

JAN VERMEER (1632-1675)

by George Constantourakis

In November 1995, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C., opened the first exhibit ever devoted exclusively to the 17th century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. Twenty-three paintings (out of a total of less than forty) were gathered from public and private collections around the world and put on view for an eager public.

On February 27, 1996, this same exhibit moved to the Netherlands, the painter's native land, and was put on view at the "Mauritshuis" museum in the Hague. The Dutch Posts, in order to publicize this event, issued on February 27, 1996 three stamps reproducing three paintings of Jan Vermeer, plus a souvenir sheet with the same three stamps on a background of his "View of Delft" painting.

Jan Vermeer was born at Delft in 1632 and died there in 1675, at the age of 43. He was a pupil of Carel Fabritius. Strictly speaking he is neither a *genre* nor a portrait painter. His paintings are enigmatic scenes of women in their homes, alone (or with a servant), who are occupied with some cultivated activity, such as writing, reading letters, or playing a musical instrument. The faces are formally pleasing, but they seem remote. Vermeer's pictures have a reality, as they concentrate on the minutiae of material things. However, he is unique in the creation of pure color, form, and effects of light. His light effects are set within a room. Vermeer's cool light gives a new dignity to the room furnishings and man loses actuality and takes on a timeless quality; for example, forever a girl reads, or plays an instrument.

The M. C. in Fig. 1 shows a painting found at the National Gallery of Ireland.

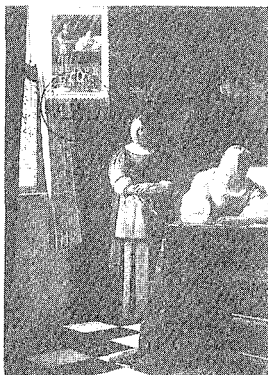


Fig. 1. "Lady Writing a Letter and Her Maid" (c. 1670). Color Postcard: Pub. by National Gallery of Ireland (Commerical). Cancel: Gravenhagen (Hague), Netherlands, February 27, 1996, FDOI. Created by G. Fischer of Amsterdam.

The M. C. in Figure 2 shows the painting "The Love Letter". The M. C. in Figure 3 shows "Woman Reading a Letter". The young woman, standing in the corner of a sunlit room, is absorbed in reading a letter. Both paintings are from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

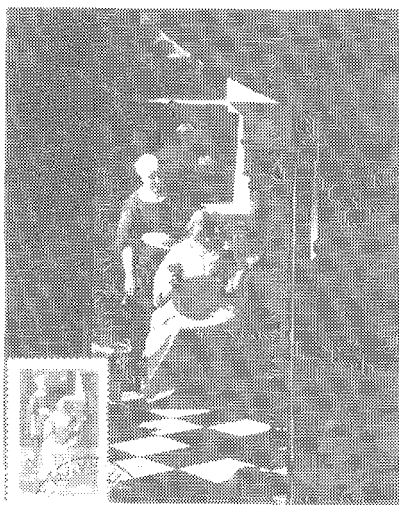


Fig. 2. "The Love Letter". Color Postcard: Pub. by Druk by Kunst drukkerij Mercurius (Commercial). Cancel: Gravenhagen (Hague), Netherlands, February 27, 1996, FDOI. Created by G. Fischer.

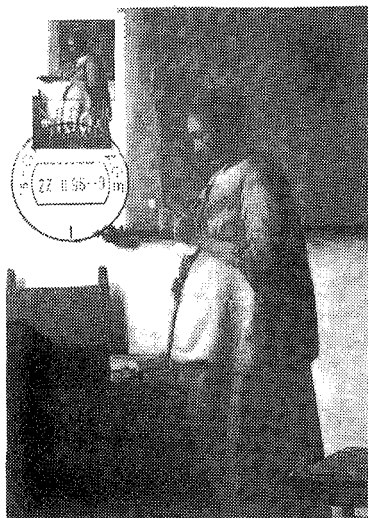


Fig. 3. "Woman Reading a Letter". Color Postcard: Pub. by Druk by Kunst drukkerij Mercurius (Commercial). Cancel: Gravenhagen (Hague), Netherlands, February 27, FDOI. Created by G. Fischer.

Other known M.C.'s showing Vermeer paintings are:

GERMAN DEM. REP., Scott #276, "Girl Reading a Letter", Dresden Museum.
 RWANDA, Scott #681, "Woman Reading a Letter", Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
 RWANDA, Scott #682, "Woman Playing the Organ", National Gallery, London.
 RWANDA, Scott #683, "Artist in his Studio", Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
 RWANDA, Scott #684, "Man & Woman Drinking Wine", Gemaldegalerie, Berlin.
 FRANCE, Scott #1832, "The Lace-Maker", Louvre Museum, Paris.