



Above, *Milk Maid*, painting, 1660

Johannes Vermeer was a Dutch Baroque Period painter who specialized in domestic interior scenes of middle-class life. During his lifetime, he was a moderately successful provincial genre painter, recognized in Delft and The Hague. Nonetheless, he produced relatively few paintings and evidently was not wealthy, leaving his wife and children in debt at his death. Vermeer's works are largely genre pieces and portraits, with the exception of two cityscapes and two allegories. His subjects offer a cross-section of seventeenth-century Dutch society, ranging from the portrayal of a simple milkmaid at work, to the luxury and splendor of rich notables and merchantmen in their roomy houses. Besides these subjects, religious, poetical, musical, and scientific comments can also be found in his work.



Above Left, *Mistress and Maid* Painting, 1666



Above Right, *Allegory on Faith* 1670



Above Left, *Girl with a Red Hat*, Painting, 1665



Above Right, *The Geographer*, 1668

Vermeer worked slowly and with great care, and frequently used very expensive pigments. He is particularly renowned for his mastery treatment and use of light in his work. There is no other 17th-century artist who employed the exorbitantly expensive pigment lapis lazuli (natural ultramarine) either so lavishly or so early in his career. Vermeer used this in not just elements that are naturally of this color; the earth colors umber and ocher should be understood as warm light within a painting's strongly lit interior, which reflects its multiple colors onto the wall. In this way, he created a world more perfect than any he had witnessed. This working method most probably was inspired by Vermeer's understanding of Leonardo's observations that the surface of every object partakes of the color of the adjacent object. This means that no object is ever seen entirely in its natural color.



Above, *Women Reading a Letter*, painting, 1663



Above, *A Lady with Two Gentlemen*, painting, 1659

Vermeer may have first executed his paintings tonally like most painters of his time, using either monochrome shades of gray or a limited palette of browns and grays over which he would apply more saturated colors in the form of transparent glazes. No drawings have been positively attributed to Vermeer, and his paintings offer few clues to preparatory methods. "Almost all his paintings", Hans Koningsberger wrote, "are apparently set in two smallish rooms in his house in Delft; they show the same furniture and decorations in various arrangements and they often portray the same people, mostly women." A comparable but even more remarkable, yet effectual, use of natural ultramarine is in *The Girl with the Wine Glass*. The shadows of the red satin dress are underpainted in natural ultramarine, and, owing to this underlying blue paint layer, the red lake and vermilion mixture applied over it acquires a slightly purple, cool and crisp appearance that is most powerful.



Above Left, *Lady Writing a Letter with her maid*, Painting, 1665,

Above Right, *The Astronomer*, Painting 1668



Even after Vermeer's supposed financial breakdown following the so-called *rampjaar* (year of disaster) in 1672, he continued to employ natural ultramarine generously, such as in *Lady Seated at a Virginal*. This could suggest that Vermeer was supplied with materials by a collector, and would coincide with John Michael Montias' theory that Pieter van Ruijven was Vermeer's patron.

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Joannes Vermeer

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