THE LEIDEN COLLECTION



Young Woman Seated at a Virginal

Johannes Vermeer
(Delft 1632 – 1675 Delft)

ca. 1670–75
oil on canvas
25.5 x 20.1 cm
JVe-100

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In his entrancing *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, Johannes Vermeer captured the quiet joy of a young woman in harmony with her music.[1] As the musician gently and tenderly fingers the keyboard of her virginal, she leans slightly forward in her chair while looking out with a sympathetic expression, as though desiring to share the virginal's dulcet sounds with the viewer. The young woman's tightly wound curls, red ribbons, and a strand of small beads in her hair indicate that she is a young lady of proper upbringing and fine sensibility, but it is her engaging face that makes the encounter feel personal. The small scale of this canvas heightens its intimate character, and one can imagine it sitting on a favorite table or hanging in a private space where it could be enjoyed in quiet moments.

A woman's proficiency at playing the virginal was greatly esteemed in Dutch society, and Vermeer must have admired the artistry required to control the instrument's pitch and tone.[2] He likely also recognized a symbiotic relationship between the measured rhythms of its music and the underlying harmony of his paintings. Importantly, moreover, a woman playing a virginal facilitated polite contact between the sexes, a theme that clearly appealed to Vermeer, for he explored it on four different occasions. In two of these works, *The Music Lesson* (Royal Collection, London) and *The Concert* (formerly Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), both from the 1660s, Vermeer depicted men and women who had gathered in an elegant room to play music, sing, and otherwise to enjoy their social interactions. The musician in *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* **(fig 1)**, ca. 1673–75, in the National Gallery, London, is seated alone in a well-appointed room—complete with tile floor, curtains, and a painting on the back wall—where she awaits a lover to join her by playing the viola da gamba prominently displayed in the foreground.[3] In the painting in The Leiden Collection, however, Vermeer has focused entirely on the woman at the virginal. The artist has not only placed her at the very front of the picture plane but also omitted any contextual information beyond the simple, light-filled white wall behind her. Nothing in this small canvas distracts from the young woman's open expression and gentle smile as she gazes out at the viewer while playing the virginal, the quiet tones of which are best heard when one is nearby. There is no question that she is playing her music specifically for the viewer, which is the essence of the work's powerful personal resonance.

The special qualities that distinguish *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* became fully revealed after conservation treatments undertaken by David Bull in the winter of 2024.[4] Although, as expected, this treatment uncovered no compositional changes, the removal of aged, discolored varnish and retouching did reveal the painting's remarkable luminosity and subtle tonal values.[5] The conservation treatment gave greater visibility to the reflections of the figure's arms on the virginal's wooden

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Johannes Vermeer, *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, ca. 1673–75, oil on canvas, 51.5 x 45.5 cm, National Gallery, London, inv. no. NG2568, © National Gallery, London / Art Resource, NY.

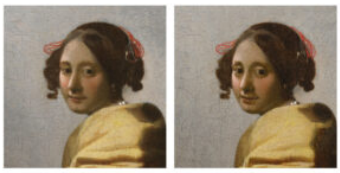


Fig 2. Left: Detail of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (before 2024 conservation treatment), The Leiden Collection, New York. Right: Detail of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* (after 2024 conservation treatment), The Leiden Collection, New York.



Fig 3. Han van Meegeren, *The Men at Emmaus*, 1937, oil on canvas, 118 x 130.5 cm, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, inv. no. St 1. Photography: Studio Tromp.

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casing; the nuances in Vermeer's modeling of the folds in the white satin dress; and the velvety blue color of the fabric on the back of the chair. Significantly, with the removal of disturbing overpaint on the woman's lips and eyebrows, her appearance has also changed (**fig 2**). Her mouth once again has the gently curving shape Vermeer intended and a small patch of light illuminates her face to the left of her left eyebrow.[6] The young woman now has a friendlier, more open expression. We find ourselves drawn into her world while imagining the quiet rhythms of the music she plays. A compelling human connection holds us in place.[7]

Young Woman Seated at a Virginal was first identified as a work by Vermeer at the turn of the twentieth century, likely by the German art historian Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929). Bode was art advisor for Alfred Beit (1853–1906), who had acquired the painting by 1904.[8] In 1907, Sir Otto Beit (1865–1930), who inherited *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* after his brother Alfred's death, lent it to an exhibition in Burlington House in London.[9] This exhibition marked the only instance when the painting was on public view prior to 2001, when it was shown both at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and at the National Gallery, London.[10] *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, which has always been privately owned, remains the only painting by Vermeer in private hands.

The light effects and harmony of color in *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* revealed by the painting's recent conservation are qualities scholars have long identified as central to Vermeer's artistic achievements. Bode, in his catalogues of the Beit collection, published in 1904 and 1913, commented that though the painting was "the smallest picture known to [him] by this artist . . . [Vermeer's] piquant characteristics are apparent."[11] In his 1913 catalogue, Bode identified these characteristics as being the master's "wonderful distribution of light and its effect within the allotted space, and in the exquisite harmony of colour, that he succeeds in producing masterpieces of the utmost delicacy of tone." He also reflected upon Vermeer's burgeoning reputation in the early years of the twentieth century, especially in America where "a Vermeer is more prized than a Raphael or a Rembrandt, and his small pictures command prices as high as works by these masters."[12]

Bode's positive assessment of Vermeer's artistic qualities, however, was not far distant from that of the Boston painter Philip Leslie Hale (1865–1931). In his monograph on Vermeer, which appeared in 1913, the very year that Bode published the second of his two Beit catalogues, Hale described the Delft master as "the greatest painter who has ever lived." He wrote, "No other Dutch master had ever attempted to arrive at tone by an exquisitely just relation of colour values."[13] Hale illustrated his chapter "Values in Vermeer's Painting," with *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, noting that "no one has ever painted the graduated light on a wall better than he."[14]



Fig 4. Detail of X-radiograph of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, The Leiden Collection, New York.



Fig 5. Johannes Vermeer, *The Guitar Player*, ca. 1670, oil on canvas, 53 x 46.3 cm, English Heritage, Kenwood House, London, inv. no. 88028841.

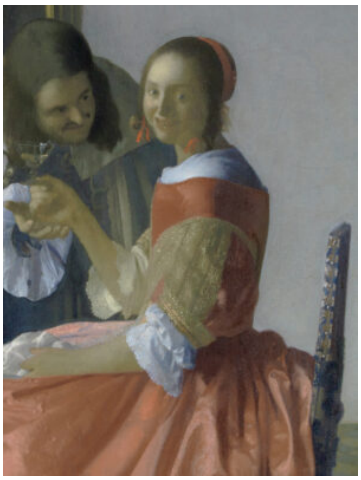


Fig 6. Detail of Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Wine Glass*, ca. 1658/59, oil on canvas, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig, inv. no. G 316, © bpk Bildagentur / Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum / C. Cortes / Art Resource, NY.

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According to Hale, Vermeer's sensitivity to tonal values was an important aspect of the master's modernity, but so also were his restrained and carefully ordered compositions.[15] In a similar vein, the Belgian writer Gustave Vanzype (1869–1955) emphasized that the Delft artist avoided anecdotal genre scenes. He wrote that Vermeer painted women with tenderness, purity, and freshness, and that their eyes "have the transparent clarity of the heavens."[16]



Fig 7. Johannes Vermeer, *The Lacemaker*, ca. 1669–71, oil on canvas, 24.5 x 21 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. M.I. 1448, © Gianni Dagli Orti / The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY.

The 1920s and 1930s were exciting decades for the discovery and appreciation of Vermeer, but they also raised the specter of incorrect attributions and even forgeries, which were entering the art market because of the artist's extraordinary appeal to contemporary taste. For example, to celebrate the opening of the new Museum Boymans building (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen) in Rotterdam in 1935, the museum's director, Dirk Hannema (1895–1984), organized the first ever exhibition devoted to the Delft Master.[17] Although the show proved an enormous success, scholars, including the Vermeer expert A.B. de Vries (1905–83), questioned the attributions of several of the paintings in the exhibition.[18] Later in 1935, a smaller Vermeer exhibition, with a discrete selection of paintings from the Rotterdam show, was held at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.[19] During that decade, however, the most dramatic event in the Vermeer world was the discovery by Abraham Bredius (1855–1946) of *The Supper at Emmaus* **(fig 3)** in 1937.[20] The Museum Boymans, at great expense, acquired the painting the following year, which it proudly unveiled to the public in June 1938.

Partly because of all this excitement about Vermeer during the 1930s, De Vries published his catalogue raisonné of Vermeer's paintings in 1939.[21] Among the forty-five works he attributed to the master was The Leiden Collection's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, which he had seen in 1938 at the home of Lady Lilian Beit in London.[22] De Vries, however, also included in this influential monograph the newly discovered *Supper at Emmaus*. The subsequent revelation that the Dutch painter Han van Meegeren (1889–1947) had forged this work shocked the Dutch art world.

The disclosure that *The Supper at Emmaus* was a forgery occurred in 1947. Van Meegeren had been arrested immediately after World War II for collaborating with the enemy by selling a Vermeer painting to Nazi field marshal Hermann Goering (1893–1946). At Van Meegeren's trial in 1947, he dramatically persuaded the jury that he had forged that painting, as well as others, including *The Supper at Emmaus*.[23] The impact of the so-called "Van Meegeren Affair" on De Vries, and other Dutch art historians, was profound and had direct implications for subsequent assessments of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*.

In December 1947, less than a month after the conclusion of the trial, De Vries began a revised Vermeer monograph in response to the "disillusion" (*désillusion*) caused by

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Van Meegeren's revelation about *The Supper at Emmaus*.[24] In the introduction to this revised edition, De Vries explained that he had decided to look critically at the entirety of Vermeer's accepted oeuvre and to prune away paintings whose authenticity he could no longer confirm. Among the works De Vries included in his list of contested attributions was *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, which he now surmised had been executed around 1800 in the style of a seventeenth-century genre painting.[25]

De Vries's rejection of the attribution of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* to Vermeer had a direct impact on subsequent opinions about the work. P.T.A. Swillens (1890–1963), in his Vermeer monograph of 1950, immediately followed De Vries's negative assessment of the painting and listed it among other "Dubious Works."[26] De Vries's doubts impacted later authors as well, including Ludwig Goldscheider (1896–1973), who, in his Vermeer monograph of 1958, described the attribution of the painting as "uncertain."[27] Importantly, De Vries's doubts about the attribution also discouraged potential buyers from acquiring *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* once Alfred Lane Beit (1903–94), who had inherited the painting, decided to sell it in the 1950s.

Beit enlisted the London art dealer Frank Lloyd (1911–98) of Marlborough Fine Art to sell *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*. Lloyd, who was concerned about De Vries's negative opinion of the work, decided to have the painting partially cleaned before bringing it to The Hague for De Vries to examine. On November 4, 1957, after he had studied the painting for some time, De Vries wrote to Lloyd that he was now convinced about its attribution to Vermeer, although he recommended that it be fully restored, as "some overpaint, however of an old date, is noticeable in several parts."[28] Lloyd followed De Vries's recommendation, after which he again showed the painting to the Dutch scholar, who responded positively to its changed appearance.

In June of the following year, De Vries wrote to Beit to explain why he had expressed doubts about the painting after he had accepted it as a work by the Delft Master in the first edition of his Vermeer monograph.[29] "After the war a second and revised edition was published . . . and as a result of the Van Meegeren–fake affair, I became very cautious and expressed doubts on this very painting, without however having seen again the original." However, having seen the painting's "very successful restauration [*sic*]," he was "strengthened" in his belief that Vermeer had executed this work. The painting, he wrote, "shows very typical and characteristic details of Vermeer's way of painting, i.e. the drawing, the structure and the colouring of the arms, the rendering of the spinet and the chair." Moreover, a technical expert with whom he had spoken indicated that the canvas was not mechanically woven and thus

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predated the nineteenth century. This same authority also found that the painting contained not only lapis lazuli but also tin-lead yellow, “which was usual before the early 18th century and later forgotten about.”

In 1959, Lawrence Gowing (1918–91), who, like De Vries, had examined the painting shortly after it had been restored in 1958, was similarly convinced that the attribution to Vermeer was correct. Like De Vries, Gowing wrote to Frank Lloyd to convey this information. Gowing informed Lloyd that he was particularly struck by the distinctive rendering of “the hands, the instrument and the space and light around them” and that he had concluded it was “the last painting we have from Vermeer’s hand.”[30] After these positive assessments by De Vries and Gowing, the painting was sold in 1960 to the collector/dealer Baron Frédéric Rolin (1919–2001) in Brussels.

Rolin decided to sell *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* in the early 1960s and enlisted David Carritt (1927–82) of Christie’s, London, to market the painting. Carritt felt it was important to have additional scholarly opinions about the work, since the publications by De Vries, Swillens, and Goldscheider had all cast doubt on its attribution to Vermeer, and De Vries was not planning to write a new revised edition. In 1963, Carritt had the painting sent to the Rijksmuseum so that Arthur van Schendel (1910–79), the museum’s director, and the collector/dealer Frits Lugt (1884–1970) could compare it with Vermeer paintings in that collection. In December of that year, Carritt summarized their conclusions in a letter to Theodore (Ted) Rousseau (1912–73), curator of European art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Carritt wrote that, after seeing the painting in person, Van Schendel and Lugt “who had previously been slightly skeptical were completely convinced of the picture’s authenticity.”[31] Carritt subsequently showed the painting to Philip Hendy (1900–80), director of the National Gallery, London. He described his meeting with Hendy in a letter to Rolin, dated January 20, 1964: “He [Hendy] expressed the opinion that it was not only a fine example of Vermeer, but in many respects superior to the Vermeers already in the National Gallery.”[32]

These positive assessments of the painting, however, were not circulated, and no mention of these opinions is found in the literature on Vermeer. After Carritt’s unsuccessful efforts to sell *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Gallery, London, the painting was returned to Rolin in Brussels, where it remained largely unavailable to Vermeer scholars. Neither Albert Blankert (1940–2022) nor Arthur Wheelock accepted the attribution of this work to Vermeer in their publications on the artist from the 1970s and 1980s.[33]

In the mid-1990s, Rolin asked Gregory Rubinstein of Sotheby’s to undertake a thorough assessment of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*. Sotheby’s engaged Libby Sheldon, Catherine Hassall, and Nicola Costaras to conduct a technical examination

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of the painting.[34] Their analyses yielded important discoveries through X-radiography **(fig 4)** and infrared reflectography, which revealed that a fully realized yellow garment existed beneath the woman's yellow shawl.[35] This earlier costume has a lower neckline and an intricately designed sleeve that leads gracefully from the neck to the woman's arms.[36] The X-radiograph revealed that Vermeer modeled this garment with interrelated planes of paint, in a manner comparable to that in *The Guitar Player* at Kenwood House **(fig 5)**, quite different from the abstract, somewhat simplistic way in which the folds in the shawl are handled.[37] Perhaps the shawl has lost glazes that would have provided for such transitions, but none have yet been detected.

In 1996, the painting was brought to the National Gallery, London, to be examined together with the two late Vermeers in that collection. Upon viewing *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* on this occasion, those present—Arthur Wheelock and the National Gallery's conservators, David Bomford and Ashok Roy, all of whom were seeing *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* in person for the first time—concluded that the work, and the two Vermeer paintings in the National Gallery, were by the same hand. Nevertheless, this examination raised questions about the yellow shawl, which was executed in a different manner than the sitter's white satin dress and the underlying yellow bodice. Largely because of these strikingly dissimilar manners of execution of fabrics, some Vermeer scholars, including this author, argued that another hand had painted the shawl following the master's death in 1675.[38]

In 2001, Rolin lent *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* to the exhibition *Vermeer and the Delft School* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Walter Liedtke (1945–2015), curator of the exhibition, added the work at the end of the installation, but only as an addendum to the show and without giving it an attribution.[39] In 2004, after restorations had removed disturbing overpainting, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* was sold at Sotheby's, London, where it was confidently attributed to Vermeer.[40] Since that time, the work has been widely acknowledged as one of the last, if not the last, painting executed by the master.[41]

The results of the technical examinations undertaken in the 1990s by Sheldon, Hassall, and Costaras, which were summarized in the 2004 Sotheby's sales catalogue and later published in full in 2006, established many similarities in the materials and techniques used in this painting and those of other late works by Vermeer.[42] Their examinations determined that the painting's pale-brown ground was applied in two layers and was identical in composition and application to the ground layers in the London paintings **(fig 1)**. Natural ultramarine (lapis lazuli) in the final paint layers served not only to color blue motifs (as in the back of the chair) but also to lend a cool luminosity to the white wall and to the highlights on the young woman's

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forearms. Vermeer used a green pigment in the shadows on the face, as he did in the two works in the National Gallery in London and in the Kenwood House painting **(fig 5)**. Finally, much as in other works, Vermeer created the orthogonal lines of the virginal by snapping onto the primed canvas chalked strings running to a pin stuck in the canvas at a point coincident with the woman's shoulder.[43]

Importantly, pigment analysis undertaken as part of this examination determined that the lead-tin yellow paint used to model the underlying bodice and the paint in the visible shawl were slightly different. V.G.M. Sivel was able to discern that Vermeer painted the bodice with pure lead-tin yellow paint, whereas the paint used for the shawl layered above the bodice was mixed with a quantity of organic yellow lake. Sivel also found large particles of feldspar, presumably contaminants from nearby Delftware production, that had settled between these two layers of paint, likely while it lay uncovered in Vermeer's studio.[44] The distinction in the character of the lead-tin yellow paint used to model these two garments, as well as the existence of feldspar between the two layers of paint, suggests that the bodice and the yellow shawl were executed a few years apart. Whether Vermeer himself returned to add the yellow shawl or another artist reworked it has been a long-standing matter of debate.[45]

Additional revelations about the painting occurred when it was conserved in 2024. With the removal of old varnish in the shadowed area of the yellow cloak, which had not been taken off in prior conservation treatments, it has become possible to distinguish where the upper paint layer overlapped the original yellow cloak and where it covered the gray paint of the back wall. This information revealed that the young woman sits quite erectly in her chair, in a pose comparable to that of the seated woman in Vermeer's *The Girl with the Wine Glass*, ca. 1660, in the Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Brunswick **(fig 6)**, and in *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, ca. 1673–75, in London **(fig 1)**. With the large shawl now covering her upper body, the young woman appears to lean forward toward the virginal even as she looks out at the viewer. Not insignificantly, the sweeping horizontal folds of her yellow shawl reflect the flowing rhythms that must have emanated from her music.

These insights about Vermeer's materials and techniques have provided much information relevant to the dating of the initial painting and the added shawl. The various connections noted above between *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* and *The Guitar Player* **(fig 5)**, in both style of painting and character of the underlying garment, suggest that Vermeer probably began painting this work in the early 1670s. This dating is reinforced through an analysis of the thread counts of the painting's canvas undertaken by C. Richard Johnson Jr. and Don H. Johnson. These researchers have determined that Vermeer painted *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* on a canvas cut from the same bolt of cloth as *The Lacemaker* in the Musée

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du Louvre, Paris, which is generally dated ca. 1669–71 **(fig 7)**.[46] Aside from their virtually identical small sizes and corresponding supports, compelling stylistic connections also exist between these two paintings, particularly in Vermeer's modeling of the subjects' faces, where strong light accents the foreheads of the women and their cheeks. Moreover, Vermeer used green pigments in the facial shadows in both *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* and *The Lacemaker*. Their respective features, and even the way their hair is parted, are so similar that it seems probable that the subject depicted in each work is the same young woman.[47]

In the 2023 exhibition titled *Vermeer* at the Rijksmuseum, these stylistic arguments, reinforced by the thread-count information, were fully accepted, and *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* was dated ca. 1670–72.[48] However, information provided (to this point) by the Rijksmuseum suggests that Sivel's pigment analysis, which indicates that a period of time existed between the execution of the underlying costume and the shawl, was not fully considered. According to the exhibition catalogue, the yellow shawl was "an alteration made by Vermeer himself during the painting process. In the initial design, the pleats of the satin skirt extend under the shawl, but in the final paint layers they do not continue, stopping instead at the shawl's edge. This indicates that the shawl and skirt were elaborated at the same stage."[49]

Despite the Rijksmuseum's conclusion that Vermeer executed the shawl in the early 1670s when he painted the rest of the painting, stylistic and technical evidence points to a later period of execution for the shawl. Its modeling differs fundamentally from that of the woman's dress, which, like those in *The Guitar Player* **(fig 5)** and *Woman Standing at a Virginal* in London, is deftly rendered with translucent shadows laid over the paler ground before the application of thicker half-lights and light tones.[50] The only instance where Vermeer modeled fabric in a comparable manner to that of the shawl is *A Young Woman Seated at the Virginal* in the National Gallery, London (**fig 1**), which he likely painted somewhere between 1673–75. In that work, Vermeer starkly juxtaposed highlights on the sweeping folds of the woman's blue dress with deep pockets of shade. The similarities in the way these fabrics are treated suggest that Vermeer revised The Leiden Collection's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* at about the same time, likely also 1673–75.[51]

The gap in time between when Vermeer initially painted this composition and when he added the yellow shawl could be explained by the impact on his life of the devastating *Rampjaar* (Disaster Year) of 1672. The hostilities during the *Rampjaar*, when French and German forces invaded the Netherlands, negatively affected the art market. Following Vermeer's death in December 1675, the artist's widow, Catharina Bolnes (ca. 1631–87), lamented that her husband had "been able to earn very little or hardly anything at all" because of the war with the King of France.[52] Nevertheless, it

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seems unlikely that Vermeer stopped painting after 1672, as some have postulated.[53] At his death, Vermeer left “ten painter’s canvases” among the supplies in his studio, an indication that he was still active as a painter.[54] The broad folds of the shawl may reflect a different style of dress that became fashionable after the French invasion of the Netherlands, but it also gave the young woman a timeless, classical look. Vermeer probably added the red ribbons adorning the young woman’s hair at the same time. Much as Gowing posited, Vermeer likely made his revisions to *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* during the last year of his life. Whether he did so on his own initiative or because of a patron’s request is a fascinating question that, tantalizingly, remains open.[55]

- Walter A. Liedtke and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., 2017; revised by Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., 2020, 2023; rewritten by Arthur K. Wheelock, 2024

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Endnotes

1. I am very grateful for the editorial suggestions of my colleagues at The Leiden Collection, Elizabeth Nogrady, Sara Smith, and Caroline Van Cauwenberge.
2. For a discussion of the virginal in relationship to Vermeer, see Marjorie E. Wieseman, "Inventing Duets," in *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry*, ed. Adriaan E. Waiboer, Blaise Ducos, and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art; Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Paris, Musée du Louvre) (New Haven, 2017), 135–39.
3. The chronology of Vermeer's late paintings is difficult to establish. The proposed dates for these paintings are those found in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Vermeer and the Art of Painting* (New Haven, 1995), 183–86. Most scholars, including Bart Cornelis, "Musical Appeal," in *Vermeer*, ed. Pieter Roelofs and Gregor J.M. Weber (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (London, 2023), date all of these paintings to ca. 1670–72. There is no evidence, however, that Vermeer stopped painting in 1672 even though the art market deteriorated drastically during the *Rampjaar* (Disaster Year).
4. The Dutch conservator Martin Bijl conserved the painting in 2003/4. Prior restorations are documented to 1957 and 1958. Documentation on these conservation treatments is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files.
5. Many of the retouchings David Bull removed had been applied to minimize craquelure that had developed as part of the aging process. A copy of the treatment report is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files.
6. I would like to thank Libby Sheldon for her observations about the impact of these retouchings on the young woman's expression. Correspondence, 24 October 2023.
7. A newly acquired seventeenth-century Dutch frame, which replaces the elaborate gold frame that had been on the painting for many years, further enhances the striking visual power of the image.
8. Bode included a discussion of this painting in his 1904 catalogue of the collection. See Wilhelm von Bode, *The Art Collection of Mr. Alfred Beit at His Residence 26 Park Lane London* (Berlin, 1904), 9. The painting's earlier provenance is not known. Bode's text reads: "The picture . . . shows a girl in white and yellow, playing a harpsichord which is placed beside a pale-violet wall. It is the smallest picture by the master known to the writer, and is not a particularly important one; but at the same time it shows us the striking characteristics of the artist." See also Provenance.
9. Burlington Fine Arts Club, *A Collection of Pictures, Decorative Furniture and Other Works of Art* (London, 1907), no. 13. See Exhibition History.
10. The painting, lent by Baron Frédéric Rolin, was shown in both venues at the time of the 2001 exhibition *Vermeer and the Delft School*, albeit out-of-catalogue and without an attribution. The work has been exhibited several times since then, including in the exhibition *Vermeer* at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in 2023. See also Exhibition History.

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11. Wilhelm von Bode, *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures and Bronzes in the Possession of Mr. Otto Beit* (London, 1913), 9. The full text largely repeats that in his 1904 catalogue (see note 8). It reads: "A young girl clad in white and yellow seated at a spinet; a white wall toning to grayish-lilac forms the background. It is the smallest picture known to me by this artist and, on the whole, not of great importance; but his piquant characteristics are apparent in it."
12. Wilhelm von Bode, *Catalogue of the Collection of Pictures and Bronzes in the Possession of Mr. Otto Beit* (London, 1913), 9.
13. Philip Leslie Hale, *Vermeer* (Boston, 1937), 3, 4.
14. Philip Leslie Hale, *Vermeer* (Boston, 1937), 154.
15. Philip Leslie Hale, *Vermeer* (Boston, 1937), 161–63.
16. Gustave Vanzype, *Jan Vermeer de Delft* (Paris, 1925), 67. Vanzype includes a list of paintings, among them *Femme au clavecin*, before commenting that they "n'ont rien qui ne soit chaste . . . dont les yeux ont des clartés transparentes de ciels."
17. Museum Boymans, *Vermeer: Oorsprong en invloed: Fabritius, De Hooch, De Witte* (Exh. cat. Rotterdam, Museum Boymans) (Rotterdam, 1935).
18. A.B. de Vries, *Jan Vermeer van Delft* (Amsterdam, 1939), 43–46.
19. Rijksmuseum, *Vermeer tentoonstelling* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (Amsterdam, 1935). *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* was not lent to either the Rotterdam or the Amsterdam exhibition that year.
20. Abraham Bredius, "A New Vermeer," *Burlington Magazine* 71 (1937): 211.
21. A.B. de Vries, *Jan Vermeer van Delft* (Amsterdam, 1939), 95, no. 43, fig. 66.
22. A.B. de Vries to Alfred Beit, 19 June 1958, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. I am grateful to Anne Woollett, curator at the J. Paul Getty Museum, for informing me about this letter from De Vries to Beit (correspondence, 23 May 2024). A copy of the letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial records.
23. In November 1947, Van Meegeren was convicted of forgery, not for collaborating with the enemy, and was sent to prison. Van Meegeren's story has been frequently told. For an authoritative account, see Friso Lammertse et al., *Van Meegeren's Vermeers: The Connoisseur's Eye and the Forger's Art* (Exh. cat. Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen) (Rotterdam, 2011).
24. A.B. de Vries, *Jan Vermeer van Delft* (Basel, 1948), 9.
25. A.B. de Vries, *Jan Vermeer van Delft* (Basel, 1948), 65, 68–69, no. 39. De Vries did not explain his reasoning for this change in attribution.
26. P.T.A. Swillens, *Johannes Vermeer, Painter of Delft, 1632–1675* (Utrecht, 1950), 63, 108, 154, no. 30 (under "Dubious Works").
27. Ludwig Goldscheider, *Johannes Vermeer: The Paintings, Complete Edition* (London, 1958), 5, 144, no. 6, pl. 6 (as "uncertain attribution"). He later fully accepted the attribution after he studied the cleaned

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painting in May 1959. Ludwig Goldscheider, *Johannes Vermeer: The Paintings, Complete Edition*, rev. ed. (London, 1967), 133, no. 33, pl. 75.

28. A.B. de Vries to Frank Lloyd, 4 November 1957, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. I am grateful to Anne Woollett, curator at the J. Paul Getty Museum, for informing me about this letter from De Vries to Lloyd (correspondence, 23 May 2024). A copy of the letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial records.

29. A.B. de Vries to Alfred Beit, 19 June 1958, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. A copy of this letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial records.

30. Lawrence Gowing to Marlborough Fine Art, London, 20 May 1959. A copy of this letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files. The restoration of the painting at this time also persuaded Ludwig Goldscheider that the attribution to Vermeer was correct. See Ludwig Goldscheider, *Johannes Vermeer: The Paintings, Complete Edition*, rev. ed. (London, 1967), 133, no. 33.

31. David Carritt to Theodore (Ted) Rousseau, 12 December 1963. A copy of this letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files.

32. David Carritt to Baron Frédéric Rolin, 20 January 1964. A copy of this letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files. The two Vermeer paintings in the National Gallery, London, Carritt refers to are *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal*, ca. 1670–72, and *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, ca. 1673–75 (see fig 1).

33. In a letter to the painting's then-owner Baron Frédéric Rolin, dated 4 November 1976, Albert Blankert proposed that the painting was executed by an artist familiar with Vermeer. A copy of this letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files. Blankert did not include the painting in his monographs on Vermeer: Albert Blankert, *Johannes Vermeer van Delft, 1632–1675: Complete Edition of the Paintings* (Utrecht, 1975; reprint, Oxford, 1978); and Albert Blankert, Gilles Aillaud, and John Michael Montias, *Vermeer* (New York, 1988). In 1981, Arthur Wheelock, who had not seen the painting, described it as being "by circle of Vermeer" in Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Jan Vermeer* (New York, 1981), 45, no. 53. In 1998, Ben Broos described the painting as a twentieth-century imitation. See Ben Broos, "Vermeer: Malice and Misconception," in *Vermeer Studies*, ed. Ivan Gaskell and Michiel Jonker (Washington, D.C., 1998), 27, 29, fig. 14, 33n58 (as by an "unidentified artist").

34. Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): 89–97.

35. For a full description of these changes, see Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): 95–96.

36. Liedtke has suggested that the infrared photograph of the painting indicates that this garment had a fur trim similar to that of the jacket of the woman in *The Guitar Player* at Kenwood House. See Walter Liedtke, *Vermeer: The Complete Paintings* (New York, 2008), 176. For an illustration of the infrared photo, see Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): fig. 31.

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37. In the shawl, bands of dark paint, signifying deep troughs of shaded fabric, are directly juxtaposed with the bright-yellow tops of the folds, with no transitional tones to indicate the recession of the folds into depth.

38. The 2017 and 2020, archived versions of this entry, written by Walter A. Liedtke and Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., read: "The skirt came up in gathered folds to the waist, and the broad swag of drapery from the elbows to the back of the chair was not present originally. Pigment analysis has also determined that this undergarment was executed with a different mixture of lead-tin yellow paint than that of the shawl. The probability, thus, is that the shawl was a later addition, likely executed shortly after Vermeer's death."

39. Walter Liedtke, ed., *Vermeer and the Delft School* (Exh. cat. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art; London, National Gallery) (New York, 2001), 403, 406n11, 581n46. The painting was subsequently also shown in the London venue.

40. This conservation treatment was undertaken by Martin Bijl. At this sale (Sotheby's, London, 7 July 2004, no. 8), the painting was acquired by Steve Wynn. In 2008, Wynn sold this painting to Thomas S. Kaplan, founder of The Leiden Collection. See Provenance.

41. The only voice critical of the painting's attribution to Vermeer in recent years is that of Jonathan Janson, who published his dissenting view, "*Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*: A Second Look," in 2024 on his website, *Essential Vermeer*.

42. Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): 89–97.

43. Jørgen Wadum, "Vermeer in Perspective," in *Johannes Vermeer*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 1995), 67, 71, reports thirteen cases of a pinhole at the vanishing point in canvases by Vermeer.

44. V.G.M. Sivel et al., "The Cloak of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*: Vermeer, or a Later Hand?," *Art Matters: Netherlands Technical Studies in Art* 4 (2007): 90–96.

45. Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): 96. They write: "While the luminosity and finely modelled passages of the skirt closely echo those of *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal* in the National Gallery, the apparent inelegance of the shawl is less easy to elucidate. The hypothesis of a later hand being responsible for it can neither be substantiated nor ruled out on the basis of the evidence provided by the cross-sections of the paint layers."

46. Walter Liedtke, C. Richard Johnson Jr., and Don H. Johnson, "Canvas Matches in Vermeer: A Case Study in the Computer Analysis of Fabric Supports," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47 (2012): 100. Paintings from the same bolt of canvas could have a range of dates depending on how quickly the artist worked and used up his materials at hand. For stylistic reasons, it is likely that *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* dates a few years after *The Lacemaker*. For further discussion on this matter, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., "The Scientific Examination of Works of Art: Its Potentials and Its Limitations,"

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in *Counting Vermeer: Using Weave Maps to Study Vermeer's Canvases*, ed. C. Richard Johnson Jr. and William A. Sethares, RKD Studies (The Hague, 2017), http://countingvermeer.rkdstudies.nl/.

47. For compositional and thematic reasons, however, it seems unlikely that Vermeer conceived these paintings as pendants.

48. Pieter Roelofs and Gregor J.M. Weber, eds., *Vermeer* (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (London, 2023), 291. The technical research conducted by the Vermeer research team at the Rijksmuseum will be published in 2025.

49. Bart Cornelis, "Musical Appeal," in *Vermeer*, ed. Pieter Roelofs and Gregor J.M. Weber (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (London, 2023), 226.

50. Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): 97.

51. For arguments for this dating, see Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *Johannes Vermeer* (Exh. cat. The Hague, Mauritshuis; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art) (New Haven, 1995), 196–203. This late date, which Albert Blankert also proposed (see Albert Blankert, *Johannes Vermeer van Delft, 1632–1675: Complete Edition of the Paintings* [Utrecht, 1975; reprint, Oxford, 1978], cat. 31), differs from that of Bart Cornelis who, in the Rijksmuseum Vermeer catalogue, dates the painting ca. 1670–72. See Bart Cornelis, "Musical Appeal," in *Vermeer*, ed. Pieter Roelofs and Gregor J.M. Weber (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (London, 2023), 225. Cornelis also dates *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* and *A Young Woman Standing at a Virginal*, both in The National Gallery, London, to ca. 1670–72, in part because they are on canvases from the same bolt of cloth (see Walter Liedtke, C. Richard Johnson Jr., and Don H. Johnson, "Canvas Matches in Vermeer: A Case Study in the Computer Analysis of Fabric Supports," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47 [2012]: 105). However, paintings from the same bolt of canvas could have a range of dates depending on how quickly the artist worked and used up his materials at hand.

52. John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton, 1989), 344–45, doc. 367. This lament indicates that Vermeer continued to try to sell paintings during this difficult period, likely both as an artist and as an art dealer.

53. Pieter Roelofs, "Johannes Vermeer (Delft 1632–1675) Modestly Masterful," in *Vermeer*, ed. Pieter Roelofs and Gregor J.M. Weber (Exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum) (London, 2023), 35.

54. John Michael Montias, *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History* (Princeton, 1989), 341, under doc. 364. These canvases were most likely stretched and primed but otherwise unpainted.

55. Lawrence Gowing to Marlborough Fine Art, London, May 20, 1959. A copy of this letter is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files.

Provenance

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- Possibly Pieter Claesz van Ruijven (1624–74), Delft; by descent to his son-in-law, Jacob Dissius (1653–95) (his sale, Amsterdam, 16 May 1696, no. 37 [for 42 guilders 10 stuivers]); or possibly Nicholas van Assendelft (1630–92), Delft; by descent to his widow, Maria Magdalena van den Hoeff (1624–1711), Delft.
- (Possible sale, Amsterdam, 11 July 1714, no. 12 [for 55 florins].)
- Possibly Wessel Ryers (his sale, Amsterdam, 21 September 1814, no. 93 [for 30 florins to Willem Gruyter]).
- [Willem Gruyter the Elder (1763–1832), Amsterdam.]
- Alfred Beit (1853–1906), London, by 1904; by descent to his brother, Sir Otto Beit (1865–1930), 1st Baronet, London; by descent to his widow, Lilian Carter Beit (1874–1946); by descent to her son, Sir Alfred Lane Beit (1903–94), 2nd Baronet, Russborough House, Ireland [through Marlborough Fine Art, London (to Baron Frédéric Rolin)].
- Baron Frédéric Rolin (1919–2001), Brussels, 1960; by descent (sale, Sotheby's, London, 7 July 2004, no. 8 [to Steve Wynn]).
- Steve Wynn (b. 1942), Las Vegas, 2004 [through Otto Naumann Ltd., New York].[1]
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2008.

Provenance Notes

1. Rembrandt van Rijn's *Self-Portrait with Shaded Eyes*, now in The Leiden Collection, was also formerly in the collection of Steve Wynn.

Exhibition History

- London, Burlington Fine Arts Club, "A Collection of Pictures, Decorative Furniture and Other Works of Art," 1907, no. 13 [lent by Otto Beit].
- New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Vermeer and the Delft School," 8 March–27 May 2001; London, National Gallery, 20 June–16 September 2001 [lent by Baron Frédéric Rolin].
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, 11 August 2004–1 March 2005 [lent by Steve Wynn].
- Tokyo, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, "Vermeer and the Delft Style," 2 August–14 December 2008, no. 31 [lent by the present owner].
- New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, 29 December 2008–30

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November 2009 [lent by the present owner].

- Norfolk, Virginia, Chrysler Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, 19 August 2010–January 2011 [lent by the present owner].
- Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, "Vermeer's Women: Secrets and Silence," 17 September 2011–15 January 2012, no. 28 [lent by the present owner].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, January–September 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Rome, Scuderie del Quirinale, "Johannes Vermeer and the Golden Age of Dutch Art," 27 September 2012–20 January 2013 [lent by present owner].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, on loan with the permanent collection, January–June 2013 [lent by the present owner].
- London, National Gallery, "Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure," 25 June–8 September 2013, no. 25 [lent by the present owner].
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, 26 October 2013–21 September 2014 [lent by the present owner].
- Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, "Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries," 26 October 2014–4 January 2015; Birmingham, Birmingham Museum of Art, 4 February–26 April 2015, no. 44 [lent by the present owner].
- Dallas, Dallas Museum of Art, "Vermeer Suite: Music in 17th-Century Dutch Painting," 17 January–21 August 2016 [lent by the present owner].
- Paris, Musée du Louvre, "Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting," 22 February–22 May 2017, no. 18 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, "Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 17 June–3 September 2017, no. 69 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 28 March–22 July 2018, no. 4 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum, "The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection," 5 September 2018–13 January 2019, no. 4 [lent by the present owner].
- Abu Dhabi, Louvre Abu Dhabi, "Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre," 14 February–18 May 2019, no. 85 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, "Vermeer," 10 February–4 June 2023, no. 37 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H'ART Museum, "From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection," 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].

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- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, “Art and Life in Rembrandt’s Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].

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Technical Summary

The painting is unsigned and undated.

The support, a single piece of medium-weight, plain-weave fabric, has been lined.[1] The weave includes slightly thicker threads each centimeter in both the vertical and horizontal directions. The vertical threads run perfectly straight, while the horizontal threads slope downward when viewed left to right. All four tacking margins have been removed, and slight cusping is present along all edges. An illegible green wax collection seal and numerical inscriptions are on the stretcher, and two unidentified red import stamps are attached to the lining.

In 2010, the Thread Count Automation Project (TCAP) identified weave matches linking the supports of The Leiden Collection's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, then dated ca. 1672–75, and the Louvre's *Lacemaker*, generally dated ca. 1669–71.[2] Richard Johnson, Don Johnson, and Robert Erdmann's report states: "Presuming Vermeer purchased canvas in sizes larger than his paintings, a weave match is strong evidence that both, now separate, canvases were once joined and both in Vermeer's possession. This argues for the authenticity of one half of a matching pair to carry over to the other half of the pair."[3] This weave match confirms the findings of Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, published in *the Burlington Magazine* (February 2006), stating that "a painting of a similar size to *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, the *Lacemaker*, is on a canvas made of precisely the same type of rather coarse thread and has exactly the same thread count. . . . So similar is the appearance of the two canvases that they could well be from the same bolt."[4]

A light-gray ground was applied to the canvas support in at least two layers, followed by a thin, red-brown imprimatura glaze.[5] The paint was applied from dark to light, although dark glazes were applied over the lighter brown paint along the drapery folds of the yellow shawl to enhance the illusion of depth. The composition's perspective lines converge in the yellow shawl draped over the figure's shoulder. A previously filled and inpainted small loss in the shawl, below and slightly to the left of the two white pearls along the figure's neck, may mark the vanishing point.[6]

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No underdrawing is visible in infrared images captured at 780–1000 nanometers. The infrared images indicate that the yellow shawl was added after the vertical folds of the skirt were painted. Dark pentimenti through the figure's hands and wrists suggest the figure was painted after the virginal.

The painting was most recently conserved in 2024 by David Bull, who confirmed that the paint and ground layers are secure and in stable condition, with no signs of cleavage or flaking.[7]

Older retouching and discolored varnish were removed and small losses were inpainted to slightly minimize the craquelure before revarnishing.

Technical Summary Endnotes

1. Narrow remnants of primed canvas remain along all but the left edge. The lining canvas and its adhesive are in stable condition.
2. See also Walter Liedtke, C. Richard Johnson Jr., and Don H. Johnson, "Canvas Matches in Vermeer: A Case Study in the Computer Analysis of Fabric Supports," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47 (2012): 102.
3. C. Richard Johnson Jr., Don H. Johnson, and Robert G. Erdmann, "Counting Vermeer and the Delt School," *Thread Count Automation Project: Annual Report* (2010), 4. See also Walter Liedtke, C. Richard Johnson Jr., and Don H. Johnson, "Canvas Matches in Vermeer: A Case Study in the Computer Analysis of Fabric Supports," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47 (2012): 101–8.
4. Libby Sheldon and Nicola Costaras, "Johannes Vermeer's *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*," *Burlington Magazine* 148 (2006): 89–97.
5. From page one of the painting analysis report by C. Hassall and L. Sheldon, UCL Painting Analysis Ltd, May 1997 (on file at The Leiden Collection).
6. This vanishing point is about 1 cm below and slightly to the left of the two white pearls along the figure's neck.
7. The most recent previous conservation treatment had been undertaken by the Dutch conservator Martin Bijl in 2003–4. Prior restorations are documented to 1957 and 1958. Documentation on these conservation treatments is in The Leiden Collection curatorial files.

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