Frick Vermeers Back on View Following Landmark Rijksmuseum Exhibition in Amsterdam

Museum Shares Insights Gained into Three Masterworks

June 15, 2023, through March 3, 2024

(NY, June 14, 2023) The Frick Collection’s trio of paintings by famed seventeenth-century Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer has returned from Amsterdam to New York. From June 15 through the remainder of the institution’s temporary residency at Frick Madison, visitors can once again encounter in one room the Frick’s Officer and Laughing Girl, Girl Interrupted at Her Music, and Mistress and Maid. Recently reinstalled after their presentation in the Rijksmuseum’s landmark Vermeer exhibition, these three canvases by the “Sphinx of Delft” have revealed a few more hints about their layered histories.

The recent Amsterdam show offered an exceptional opportunity to contextualize the Frick works within the artist’s career. Twenty-eight paintings by or attributed to Vermeer were on view, the most that one exhibition has ever shown from his surviving oeuvre of only around thirty-five canvases. The Frick’s loans—possible during the renovation and enhancement of the institution’s historic East 70th Street buildings—were key to securing the Rijksmuseum exhibition’s historic scope.

Comments Ian Wardropper, Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Director, “We are thrilled to have participated in this thought-provoking and visually stunning presentation of the great artist’s works. The show—one of the most talked about art world events of the year, if not the decade—offered audiences from around the world, both in person and online, new ways to consider Vermeer’s oeuvre, taking advantage of thematic groupings and recent technical analysis. Having never loaned our three works simultaneously before, we found the experience deeply enriching. As we celebrate the return of the works to Frick Madison, we look forward to engaging in stimulating dialogues about them with New York audiences.”

Anna-Claire Stinebring, the Frick’s Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow, traveled twice to Amsterdam during the show’s run to experience it and attend a remarkable symposium in which the Frick participated. Reflecting on these experiences, she adds, “Whether pensive or smiling, gazing outward or looking away, Vermeer’s figures keep many of their secrets close. Yet now is also an exciting moment for new conversations and research concerning the Frick’s important collection of paintings by the Delft master.” In addition to close encounters with the Frick’s Vermeers at the museum, members of the public can investigate some of the current dialogues through recent Frick publications such as Vermeer’s Maps as well as in fresh blog posts, videos, and other content.

CENTRAL THEMES OF AMSTERDAM SHOW OFFERED IN FRICK GALLERY

In many ways, the reinstallation of the Vermeer paintings at Frick Madison represents a microcosm of central themes experienced by visitors to the Amsterdam exhibition. All three Frick paintings reveal the artist’s signature focus on domestic spaces, especially the activities and inner lives of women. Likewise, the thematic organization of the Rijksmuseum show
highlighted, for example, the role of music in suggesting an amorous relationship in *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*, or the evocation of the outside world with the arrival of a letter in *Mistress and Maid*.

The Frick paintings also demonstrate just how much Vermeer varied his painting style across his career, a clear lesson from the exhibition. *Mistress and Maid* is large-scale, with the paint layers carefully blended, while the smaller *Officer and Laughing Girl* is comprised of dabs of paint placed side by side. It is a technique that some scholars have associated with Vermeer’s possible use of optical devices such as a camera obscura, a topic of ongoing and impassioned debate. The differences across the three paintings serve as a reminder that their intense degree of naturalism is entirely constructed by the artist, rather than representing a straightforward transcription of reality.

PEARLS, FURS, CERAMICS, AND MORE

In Amsterdam, the fur-lined coat and pearl earring from the Frick’s *Mistress and Maid* were a posterchild for the show. The reappearance of the coat—a jacket made of yellow satin with white fur trim, listed in the 1676 inventory of moveable goods in Vermeer’s home—in numerous other paintings shown in the Rijksmuseum’s galleries highlighted its frequent use as a studio prop in Vermeer’s fictional scenes. As luxurious as the mantle is meant to appear, the lining was in fact perhaps made of rabbit fur dyed to look like more expensive ermine. Another evident studio prop, the large pearl in *Mistress and Maid*, was also likely fake. Frick Curator Aimee Ng elaborated on this important topic in “Vermeer’s Pearls,” a talk given as part of the Rijksmuseum symposium. While stressing that Vermeer’s famous pearls are ultimately “neither real nor fake—they are just paint,” Ng reevaluated his renderings of these natural gems in the context of the brutal conditions in which pearl divers often worked. She also explored the centuries-old industry of making counterfeit pearls, with recipes evolving to include materials from powdered mother-of-pearl to egg whites and glass (sometimes enhanced with fish scales or even snail slime). More information is available in a recent episode of the Frick’s *Where in the World?* video series.

Ng’s presentation was in dialogue with other compelling investigations into the material world conjured by Vermeer, which provide new perspectives on the Frick’s masterworks. These include reassessments of the artist’s depictions of imported Asian porcelain as luxury goods within domestic interiors, including in *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*. Moreover, the Frick’s former Anne L. Poulet Curatorial Fellow Rozemarijn Landsman offered new research related to her recent publication, *Vermeer’s Maps*, which examines the significance of the detailed renderings of recognizable maps throughout Vermeer’s body of work, such as that shown on the back wall in the Frick’s *Officer and Laughing Girl* and portrayed in two other paintings, all three united in the Rijksmuseum’s exhibition galleries.

Other presentations, as well as the Rijksmuseum exhibition catalogue, brought renewed focus to one of Vermeer’s main patrons, a Delft woman named Maria de Knuijt, who (along with her husband, Pieter van Ruijven) may likely have been the original owner of the Frick’s *Officer and Laughing Girl* and *Mistress and Maid*. Finally, initial insights into the working process of several Vermeer paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art were shared by that institution’s Research Scientist Silvia Centeno and Paintings Conservator Dorothy Mahon, who also recently made discoveries regarding the design and original appearance of the Frick’s *Mistress and Maid*. You can read more about these exciting findings in a past blog post.

These fresh perspectives and more are explored in a new blog post by Anna-Claire Stonebring. An accompanying literary blog post was authored by Christopher Snow Hopkins, the Frick’s Associate Editor. Building on the tradition of artists and writers taking inspiration from the museum’s Vermeer paintings (such as James Ivory in the 2018 Frick Diptych volume *Vermeer’s Mistress and Maid*), Hopkins reflects on the experience of seeing the Frick’s pictures in the context of Vermeer’s oeuvre at the Rijksmuseum.
Images: Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Mistress and Maid*, ca. 1666–67, oil on canvas, 35 1/2 x 31 in. (90.2 x 78.7 cm), The Frick Collection, New York, photo: Joseph Coscia Jr.; Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Officer and Laughing Girl*, ca. 1657, oil on canvas, 19 7/8 x 18 1/8 in. (50.5 x 46 cm), The Frick Collection, New York, photo: Joseph Coscia Jr.; Banner inside the Rijksmuseum featuring a detail of the Frick’s *Mistress and Maid*, photo: Heidi Rosenau; Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675), *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*, ca. 1658–59, oil on canvas, 15 1/2 x 17 1/2 in. (39.4 x 44.5 cm), The Frick Collection, New York, photo: Joseph Coscia Jr.

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**BASIC INFORMATION**

**Website:** frick.org  
**Building project:** frickfuture.org  
**Bloomberg Connects app:** frick.org/app

**Frick Madison visitor address:** 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York, NY 10021  
**Museum hours:** Thursday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Monday through Wednesday. See website for holiday schedule.

**Admission:** Timed tickets are strongly recommended and may be purchased online. $22 general public; $17 seniors and visitors with disabilities; $12 students. Free admission is granted to visitors ages 10–17. Admission is always free for members. Pay-what-you-wish admission is offered Thursdays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

**Please note:** Children under ten are not admitted to the museum.

**COVID-19/health and safety policies:** frick.org/visit/guidelines

**Ticket purchase link:** frick.org/tickets. For questions: admissions@frick.org  
**Group reservations:** For questions: groupreservations@frick.org

**Public programs:** A calendar of in-person and virtual events is available on our website.

**Shop:** Open during museum hours as well as online daily.

**Refreshments:** A light menu, offered by The SisterYard, is available on the lower level during museum hours.

**Subway:** #6 local to 77th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station. **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 75th Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 74th Street

**Museum mailing address:** 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021

**Photography:** Allowed only in the Frick Madison Lobby.

**Reading room:** Access is offered by appointment Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For further information, visit frick.org/tickets.

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For further press information, please contact us at communications@frick.org.