

Rijksmuseum's Vermeer exhibition most successful in its history



Visitors view "Lady Writing a Letter with her Maid" on display in the "Vermeer" exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, June 4, 2023. In March, the Rijksmuseum released 200,000 more tickets — the museum's website crashed. (Ivvy Njikiktjen/The New York Times)

AMSTERDAM.— From 7 June to 10 October, 6 paintings by Vermeer will remain on display in the Gallery of Honour of the [Rijksmuseum](#).

Despite having carefully limited numbers in order to give visitors the best experience possible, the Rijksmuseum's Vermeer exhibition finished as the most successful exhibition in its history with 650,000 visitors from 113 nations, over 16 weeks from 10 February to 4 June 2023.

Vermeer is the artist of peacefulness and intimacy. We wanted the visitors to enjoy it to the fullest. This was only possible by limiting the number of visitors. The Rijksmuseum is grateful for the generous loans from museums around the world that have enabled it to bring together more works by Vermeer than ever before. - Taco Dibbits, general director Rijksmuseum

From 7 June to 10 October, 6 paintings by Vermeer will remain on display in the Gallery of Honour of the Rijksmuseum. The Girl in the Red Hat (National Gallery of Art, Washington) and Young Woman at the Virginal (The Leiden Collection, New York) are temporarily shown together with the four works by Vermeer from the collection of the Rijksmuseum.

Facts

- The exhibition featured 28 of the 37 works by the artist, including the Girl with a Pearl Earring and The Milkmaid.
- 7 paintings had never before been on public display in the Netherlands, including the three paintings from The Frick Collection in New York and the recently restored Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden.
- 650.000 art lovers from 113 nations visited the exhibition.
- 55% of the visitors came from the Netherlands.

Of the international visitors, the top 15 nations are:

- 1, France 17%; 2, Germany 16%; 3, UK 16%; 4, United States 14%; 5, Belgium 14%; 6, Poland 4%; 7, Italy 3%; 8, Spain 2.3%; 9, Switzerland 1.6%; 10, Canada 1.3%; 11, Ireland 1.1%; 12, Austria 0.8%; 13, Japan 0.8%; 14, Sweden 0.7%; 15, Finland 0.6%.

- The visitors rated the exhibition with an appreciation score of 8.7.
- A visit to the Vermeer exhibition was an official part of the state visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to the Netherlands.
- The exhibition was designed by architect and designer Jean-Michel Wilmotte.
- Irma Boom designed the catalogue and was responsible for all the graphic design.
- More than 100,000 copies of the Vermeer catalogue have been sold, more than any other exhibition catalogue in the history of the Rijksmuseum.
- In addition, the Rijksmuseum published Vermeer. Faith, Light, and Reflection by Gregor J.M. Weber.
- For kids the book Miffy x Vermeer was published.
- On the website Closer to Vermeer, nearly 800,000 people have been transported into Vermeer's world narrated by Stephen Fry. The website was awarded with two Webby Awards and a Golden European Design Award.
- Two podcast episodes (in Dutch) were published, Life and Work of Vermeer and Camera Obscura and the Faith; The episode about the life and work of Vermeer is the Rijksmuseum's most-listened-to podcast episode ever (more than 27,000 downloads).
- The Rijksmuseum also contributed to the TV program De Nieuwe Vermeer (NPO1/Omroep Max).
- Two documentaries have been made about the exhibition. Director Suzanne Raes followed the preparations for the exhibition for her film Close to Vermeer, and Vermeer: The Greatest Exhibition appeared in the Exhibition on Screen series.
- For blind and partially sighted visitors an audio description tour was available and on March 31, there were guided tours during which paintings were described, objects to feel were available and music was played on the instruments from Vermeer's paintings.
- On 12 March and 3 May there were sensory-friendly evening openings.
- On March 19, there was a lecture in Dutch Sign Language and a lecture with subtitles for deaf and hard of hearing visitors.
- All the velvet curtains at the exhibition are given a second life. Some are reused in other museums (Kunsthal KAdE in Amersfoort and Museum Gouda), while others are processed by BORO*ATELIER into new products sold in the Rijksmuseum shop.

Research

The exhibition led to new art historical and material technical research, both within and outside the Rijksmuseum. This has yielded more insights into his working process, his knowledge of optical tools, the context in which his art was created, and his life in Delft.

The main findings are:

Material technical research provided a better understanding of the underpainting of the Milkmaid. It reveals that Vermeer used quick brushstrokes to establish the composition. The can and board visible in the underpainting, but not in the final painting, indicate that Vermeer continued to seek tranquility and the perfect composition during the painting process. More on this: Rijksmuseum reveals major discoveries on Vermeer's painting The Milkmaid - Rijksmuseum

New art historical research shows the influence of the Catholic Jesuit order in Delft on Vermeer's life and work. Vermeer also came into contact with the camera obscura, the precursor to the photographic camera, through the Jesuits. More on this: Revelatory new insights unveiled in new Vermeer biography - Rijksmuseum

Contrary to what was previously assumed, it is revealed that Pieter Claesz van Ruijven was not alone, but explicitly together with his wife Maria de Knuijt, the most important patron of Vermeer.

After the exhibition, the research continues. In the coming weeks, the Rijksmuseum will be investigating the paintings View of Delft (Mauritshuis, The Hague), The Geographer (Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main), Saint Praxedis (Kufu Company Inc., on loan to The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo), and Christ in the House of Martha and Mary (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh). The research on Vermeer's paintings is being carried out in collaboration with the Mauritshuis and the University of Antwerp and will be published in 2025, 350 years after Vermeer's death.