. Yet a host of other masters, including Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou, Gabriel Metsu, Frans van Mieris, and Jan Steen, also specialized in capturing the private moments and leisure pastimes of affluent Dutch society. Their virtuoso paintings combine technical prowess and aesthetic appeal. This exhibition explores the interactions that existed among fifteen remarkable Dutch masters whose works share similarities in subject matter, style, and technique. By bringing together groups of related paintings, it examines how these artists sought to rival and even surpass one another in skill and imagination. The juxtapositions of these works also reveal the distinctive qualities and approaches of each of these artists, from Vermeer's timelessness and Ter Borch's portrayals of human emotions to Dou's meticulous brushwork and Metsu's lively storytelling.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, and the Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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#VermeerDC

JOHANNES DE RAM

Dutch, 1647/1648–after 1696

Figurative Map of Delft

1675–1678

etching and engraving

National Gallery of Art Library

This decorative wall map of Delft, where Vermeer spent his entire life, was commissioned by the city fathers in 1675. The city's ground plan is at the center of the map, while a profile view of Delft is at the top. The map also includes images of Delft's most prominent public buildings, and the tombs of admirals in the Oude Kerk (Old Church) in the upper left and that of the prince of Orange (1533–1584)—considered the father of the Dutch Republic—in the Nieuwe Kerk (New Church) in the upper right. The inn of Vermeer's father, where the artist lived at the beginning of his career, was situated along the left side of the large market square in the heart of Delft.

THE NETHERLANDS

1650

Genre painting flourished in a number of cities throughout the Dutch Republic. An excellent system of public transportation, with regularly scheduled passenger barges along the country's vast network of canals and rivers, facilitated the exchange of artistic ideas. Artists may have seen one another's works through studio visits, at the homes of collectors, and at markets and fairs.

NORTH SEA



Gerard ter Borch

The most influential Dutch high-life painter was Gerard ter Borch. In the mid-1650s he transformed genre painting by introducing domestic subjects showing young women in unguarded moments, writing a letter or tending to their morning routine. Ter Borch also possessed a remarkable ability to capture the shimmering quality of satin and silk, a skill that inspired contemporaries. Although he lived in Deventer in the eastern part of the Netherlands, away from artistic centers such as Amsterdam, Leiden, Haarlem, and Delft, his fame extended far and wide. Ter Borch's influence is frequently seen in paintings by artists throughout the Dutch Republic, who borrowed and adapted his prototypes in accordance with their own artistic personalities.

Vermeer and Ter Borch

In the late 1650s Vermeer began to depict genre subjects similar to those favored by Ter Borch. Vermeer emulated his older colleague's approach by focusing on solitary women lost in thought in the midst of their daily activities. He differed, however, in the way he integrated his figures into a stable geometrical framework created by windows, chairs, and tables, and by infusing his interiors with natural light. Vermeer's thematic intent is often elusive, but he sought to convey meaning through the reflective mood of his figures and the perfect equilibrium of his compositions, which give his images a poetic and timeless character.

World of Men

Men feature much less prominently than women in Dutch high-life genre scenes, perhaps understandably given the emphasis on domestic interiors. Nonetheless, male figures appear in a variety of roles — as doctors attending the sick, scholars in their studies, soldiers in taverns, or suitors courting young women. Men in high-life genre paintings are often portrayed as visitors to the home, their cloaks and hats indicating that they have just come in from the outdoors. Artists often presented men as serious in their pursuit of knowledge, but their portrayals are not always positive: frequently, men add a comic note as drunken cads and quacks.

Love and Courtship

Romantic encounters are a favorite subject of high-life genre paintings. In the privacy of their homes, refined young women of marriageable age and their eager suitors pursue amorous liaisons through musical performance, intimate conversation, or the exchange of letters. Occasionally third parties play a role, as an attendant standing by to act as a go-between or a page bringing refreshment to a couple. Despite a wealth of anecdotal details, the outcome of these dalliances remains unresolved. While faces rarely betray emotions, cleverly chosen motifs — a crumpled letter, an ace of hearts, an image of stormy seas — allude to the passion underlying the moment.

Pendants

Dutch artists occasionally used paired paintings to suggest a narrative. In Ter Borch's innovative pendants, young lovers communicate through letters whose texts are not revealed, leading us to speculate on what passes between them. The theme of romantic exchange found its way into other artists' repertoires, including Metsu, who filled his pendants with light and color to wholly different effect. Vermeer addressed the subject in a single composition, in which a maid silently awaits her mistress's orders to dispatch her note once it is finished.

Back to the Viewer

One of Ter Borch's most lasting innovations was the standing woman with her back to the viewer, a figure who appears most famously in the master's *Gallant Conversation*. Evocative and mysterious because of her inaccessibility, and alluring in no small part owing to her exquisite, lustrous dress, Ter Borch's demure lady seen from behind was emulated more than any other figure in Dutch art. Painters adapted her restrained pose imaginatively for an array of pictorial purposes. In the works along this wall, she appears alternately as a mistress of the house, a maidservant in a tavern, and a young lady swaying to her suitor's serenade.

Reflections

Mirrors were an essential part of upscale Dutch interiors and appear with regularity in genre scenes, usually where women are dressing themselves for the day. Having both positive and negative associations, mirrors could symbolize truth and the sense of sight, but also vanity and the transience of love. Artists thought carefully about how to paint mirrored reflections and how they could expand the narrative possibilities of a scene. Mirrors could reveal the expression of someone whose face is hidden from the viewer, opening up a private moment, or they could add emotional depth to a scene by showing a fleeting look of care or concern from a different angle, doubling the effect.

Themes and Variations

Many of the works in this exhibition depict similar themes and motifs, yet they differ in character, revealing the individual artistic personalities at play — as is the case with the two paintings here by Johannes Vermeer and Nicolaes Maes. Each addresses the theme of lacemaking, a skilled activity performed by accomplished young women from affluent households.

Vermeer's tightly framed composition concentrates on the woman's virtuous industriousness. In Maes's more traditional representation of a lacemaker, the furnishings and decorations of the room vie for attention with the young lady. Vermeer's soft focus on details and the almost abstract strokes of red and white for the tangle of sewing threads contrast with Maes's more straightforward approach.

Musicians

Young, elegant women engaged in domestic activities befitting their social status were the primary subjects of Dutch high-life genre painting. Musical ability was a desirable trait in such well-to-do ladies, and nearly every genre painter included in his repertoire scenes of women performing music in the privacy of their homes. Luxuriously dressed and playing expensive stringed instruments such as lutes and keyboards, these exquisite musicians evoked a privileged world of refinement that would have appealed to wealthy patrons.

Parrots

The motif of a woman with a parrot was highly popular throughout the 1660s. Expensive pets imported from the distant lands of the vast Dutch commercial empire, parrots were valued for the beauty of their plumage and their ability to imitate speech. Despite thematic similarities in the three paintings along this wall, each artist approached his subject differently by adjusting the woman's demeanor, attire, and relationship to the viewer.

Doorways

Doors and drapery play an important role in revealing the intimate scenes of Dutch genre painting as well as determining how the viewer relates to them. When framing a view into a distant room, an open doorway allows for the voyeuristic experience of peering into the inner sanctum of a home. The impression is intensified by the casual disarray of brooms, a bucket or basket, discarded shoes, and other household items.

5.1

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

Woman Playing a Theorbo Lute

1663

oil on panel

Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh

This work exemplifies the meticulous technique and refined style of painting that flourished in Leiden in the 1650s and 1660s. Van Mieris was renowned for his ability to paint spectacular illusionistic effects, such as the sheen of a skirt, using nearly invisible brushwork. Both he and his teacher Gerrit Dou, two of whose paintings are nearby, commanded extremely high fees for their painstaking efforts.

5.2

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

A Woman with a Lute

c. 1663 – 1664

oil on canvas

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Bequest of Collis P. Huntington, 1900 (25.110.24)

5.3

EGLON VAN DER NEER

Dutch, c. 1634–1703

Woman Tuning a Lute

1678

oil on panel

Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich

13.1

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613–1675

Woman with a Parrot

c. 1660–1665

oil on panel

The Leiden Collection, New York

Dou's bird, a species from South America, was originally bright green, but the yellow glaze he painted over the underlying blue pigment to make that color has become transparent over time.

13.2

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

Woman Feeding a Parrot

1663

oil on panel

The Leiden Collection, New York

13.3

CASPAR NETSCHER

Dutch, 1639 – 1684

Woman Feeding a Parrot, with a Page

1666

oil on panel

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

The Lee and Juliet Folger Fund

14.1

PIETER DE HOOCH

Dutch, 1629 – 1684

Woman Weighing Coins

c. 1664

oil on canvas

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie,

Property of Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

Woman Holding a Balance

c. 1664

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* and De Hooch's *Woman Weighing Coins* have strikingly similar compositions, but the two artists interpreted the motif differently. Vermeer conceived the subject as a moral allegory on human behavior, whereas De Hooch portrayed it as a scene from daily life. De Hooch's woman weighs gold coins to measure the financial well-being of her household, while Vermeer's woman quietly waits for an empty balance to come to rest. The painting of the Last Judgment hanging behind her serves as a visual commentary on the implications of her gesture, for to weigh is to judge. The woman's pensive bearing indicates she strives to conduct her life with temperance and balanced judgment.

16.1

NICOLAES MAES

Dutch, 1634 – 1693

Woman Scraping Parsnips, with a Child

1655

oil on panel

The National Gallery, London,

Bequeathed by Lord Farnborough, 1838

The three paintings along this wall, each by a different artist, depict a woman engrossed in a domestic task in the presence of a child. In Maes's painting, the humble setting and the simple clothing of the woman scraping root vegetables indicate that the family belongs to a modest household. The paintings of De Hooch and Ter Borch, on the other hand, place figures robed in costly garments amid impressive surroundings and furnishings belonging to a more elevated social class. All three paintings represent an ideal of domestic virtue, where the nurturing mother carefully attends to her family's needs.

16.2

PIETER DE HOOCH

Dutch, 1629 – 1684

*Woman Nursing an Infant,
with a Child and a Dog*

c. 1658 – 1660

oil on canvas

Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco,
Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1961

16.3

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Woman Peeling Apples

c. 1660 – 1661

oil on canvas, mounted on panel

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

Woman Sealing a Letter by Candlelight

1667

oil on panel

Private Collection

In a country where merchants, traders, and soldiers were often away for extended periods of time, letters were an important means of communication between loved ones. As the woman reaches forward to soften her stick of sealing wax in the candle's flame, its light dramatically illuminates her face and her body, emphasizing the private, emotional quality of such correspondence.

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Woman Writing a Letter

c. 1655 – 1656

oil on panel

Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague

Encouraged by his father to take up “modern” subjects, Ter Borch turned to the daily life of genteel young men and women. He frequently used his younger half-sister Gesina as his model, and his tender feelings toward her are reflected in the sweet innocence with which she is always portrayed.

GABRIEL METSU

Dutch, 1629 – 1667

Woman Writing a Letter

c. 1662 – 1664

oil on panel

The Leiden Collection, New York

Metsu often combined a highly refined style with a tendency toward theatricality. Here he transformed Ter Borch's contemplative motif of a letter writer into a more dynamic narrative. With an eager dog seeking her attention, the lady daintily suspends a quill pen above the inkwell as she turns her gaze outward, indicating that she has just been interrupted.

2.3

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

Lady Writing

c. 1665

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Gift of Harry Waldron Havemeyer and Horace Havemeyer, Jr.,
in memory of their father, Horace Havemeyer

2.4

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

Woman Writing a Letter by Candlelight

1670

oil on panel

Private Collection,
courtesy David Koetser Gallery, Zurich

Gazing quizzically at the viewer, this letter writer is more mature and worldly than Ter Borch's endearing young lady nearby. The nocturnal setting, lit by the warm glow of an oil lamp, enhances the sense of intimacy and sensuality.

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Young Woman at Her Toilet with a Maid

c. 1650 – 1651

oil on wood

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,

Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.10)

In this intimate scene of a young woman preparing for the day (or morning “toilet”), Ter Borch has depicted his younger half-sister Gesina standing before her box bed and her dressing table.

JAN STEEN

Dutch, 1625/1626 – 1679

Young Woman with a Letter

(“Bathsheba with King David’s Letter”)

c. 1659 – 1660

oil on panel

Private Collection

Steen adapted Ter Borch’s motif of a young woman with her maid for his depiction of the Old Testament story of Bathsheba receiving an invitation from King David to come to his chamber. The directness of Bathsheba’s gaze as she reveals the contents of the letter to the viewer, and the open bed curtains behind her, foretell her acceptance of his offer — a decision that will lead to the death of her husband. By depicting this biblical story in a contemporary setting, Steen made its moralizing lesson about choosing virtue over vice relevant to his audience.

6.3

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

Woman Before a Mirror

c. 1662

oil on panel

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

6.4

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

Woman with a Pearl Necklace

c. 1662 – 1665

oil on canvas

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie

Vermeer often placed a table and chair in the foreground of his paintings to restrict the viewer's access to his figures, thereby allowing them to engage in moments of quiet concentration. Here the woman stares at her reflection in a small mirror while tautly holding the ribbons of her pearl necklace. Though the gesture is simple, her pose has a timelessness that evokes inner strength. With their flawless luster, pearls were associated with faith and purity, lending the scene a moral underpinning.

6.5

CASPAR NETSCHER

Dutch, 1639 – 1684

Woman at Her Toilet

c. 1665

oil on panel

Private Collection, London,
courtesy of Johnny Van Haeften Ltd.

10.1

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

*Young Woman with a Soldier
and an Onlooker*

c. 1650

oil on panel

Musée Fabre, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

10.2

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

Brothel Scene

c. 1658 – 1659

oil on panel

Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague

Van Mieris was a consummate storyteller whose paintings are often titillating and suggestive. Like many other high-life genre painters, he also depicted the rowdy environments of taverns and inns. In each of the three paintings in this corner, a maid-servant in an inn or brothel smilingly offers alcohol to a male companion as an inducement for sensual pleasure.

10.3

JACOB OCHTERVELT

Dutch, 1634 – 1682

Merry Company

c. 1663

oil on canvas

Manchester Art Gallery

11.1

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

The Doctor's Visit

1657

oil on copper

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Gemäldegalerie

A doctor attends to a lethargic young woman who looks up from the biblical passages she has been reading. He has diagnosed her with lovesickness by taking her pulse, and points to his head as if to confirm the psychological root of her illness. Van Mieris's doctor derives from sixteenth-century representations of charlatans pretending to have medical skills.

11.2

JAN STEEN

Dutch, 1625/1626 – 1679

The Doctor's Visit

1661 – 1662

oil on panel

The Wellington Collection, Apsley House
(English Heritage)

11.3

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613 – 1675

The Dropsical Woman

1663

oil on panel

Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

Unlike the quacks depicted in the related paintings by Van Mieris and Steen, Dou's physician is not a figure of ridicule. Inspecting a vial of urine, one of the most common diagnostic tools of the time, the doctor attempts to determine what ails his patient. Much larger than most of Dou's other paintings, this tour de force features a marvelously complex composition, a remarkable flow of light through the spacious interior, and a wide range of materials and textures rendered by the artist with refinement and skill.

12.1

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

The Sleeping Soldier

c. 1657

oil on canvas

The Taft Museum of Art, Cincinnati, Ohio

12.2

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613 – 1675

Woman Asleep

c. 1660 – 1665

oil on panel

Hohenbuchau Collection, on permanent loan to Liechtenstein,
The Princely Collections, Vienna

12.3

JACOB OCHTERVELT

Dutch, 1634 – 1682

The Sleeping Cavalier

1660 – 1663

oil on panel

Manchester Art Gallery

Ochtervelt freely borrowed motifs from various contemporary painters in composing his works. In this instance, he adapted Ter Borch's playful image of a slumbering soldier in the nearby painting for his own sleeping cavalier. He also added a humorous note: the rude awakening the soldier is about to receive from a trumpet held to his ear.

18.2

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613 – 1675

Astronomer by Candlelight

c. 1665

oil on panel

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

18.3

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

The Astronomer

1668

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

The Astronomer and *The Geographer* are the only instances in which Vermeer featured a single male figure in his compositions. Whether or not — as has been proposed — Vermeer's model for these two paintings was his Delft contemporary, famed microscopist Anthony van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723), they celebrate the importance of science in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, an age of exploration and discovery.

18.4

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

The Geographer

1669

oil on canvas

Städelsches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt am Main

Vermeer's geographer and astronomer are both dressed in the Japanese-style robe popular among scholars at that time, and each is surrounded by the tools of his profession: maps, charts, books, and globes (a terrestrial one for the geographer, a celestial one for the astronomer). The twinned references to heaven and earth in these paintings may suggest an allegorical meaning concerning the search for truth in both spiritual and temporal matters.

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Officer Writing a Letter

c. 1658 – 1659

oil on canvas

Philadelphia Museum of Art,
The William L. Elkins Collection, 1924

The ace of hearts card on the floor points to the amorous nature of the letter the officer is writing. At left, dressed in his official blue jerkin, is a trumpeter, who in addition to his duties sounding orders in battle served as a courier for the military.

1.2

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Woman Sealing a Letter

c. 1658 – 1659

oil on canvas

Private Collection

Ter Borch's paired paintings share a number of similarities that underscore the sentiment connecting them: comparable coloring, especially the prominence of red and blue; the arrangement of one standing figure and another seated at a table; the setting of the rooms with a bed and fireplace in the corner and glass jars above a hearth; and a dog, the traditional symbol of fidelity.

1.3

GABRIEL METSU

Dutch, 1629 – 1667

Man Writing a Letter

c. 1664 – 1666

oil on panel

National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin,
Sir Alfred and Lady Beit, 1987 (Beit Collection)

GABRIEL METSU

Dutch, 1629 – 1667

Woman Reading a Letter

c. 1664 – 1666

oil on panel

National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin,
Sir Alfred and Lady Beit, 1987 (Beit Collection)

In Metsu's companion paintings, the bright flood of daylight, reflective figures, and geometrical frameworks established by the rooms and their furnishings echo the style of Vermeer, whose work Metsu must have known. The maid pulls back a curtain to reveal a painting of a stormy seascape, an allusion to the choppy waters of love (and perhaps to a torrent of feelings belied by the letter writer's tranquil demeanor).

1.6

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

Woman Writing a Letter, with Her Maid

c. 1670 – 1671

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin,
Sir Alfred and Lady Beit, 1987 (Beit Collection)

Small details hint at heightened emotions beneath the air of calm in this scene. On the floor lie a wax stick, a broken-off wax seal, and a crumpled piece of paper—perhaps a letter the seated woman tossed heatedly after reading. She is presumably writing her response.

3.1

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Two Women Making Music, with a Page

c. 1657

oil on panel

Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

3.2

FRANS VAN MIERIS

Dutch, 1635 – 1681

The Duet

1658

oil on panel

Staatliches Museum Schwerin/Ludwigslust/Güstrow

3.3

JAN STEEN

Dutch, 1625/1626 – 1679

*Young Woman Playing a Harpsichord
to a Young Man*

c. 1659

oil on panel

The National Gallery, London, Bought, 1871

The beautifully decorated harpsichords and virginals in Dutch genre paintings were costly objects, and it is unlikely that many painters owned such expensive musical instruments. Artists probably saw them in the homes of wealthy patrons. This harpsichord features Steen's signature above the keyboard.

3.4

GABRIEL METSU

Dutch, 1629 – 1667

Man and a Woman at the Virginal

c. 1659 – 1662

oil on panel

Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

A virginal is a variant of the harpsichord where the strings run parallel to the keyboard. Generally made without attached legs, such instruments were placed on a tabletop or dedicated stand, which could be set at varying heights to allow playing seated, as here, or standing, as elsewhere in the exhibition.

3.5

CASPAR NETSCHER

Dutch, 1639 – 1684

Song with Harpsichord Accompaniment

1666

oil on panel

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

The amorous nature of this musical episode is underscored by the embracing couple in the image on the wall behind the column at left.

22.1

HENDRICK MARTENSZ SORGH

Dutch, c. 1610 – 1670

The Lute Player

1661

oil on panel

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,

Dupper Wzn. Bequest, Dordrecht

By the early 1660s, high-life genre paintings had become so fashionable that a number of artists who specialized in genre scenes with less elevated subjects began trying their hand at upscale themes. The three artists along this wall depicted peasant scenes or humble households before turning their attention to more refined imagery.

22.2

QUIRINGH VAN BREKELENKAM

Dutch, 1620 – 1669/1670

Gallant Conversation

c. 1663

oil on panel

Lent by The Metropolitan Museum of Art,

The Friedsam Collection, Bequest of Michael Friedsam,

1931 (32.100.19)

22.3

CORNELIS BEGA

Dutch, 1631/1632 – 1664

The Duet

1663

oil on panel

Musée du Petit Palais,
Musée des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Paris

4.1

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613 – 1675

Woman at the Clavichord

c. 1665

oil on panel

By Permission of The Trustees
of Dulwich Picture Gallery, London

The vacant stool at left, the bass viol at right, and the basket containing a jug of wine indicate that the woman's outward gaze may be an invitation for a visitor—or the viewer—to join her in a musical duet.

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

Young Woman Seated at a Virginal

c. 1675

oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London, Salting Bequest, 1910

Vermeer frequently inserted paintings within his paintings, and their subjects often provided a moral commentary on the themes of his compositions. Here, hanging on the back wall, is Dirck van Baburen's *The Procuress*, a painting by an early seventeenth-century Utrecht artist that was owned by Vermeer's mother-in-law. *The Procuress* depicts a buxom prostitute playing a lute while her suitor holds up a gold coin to pay the old woman who has brought them together. The ribaldry of Baburen's subject contrasts with the refined appearance of the lady playing a virginal, a keyboard instrument symbolizing harmony and concord. Vermeer subtly reinforced the choice of moderation over illicit love by letting light fall upon the musician, thereby separating her from the darkness of the background.

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Woman Washing Her Hands

c. 1655 – 1656

oil on panel

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister,
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden

Ter Borch, more than any other Dutch artist, introduced the subject of young women beautifying themselves, often with the help of servants, in the privacy of their homes. Among the most influential of these subjects was the ritual of handwashing, which was emblematic of purity and goodness.

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617–1681

The Suitor's Visit

c. 1658

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

In this sumptuous painting, a young man (for whom Ter Borch's student Caspar Netscher served as the model) enters a room where two women had been playing musical instruments. With his arrival, the dynamics in the room change, and one of the women (Ter Borch's half-sister Gesina) has ceased playing and has come to greet him. Ter Borch's painting had an enormous impact on his contemporaries, including Gabriel Metsu. In a comparable painting nearby, Metsu depicted a gentleman entering a room through an open door, and he also included a woman wearing a similar red top and white satin dress. He even emulated Ter Borch's remarkable technique for painting these shimmering fabrics.

8.3

GABRIEL METSU

Dutch, 1629 – 1667

The Intruder

c. 1660

oil on panel

National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Andrew W. Mellon Collection

8.4

GABRIEL METSU

Dutch, 1629 – 1667

Man Visiting a Woman Washing Her Hands

c. 1663 – 1666

oil on canvas

Waddesdon Manor, The Rothschild Collection
(Rothschild Family Trust)

8.5

EGLON VAN DER NEER

Dutch, c. 1634 – 1703

Woman Washing Her Hands

1675

oil on panel

Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis, The Hague

In this painting, Van der Neer converted the subject of Metsu's *The Intruder*, where a suitor tries to gain access to his lover, into a background narrative. Strikingly, the elegant lady washing her hands with water poured by her page is completely unperturbed by the commotion behind her.

21.1

SAMUEL VAN HOOGSTRATEN

Dutch, 1627 – 1678

View of an Interior

c. 1654 – 1662

oil on canvas

Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

Although no people are to be found in this view through doorways, the key left in a lock, the broom leaning against the wall, and the shoes at the threshold allude to a human presence. The genre painting glimpsed on the back wall of Van Hoogstraten's interior is a variation of Ter Borch's *Gallant Conversation*, on view in this room.

21.3

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

The Love Letter

c. 1669 – 1670

oil on canvas

Rijksmuseum, purchased with the support
of Vereniging Rembrandt

21.4

PIETER DE HOOCH

Dutch, 1629 – 1684

Couple with a Parrot

c. 1675 – 1678

oil on canvas

Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud, Cologne

[not in catalog]

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613 – 1675

A Young Lady Playing a Clavichord

c. 1667

oil on panel

Private Collection

7.1

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Woman at a Mirror

c. 1650 – 1652

oil on panel

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam,

De Bruijn – van der Leeuw Bequest, Muri, Switzerland

7.2

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Lady at Her Toilet

c. 1660

oil on canvas

The Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase,
Eleanor Clay Ford Fund, General Membership Fund,
Endowment Income Fund and Special Activities Fund

7.3

GERRIT DOU

Dutch, 1613 – 1675

Lady at Her Toilet

1667

oil on panel

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

15.2

NICOLAES MAES

Dutch, 1634 – 1693

Young Woman Making Lace

1655

oil on oak panel

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, purchased 1954

15.4

JOHANNES VERMEER

Dutch, 1632 – 1675

The Lacemaker

c. 1670 – 1671

oil on canvas transferred to panel

Musée du Louvre, Département des Peintures, Paris

19.1

GERARD TER BORCH

Dutch, 1617 – 1681

Gallant Conversation

(“The Paternal Admonition”)

c. 1654

oil on canvas

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

Despite its traditional title, the painting does not depict a father speaking to his daughter. Instead, a young officer has called upon a refined young lady in her home — but to what end? Ter Borch purposely did not make the narrative explicit. Is the gentleman a suitor who has come to court her? Do her upright stance and reserved nature confirm her propriety, even without her facial expression providing a clue? Such questions would also have been asked by a seventeenth-century audience, as the elusive nature of the subject was surely meant to encourage discussion.

19.2

PIETER DE HOOCH

Dutch, 1629 – 1684

Woman Drinking with Two Men

c. 1658

oil on canvas

The National Gallery, London, Bought, 1871

19.3

JAN STEEN

Dutch, 1625/1626 – 1679

Itinerant Musicians

1659

oil on panel

National Trust, Ascott. The Rothschild Collection.
Accepted in lieu of inheritance tax by HM Government
and allocated to the National Trust, 2000

19.4

JACOB OCHTERVELT

Dutch, 1634 – 1682

The Serenade

c. 1669

oil on canvas

Kunsthalle Bremen Der Kunstverein in Bremen

Gift Carl Schünemann 2017

[not in catalog]

PIETER DE HOOCH

Dutch, 1629 – 1684

The Greeting

c. 1675

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington,

Corcoran Collection (William A. Clark Collection)