

# National Gallery of Art

## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 1, 2001

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**NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART PRESENTS**  
**VERMEER: MASTER OF LIGHT, A NEW DOCUMENTARY**  
**THAT EXPLORES THE ARTISTIC GENIUS OF JOHANNES VERMEER**

**Narrated by Meryl Streep**

**To Air on Public Television Stations Nationwide**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., will present *Vermeer: Master of Light*, a new, hour-long documentary narrated by Oscar-winning actress Meryl Streep, on public television stations nationwide beginning in November 2001. The Gallery is home to three paintings by the popular 17th-century Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer: Woman Holding a Balance (c. 1664), Girl with the Red Hat (c. 1665/1666), and A Lady Writing (c. 1665). The film explores these works and others in a visual pilgrimage to discover the origins of Vermeer's genius and what it is that makes his works so special.

"Vermeer is one of the most beloved of all artists. This was made very apparent when hundreds of thousands flocked to the Gallery's exhibition of his works in 1995 and 1996," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "*Vermeer: Master of Light* is the second in a series of programs about some of the greatest works of art in the Gallery's collection—it is a pleasure to share them with an even larger audience."

*Vermeer: Master of Light* is made possible by Juliet and Lee Folger, The Folger Fund. Additional support is provided by AEGON USA.

### **The Film**

Utilizing the potential of x-ray analysis and infrared reflectography, as well as the power of computer technology, *Vermeer: Master of Light* enables viewers to delve beneath the surface of the paintings to reveal fascinating insights into Vermeer's works. Produced by employing the techniques of Vermeer, each frame subtly has the "feel" of a Vermeer painting, with particular emphasis placed on lighting and composition.

Through the use of extreme magnification the viewer is able to see incredible details, such as Vermeer's use of pink on the red lips of a girl, the turquoise highlight placed in her eye, or touches of light on objects such as the sides of boats, the finials of a chair, or even loaves of bread.

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X-ray analysis and infrared reflectography uncover what is not readily seen (including figures that were moved by the artist) and in some cases sections of the paintings that were overpainted by others.

The film uses the latest visual effects to create a new way to study Vermeer's techniques. Using 3D software, a digital reconstruction of The Music Lesson (c. 1662-1664) was created for use in the film. The computer-generated model was then animated to tell the story of one of Vermeer's most remarkable paintings.

Commentary is provided throughout the film by art experts, including Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., curator of northern baroque paintings, National Gallery of Art, Washington, and professor of art history, University of Maryland; Seymour Slive, art historian, Harvard University; and David Bull, senior conservation consultant, National Gallery of Art, Washington. The film goes on location to Delft, Holland (Vermeer's home), and to the world-renowned painting conservation laboratory of the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

### **The Artist**

Very little is known about the artist Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675). He lived and worked in Delft, in the heart of the Netherlands, but the names of his masters, the nature of his training, and the period of his apprenticeship all remain mysteries. Just over 30 paintings can be attributed with certainty to this master genre painter—he left behind no sketches, drawings, or letters. Vermeer chose to paint scenes of domestic life: a girl reading a letter, a figure at work, a woman pouring milk, a girl in a red hat. His works, however, are so much more than records of simple domestic activities. His careful control of light, color, and composition raises these scenes into a magical realm and demonstrates an unprecedented level of artistic mastery.

### **Film Credits and Distribution**

The film credits for *Vermeer: Master of Light* are as follows: producer and director, Joseph J. Krakora; producer, Ellen Bryant; consulting producer, Richard Somerset-Ward; editor, Tony Black, A.C.E.; music composer and creator, William Kidd; and director of photography, Phil Gries.

*Vermeer: Master of Light* is distributed by American Public Television, which is a major source of programming for the nation's public television stations. More information about APT's programs and services is available on the Web at [www.aptv.org](http://www.aptv.org).

The presenting station for the documentary is the Nebraska ETV Network.

### **The Videotape**

The 57-minute videotape in VHS format will be available in November for \$19.95 through the National Gallery of Art Shops and from the Gallery Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). To order by telephone, call 1-800-697-9350.

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# National Gallery of Art

Washington, D.C.

## NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART *Vermeer: Master of Light* Slide Checklist

1. Johannes Vermeer  
Dutch, 1632-1675  
***Woman Holding a Balance***, c. 1664  
oil on canvas, stretcher size: .425 x .380 m (16 3/4 x 15 in.)  
painted surface: .397 x .355 m (15 7/8 x 14 in.)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection
2. Film Still:  
Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., curator of northern baroque painting, National Gallery of Art, Washington, discusses *Woman Holding a Balance*
3. Film Still:  
Using the power of graphics, the focal point of *Woman Holding a Balance* is illuminated
4. Johannes Vermeer  
Dutch, 1632-1675  
***Girl with the Red Hat***, c. 1665/1666  
oil on panel, support: .232 x .181 m (9 1/2 x 7 1/8 in.)  
painted surface: .228 x .180 m (9 x 7 1/16 in.)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection
5. Film Still:  
Extreme magnification reveals the details of the lips in the *Girl with the Red Hat*
6. Johannes Vermeer  
Dutch, 1632-1675  
***A Lady Writing***, c. 1665  
oil on canvas, .450 x .399 m (17 3/4 x 15 3/4 in.)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Harry Waldron Havemeyer and Horace Havemeyer, Jr., in memory of their father, Horace Havemeyer

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## NEWS RELEASE

### ***VERMEER: MASTER OF LIGHT***

#### **A National Gallery of Art Production**

##### **Fact Sheet**

**Length:** 57 minutes  
**Release Date:** November 2001 to public broadcasting stations  
**Airdate:** Check local listings  
**Presenting Station:** Nebraska ETV Network  
Contact: Deb Miller  
(402) 472-3611

**Distributed by:** American Public Television (APT)  
Contact: Dawn Anderson  
(617) 338-4455 x149

**Produced and Directed by:** Joseph J. Krakora  
**Produced by:** Ellen Bryant  
**Editor:** Tony Black, A.C.E.  
**Music Composed/Created by:** William Kidd  
**Consulting Producer:** Richard Somerset-Ward  
**Director of Photography:** Phil Gries  
**Presenters:** David Bull  
Seymour Slive  
Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr.

**Narrator:** Meryl Streep

***Vermeer: Master of Light* is made possible by Juliet and Lee Folger, The Folger Fund.**

Additional support is provided by AEGON USA.

**For more information or to request images, please contact:**

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