

**Celebrating 60 Years of Fruitful Engagement between Vermeer's
Young Woman Seated at a Virginal and the Rijksmuseum,
The Leiden Collection's Masterpiece to Remain on View
through October 10, 2023, in the Rijksmuseum's Gallery of Honour
alongside Five Additional Jewels by the Celebrated Artist**



New York, New York, June 27, 2023— The Leiden Collection, a unique lending library for Old Masters that has enjoyed the distinction of contributing its *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* to the stunning exhibition [“Vermeer”](#) — the monumental, once-in-a-generation cultural event organized by the Rijksmuseum — has extended the loan of its own Vermeer. The last of the master's mature works to remain in private hands, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* will stay on view in the Rijksmuseum's Gallery of Honour until October 10, 2023. The painting will hang alongside the museum's four Vermeers as well as the National Gallery of Art's iconic *Girl with a Red Hat*.

Pieter Roelofs, Head of Fine and Decorative Arts at the Rijksmuseum, remarked: “Thanks to the generosity of The Leiden Collection and the National Gallery of Art, visitors to the Rijksmuseum will be able to see no fewer than six Vermeer paintings together in the Gallery of Honour for four months after the Vermeer exhibition. We are grateful to both lenders for their kind gesture to share these exquisite paintings with the public in Amsterdam, and during the summer as well.”

“We are delighted to continue the loan of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* to the Rijksmuseum,” said Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan, co-founder of The Leiden Collection. “I have felt enormous affection for the national museum of the Netherlands from my very first encounter with Amsterdam as a youth. It is only fitting that visitors to the museum would enjoy an extended opportunity to engage with this particular painting there, given the central role that the Rijksmuseum has played not only in my personal journey in art, but also in this work's singularly fascinating history and associated scholarly endeavors.”

In addition to *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* residing at the Rijksmuseum through the Summer 2023, a selection of thirty-five important history paintings, [“Rembrandt and his Contemporaries: History Paintings from The Leiden Collection”](#) remains on display through August 2023 at the Hermitage Amsterdam. [As reported by The New York Times](#), the Hermitage Amsterdam will be renamed the H’ART Museum and in 2025, together with The Leiden Collection, will collaborate on a major exhibition to celebrate the city of Amsterdam’s 750th anniversary with the unprecedented loan of the Collection’s 17 Rembrandts, which will mark the first time ever that these paintings are all on display in one show.

A Triumph of Connoisseurship

As was only discovered during the preparations for the “Vermeer” exhibition, the Rijksmuseum’s engagement with the painting reaches back precisely sixty years. Following intensive debate among Vermeer experts about the possible addition of a new work to the short list of the master’s accepted works, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* was brought to Amsterdam in 1963 so that Director Arthur van Schendel and renowned connoisseur and art historian Frits Lugt could compare it to the works belonging to the Rijksmuseum’s collection.

Hitherto unpublished and most extraordinary [correspondences](#) from that time, copies of which are now in The Leiden Collection’s curatorial files, have revealed that the Rijksmuseum’s Vermeers were taken down and a scrupulous comparison carried out between them and the “Beit picture” — so named after its former owner, Sir Alfred Lane Beit. The first missive, dated December 12, 1963, was sent by David Carritt of Christie’s, London, to Theodore (Ted) Rousseau, Chief curator of paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, describing the context of the examination. The impact of the Rijksmuseum-held confrontation must have been momentous. For it led Van Schendel and Lugt, both of whom had not seen the original painting and had previously conveyed skepticism about a new addition to Vermeer’s canon, to lose their reservations and become “entirely convinced of the work’s authenticity”.

The two scholars were not to stand alone in their sharp connoisseurship, however. It transpires that Carritt then issued a second letter, dated January 20, 1964, to the painting’s new owner, Baron Frédéric Rolin, recounting the ardent reaction of Philip Hendy, Director of The National Gallery, London, to whom the work had been shown, and in which 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”.

While the Rijksmuseum’s original attribution remained unknown until the present, direct comparison between The National Gallery, London’s works and *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* was to prove equally persuasive years later — this time again, to previously reserved experts of the master. Professor Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., Senior Advisor of The Leiden Collection and for over four decades prior to that the Curator of Northern Baroque Paintings at the National Gallery of Art, Washington — an era during which he composed dozens of shows, including the theretofore largest and most celebrated exhibition of Vermeer’s works in 1996, and personally engaged with *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* — has provided [compelling exposition](#) upon the profoundly intimate impact that the painting unleashes onto the viewer when encountering the piece:

“[*Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*] captures the quiet joy of a young woman in harmony with her music. As she 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 dulcet sounds of her instrument with the viewer. (...) Much of the magic of Vermeer’s paintings arises from the visual restraint of his images, which gives them a timeless character

despite the immediacy of his scenes. Here Vermeer has focused entirely on the woman and her instrument, giving the viewer no hint of the nature of the room in which she sits save the simple white wall behind her. All our attention, thus, is directed to her, and she responds in kind. This powerful human connection holds us in place. We find ourselves drawn into her world and imagining the quiet rhythms of the music she plays.”

A Feat of Advanced Research and Technical Analysis

Since that first visit in 1963 of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* to the Rijksmuseum, thorough technical analysis and advanced research have since corroborated the museum’s positive conclusion. These findings are described in greater detail in the [scholarly entry](#) about the painting that is available on The Leiden Collection’s website. In 2006, for instance, art historian Libby Sheldon and conservator Nicola Costaras were able to uncover definite similarities with the pigments and painting techniques employed in Vermeer’s late works — an insight that also applies to the master’s singular use of green earth in the shadowing of the face. In 2011, scholars C. Richard Johnson and Don H. Johnson achieved another major breakthrough when discovering that *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* was painted on a piece of canvas cut from the very same roll of linen as the one Vermeer used to execute The Louvre’s *The Lacemaker*.

The Leiden Collection is especially known for its “evangelical” dissemination of the works and narrative of Rembrandt and his contemporaries around the world. Yet the exhibition history of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* has been equally charmed. This sensitive and precious piece has enjoyed continuous popular appeal across institutions and geographies ever since its acquisition in 2004 by the American collector Steve Wynn. Already fully attributed to Vermeer after having been loaned by Wynn and then The Leiden Collection to the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum’s [“Vermeer and the Delft Style”](#) exhibition in 2008, the permanent collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and The Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, the painting was subsequently catalogued by its curators and engaged in a series of loans to other prominent institutions. These included The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge for its exhibition [“Vermeer’s Women: Secrets and Silence”](#), the permanent collection of Oxford’s Ashmolean Museum, and The National Gallery in London for the show [“Vermeer and Music: The Art of Love and Leisure”](#).

After additional stints within the permanent collection of The Philadelphia Museum of Art, and later on as part of The North Carolina Museum of Art’s show [“Small Treasures: Rembrandt, Vermeer, Hals, and Their Contemporaries”](#) presented in both Raleigh and Birmingham, the work was exhibited at The Dallas Museum of Art’s [“Vermeer Suite: Music in 17th-Century Dutch Painting”](#). At long last, it was paired together with The Louvre’s *The Lacemaker* for the first time at the museum’s 2017 exhibition [“Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting”](#) in Paris. Highly successful tours of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* alongside The Leiden Collection’s Rembrandts and other masterpieces of Dutch art were to follow. First in China in 2017-2018, where the painting was presented at the exhibitions [“Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection”](#) (National Museum of China, Beijing) and [“Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection”](#) (Long Museum, West Bund). She was then exhibited to great acclaim in Russia in 2018-2019 at the dedicated shows [“The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection”](#) at both The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow and The State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, which stood among the most visited paintings exhibitions in the world that year. Yet again paired with The Louvre’s *The Lacemaker*, *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* appeared at Louvre Abu

Dhabi in 2019 for the landmark collaboration [“Rembrandt, Vermeer and the Dutch Golden Age. Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection and the Musée du Louvre.”](#)

More technical discoveries were to follow these exhibitions, and most fittingly at the Rijksmuseum itself — the “mother ship” of Dutch art. During the preparations for the opening of the museum’s show “Vermeer”, advanced technical analysis was performed on the painting by the museum’s team of conservators. A major goal of this undertaking was to determine whether the yellow shawl worn by the young woman around her shoulders constituted a later addition or in fact one of Vermeer’s pentimenti (corrections). This examination conclusively demonstrated that the accessory was not painted by a later hand. Rather, it was the result of an alteration made by Vermeer himself during the painting process. In the initial design, the pleats of the satin skirt extend under the shawl, while in the final paint layers they do not continue — stopping instead at the shawl’s edge. This confirms that both the shawl and the skirt were elaborated at the same stage by the master himself. As noted in the exhibition catalogue, “given the strong stylistic kinship existing with other works produced by the master from the years 1670–1672, the attribution of *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal* in its entirety to Vermeer is now secure.” In fact, this process revealed additional elegant pre-existing stylistic details consistent with the master’s hand, which will be further explored after the conclusion of the extended loan.

Dr. Kaplan concluded: “Learning more about the works in The Leiden Collection, and sharing those remarkable insights with the public, is one of the truly great joys of our mission. An excellent example of this has been the sheer and distinct pleasure we have felt collaborating with the Rijksmuseum on the scholarly question related to the shawl — a process as well as an outcome for which we are most grateful. Beyond the excitement that comes with closure on any fascinating subject, for all of us who love Vermeer’s oeuvre this vital technical research has beautifully evidenced anew the charms of the master’s eye and his intentions, as he so uniquely captures a particular moment in time, in this instance a single precise musical note, like no other before — or since.”

About The Leiden Collection

The Leiden Collection, founded in 2003 by American collectors Dr. Thomas S. Kaplan and his wife Daphne Recanati Kaplan, comprises some 250 paintings and drawings and represents one of the largest and most important assemblages of 17th-century Dutch paintings in private hands. The Collection is named after Rembrandt’s native city in honor of the master’s transcendence and focuses on the works of Rembrandt and his followers, illuminating the personalities and themes that shaped the Golden Age over five generations. The Collection is the most comprehensive representation of the Leiden artists known as *fijnschilders* (“fine manner painters”), who concentrated on painting portraits, tronies (character studies), genre scenes, and history paintings. To learn more, please visit theleidencollection.com—an extensive online catalogue and scholarly resource that features detailed entries on each painting, biographies of artists, and essays by leading scholars.

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Image Caption

Johannes Vermeer (1632-1675), *Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, c. 1672-75.
Oil on canvas, 25.5 x 20.1 cm.
Image courtesy of The Leiden Collection.