

鍾明君

Good afternoon. Today, I would like to share my thoughts on the exhibition of Vermeer's paintings. As I walked along the path to go into the exhibition hall, I saw many imitation paintings by students of 中原 university who were trying to present their impressions of Vermeer. Most of them chose the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* to work with, and I think their arrangements are quite interesting, since they prepared the audience to go into this exhibition, which conveyed Vermeer's world more widely and simultaneously more precisely.

After viewing Vermeer's works, I found that he poured lots of meanings, especially moral meanings, into his paintings. I was almost persuaded into believing that Vermeer was a religious man. For one thing, the composition of his works is nearly the same: a character bathed in the sunlight that comes from the left, and a curtain stands between the viewer and the character, and there is always a map on the wall. Every painting is the same format. I cannot help feeling that the audience's viewing experience is structured like a religious rite; we meet the character first, then the curtain and the map, and finally the light. The scene might be a reflection of Vermeer's actually painting room, but somehow it made me feel he must be somewhat paranoid, so afraid of something that he has to stick to one formula for his art.

There was one particular painting called *The Allegory of Faith*. In this painting, a snake is put to death by a book, and an apple scatters on the floor, which reminds me of the story of the forbidden fruit in the *Bible*. The snake and the book, in my opinion, represent temptation and rationality, and the apple, of course, is the forbidden fruit. Also, behind them is a woman standing on a terrestrial globe, which once appeared in Vermeer's other painting, *The Astronomer*. While the globe actually portrays the view of paradise and hell, I wonder whether Vermeer was suggesting that this perplexed woman in his painting, who is staring at a glass sphere hanging from the ceiling, will be sent to hell or heaven by her yielding to or standing the temptation. This beautiful work convinced me again that Vermeer was really religious. And the greater his passion was, of course, the greater his works became. Thank you very much.

蔡鈞如 Vermeer's Paintings in Taipei

Johannes Vermeer was born in 1632 in the Dutch city of Delft where Holland grew to become one of Europe's most prosperous countries and achieved its Golden Age in art. Vermeer did not leave us any diaries or letters; everything we know about him came from others and from his paintings. We know he lived his whole life in Delft where his talent grew and he created a whole world of light, peacefulness and mysterious stories of his own in his paintings. Vermeer's father was an art dealer who also had an inn where many artists often gathered; this must have had a formative influence on Vermeer from an early age. One of Vermeer's teachers was a Holland painter, Gerard ter Borch, who was good at painting intimate scenes. Vermeer must have learned a lot from him as the touch and the manner of paintings from both painters are similar.

Thirty-seven of Vermeer's paintings are preserved for us in the world, but there are rumors that Vermeer only produced an unusually small body of work, between

forty and sixty paintings during his life. Many of Vermeer's paintings are about love. For example, in the painting "A Lady Standing at a Virginal," Cupid, the symbol of love, appears not only in the painting hanging on the wall but also on the tiles that line the room. Little Cupid holds a fishing rod with bait, which shows that love is temptation and whoever bites it will be caught. This is the painting which I love the most in the exhibition. Although the same theme appears in two other paintings, "A Lady seated at a Virginal" and "A Young Woman Seated at the Virginal," my favorite painting not only has sunshine coming in from the window to make everything bright, but also presents Cupid, the son of Venus, the goddess of love, which makes me hopeful for love and happiness.

Before I went to see this exhibition, I had no idea about who Vermeer was and what he had done for the world. After the exhibition, I have learned a lot about Vermeer and his paintings, and this trip has really opened my eyes to the world of art.

劉婷昀

The first time I learned about Vermeer is through his famous painting, "The Girl with a Pearl Earring." My high school art teacher had shown a documentary about that painting to introduce us to Vermeer's work. This time I have another chance to enter his world and see all his paintings.

The atmosphere of most of Vermeer's paintings is quiet and peaceful. Nothing much stands out, and the viewer grows bored very easily. But the painting "Allegory of Faith" caught my eye immediately. At first glance, I noticed the woman's feet in the picture: she was obviously wearing flip-flops. The first thought that came into my mind was: "Could it be that flip-flops were already fashionable in the 17th century?" While the viewers around me admired the great painting, I was asking this totally irrelevant question. I am not to mock the artwork purposely because I have seen many similar style pictures before "Allegory of Faith" and felt a little tired and sleepy. But this funny thought about flip-flops stayed with me and kept me smiling to myself all day.

In addition to this brief interlude, the intense composition also attracts me. Unlike most of the other masterpieces, "Allegory of Faith" isn't be characterized by a scene from daily life. The painting was assumed to have been completed in Vermeer's later period. Because Vermeer needed to sell his paintings to support his family, he was usually commissioned to paint artworks filled with religious meanings. In this piece, the symbols of Catholicism, including the Crucifixion on the wall, the snake and apple on the floor, were quite obvious. The pose of the woman with her foot on the globe means that Catholicism will rule the world in the age of discovery.

Some may think "Allegory of Faith" is a picture that praises the greatness of Catholicism, but I think there is an important irony here. Because the spread of Catholicism went hand in hand with the expansion of trade, and the expansion of trade was achieved mainly through military action, in which many races lost their religion and were even massacred. Behind the painting "Allegory of Faith," behind the praise of the Age of Discovery, many races were sacrificed. As South Africa's Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu, said in 1984, "When the missionaries came

to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land." I think the greatness of a religion should be to comfort people, not to invade other ethnicities or replace their religions.

柯馨怡

I went to see the exhibition of Vermeer's paintings in Chang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall on a holiday. It has been such a long time since I went to Chang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall, so everything was unfamiliar for me. When I walked around the garden and the classical buildings, I felt I was living in the Qing Dynasty. I was not in Taipei any more; instead, I was in one of the magnificent cities in ancient China. However, the display of Vermeer's paintings moved me into the very different world of ancient Netherland.

The first site in the exhibition was really interesting, because it was a reproduction of one of Vermeer's works called "Artist's studio." In that painting, Vermeer was drawing the girl in his studio, so in the display room there was also an easel and I could sit on the chair and pretend I was drawing, just like Vermeer. It was truly an interesting scene. Then my friend and I listened to the group guide in the display room introducing Vermeer's life and work; it was really refreshing for people like me who rarely went to see art exhibitions. I found it wasn't boring at all; it was just like listening to a fascinating story. Through the guide, I can absorb more information about every picture Vermeer had created. The paintings were not only a reflection of this artist in different periods of his life but a medium for us to understand more about the 17th century.

The painting that impressed me the most was called "Girl Reading Letter at Open Window". In this painting, there is a girl reading a letter by the window. Relieved against the warm sunshine from outside, the girl's face seems rather cold and serious. Her facial expression made me wonder what on earth did the letter say, and what the next reaction the girl will have in response to the news. I even imagined in what situation I'd have the exact same facial expression. I guess if I had received the report card of the most important exam that would decide my future, I would show that kind of face too. Moreover, there is something interesting about the exquisite Persian table cloth in the painting, according to the guide. Born in the 17th century, Vermeer grew up in the Dutch golden age. At that time, trade between Europe and Asia was very prosperous, so there were lots of objects from Asia exported into Europe. For example, porcelain from China, spices from India, and carpets from Persia. Since Persian carpets were extremely expensive then, the Dutch used them as table cloths instead of carpets. And this custom was clearly in sight in this painting. It is so magical that one picture can tell so many stories.

After viewing all the paintings, I went out fully satisfied. It was really an unforgettable new experience for me. Back to the modern world with more interest and knowledge about Vermeer, I can't wait to take another trip to the ancient world again!

林詩賢

Stepping into the exhibition alone, I stood in front of the empty wall watching the projected introduction to Johannes Vermeer's biography and his city—Delft. Four minutes later, I learned little about Vermeer but the impression of Delft caught my attention. It is said that Vermeer spent all his life in this city. I think it was the tranquil scenery of the city that gave him the inspiration to paint.

Strangely, if Vermeer had appreciated his city so much, then why were the paintings depicting only scenes from the indoors? "The View of Delft" did present several women standing by the port, but they were tiny figures in comparison with the magnificent view of the city. In Vermeer's other paintings, most of the females were located indoors and always near a window. I think this is a reflection of the seventeenth century when gender roles were distinctly different between men and women. Women of the middle class were in charge of the family while men went out for work for a living. Though the "Astronomer" and "Geography" were also genres that depicted the interior, the men were all depicted as studying navigation with a globe and a map, dreaming about larger issues and worlds. As to the women, they may be playing the musical instrument, writing or reading letters, or dealing with a pot of water or milk—all were items close to the home.

In Vermeer's most famous painting of "A Woman with a Pearl Necklace," at first glance, I saw the woman's hand touching the pearl necklace, then, I found there was a small square mirror that she was looking at. She was obviously absorbed in herself, and this reflected upon the middle class life as private and comfortable. Through Vermeer's work, we know Delft was a prosperous trading port. It is little wonder that in his paintings so many women wore jewelry or had jewel boxes on the tables. While quite a few love stories took place in the paintings, the women, ranging from being girlish to being maternal, were always depicted as waiting passively. Only the cupid of the little tiles revealed how the women were hiding what they were missing as they stayed indoors waiting. Only the light penetrating through the window into the intimate space captured what Vermeer felt for the women in their seemingly tranquil lives.

徐郁蕙 Vermere in Taipei

I went to enjoy Vermeer's Paintings in the Jiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall with my mom and my roommates on a Saturday of a long weekend. There were lots of people there to view the incredible collection of Vermeer's masterpieces. I had learned that all of the displays were copies and felt somewhat tricked. Yet I realized later that Vermeer's works are spread all over the world and almost impossible to gather together. So now I appreciate the efforts of the organizers for giving us a chance to at least see copies of Vermeer's work all together.

After entering the exhibition, I listened to the audio guide that introduced the historical background of Delft, the city which Vermeer lived in all his life and accomplished all his paintings, as well as the content, implications, and contexts of the paintings. However, among all the splendid masterpieces, "The Girl with a Pearl Earring" (1665-1667) impressed me most. Though the painting neither used the most superior optical techniques nor set the most gorgeous scene or colors in the

painting, the girl in the picture is simply charming. Her exotic costume and her big, clear black eyes overwhelm the viewer with a sense of oriental tenderness. The setting of the light and the angle of her face perfectly reflected her bright, young face. The simple-dark background properly contrast with her delicate skin and dress. Last but not the least, the pearl earring, the object mentioned in the title of the work, not only reflect the light from the light source and the collar of the girl's costume but also Vermeer, the painter himself in front of the girl. What's more, some critics also consider that the big, round pearl may imply fertility and it may be the expectation of Vermeer toward his daughter Maria, the model of this masterpiece.

In my opinion, this exhibition is greatly worth the visit. There's a quotation on a Chinese website that appropriately represents my feelings after watching the exhibition. "Because of hope, I found my world beautiful; because of the end result, I found my world beautiful; because of the efforts I put in, I found my world beautiful; because of the cost I paid, I found my world beautiful; because every moment is newly born and fresh, I delightedly found that in my world, everything is good." After watching the exhibition, I am not only moved by Vermeer's paintings but also feel expectant for life. There are so much beautiful things in our daily life that I should be humble and content.

王慶華

If my memory serves me right, the day I went to Taipei to see the exhibition was a rainy day. Before going, I had some set ideas about art exhibitions: they must be lifeless and boring. However, as I entered the exhibition, the first thing I saw was a huge mural, with a sketchpad and a chair in front of it. People can sit on the chair so that you would become part of the big mural, and you could take pictures just as you were the very painter who was painting "The Art of Painting." It was an extremely novel experience for me. When I stepped into the exhibition, the audio-guide gave me information about almost every detail and story of the paintings. "Interesting!" I thought to myself. As I watched Vermeer's famous painting of "View of Delft," I was surprised to learn that Delft had been destroyed by war and Vermeer depicted Delft according to his memory and adjusted the distance between the buildings.

No matter what the true Delft was like, it still was my favorite painting. Because seeing the painting, I thought the dream I had forgotten. When I was preparing for the entrance exam, I was eager to escape from the stressful environment and go to a peaceful and serene place. But the dream did not come true even after the exam ended. Every time I am faced with difficulties, I will remember this little dream. It is like a weak candlelight in my mind, flickering but always there. When I felt hopeless or upset, the weak light would remind me that I still have this dream. It was the deepest desire in my soul.

There was something else quite interesting at the exhibition, too: visitors could wear the kerchief and the costumes of the girl with pearl earring and pose for pictures. It was an amusing experience and I got a kick out of taking pictures with my friend and making selfies with the special dress. With the kerchief on my head, I knew that it was impossible to be as pretty as the girl in the painting, but at least I could imagine her feelings.

徐資雅

My first impression of Vermeer's painting was "The Girl with a Pearl Earring," which was widely described as a girl with an intriguing charm of mischief. Not until I saw this painting in person did I recognize the beauty of adolescence. Her eyes remained staring at you no matter where you went. Her gaze was pure and eager for love and her parted lips were tempting. What a vigorous girl who is magnanimous to face love and life. This might be the representative of Vermeer's paintings.

There were many other paintings of women in his artworks. For instance, "Girl Asleep at the Table." The girl's mouth was a bit pouty and the serene sleeping face will make you keep silent automatically while looking at the painting. Another example is "The Milkmaid," you can see the girl concentrating on pouring the milk into a container carefully, as tender as taking care of a baby. Or "Woman Weighing Pearls," the smile on the woman's face says that she was worrying about disturbing the balance of the Libra but still feeling delightful with her work. Also, "Young Woman with A Water Pitcher" showed the moment of a young woman being attracted by the view outside the window and we might be curious about what was outside the window. The last illustration was "The Guitar Player," where the perky facial expression of the girl seemed to be telling us that there was an audience listening to her performance and she was very satisfied with performing her talent. All in all, girls in Vermeer's paintings were all anonymous and charming, quiet and forever peaceful. Vermeer presented Dutch girls' characteristics as fit and strong and full of vitality. At that age, girls were all good housekeepers, maintaining the cleanliness of their neighborhood and river banks, too.

The above observation of Vermeer's paintings tells the history of Vermeer's era. After seeing the exhibition of Vermeer's work, I am very impressed by the images of the women of a different era that is very different from contemporary Taiwan and the world.

翁子涵

"Only by art can we get outside ourselves, instead of seeing only one world, our own, we see it under multiple forms." This quotation came from Marcel Proust, the author of *In Search of Lost Time* and describes the paintings of Vermeer very nicely.

Vermeer was born in 1632 and died in 1675, the same period as the Dutch Golden Age. In the 17th century, Dutch trade, science, military, and art were among the most acclaimed in the world. It was the beginning of world trade and globalization, and as the most important port of trade, Delft was very busy, crowded and noisy. However, we could not find these elements in Vermeer's View of Delft. We could only find a quiet port with a fascinating sky and several ordinary people and boats along the river side. In my opinion, Vermeer didn't paint the reality but his impression of and longing for Delft. Vermeer ran a hotel as business and at that time the hotel was the place which all trades took place. Moreover, Vermeer was married at 21 years old and he had 11 kids with his wife. I suppose his life must have been

quite busy. But in the “View of Delft,” we feel only peace, tranquility and a sense of ease. For Vermeer, painting must have been an escape from the reality of the busy world.

During the 17th century, world trade was flourishing. In many painting of Vermeer, certain objects reappear again and again, such as the world map, Chinese porcelain, and Persian Carpet. These are the symbols of world trade and inevitable globalization which would change people’s life thoroughly. It was a revolution and innovation of life which brought advantages but also disadvantages. Perhaps the dark clouds hanging over the “View of Delft” imply Vermeer’s worry and anxiety toward the future of world trade and globalization. However, what amazes lots of people is the “little patch of yellow wall” in “View of Delft” which is the brightest and most vivid part of the painting. This “little patch of yellow wall” also appeared in Marcel Proust’s famous novel *In Search of Lost Time*. “His dizziness increased; he fixed his gaze, like a child upon a yellow butterfly that it wants to catch, on the precious little patch of wall.” To live in this busy, crowded and noisy world, you need to keep a little patch of yellow wall in the depth of your heart which serves as the last peaceful paradise for you.

“Only by art can we get outside ourselves, instead of seeing only one world, our own, we see it under multiple forms.” On the other hand, we get inside ourselves only through art in order to see the only one world, our own world, ourselves. There is always somewhere like the little patch of yellow wall in one’s heart, which provides a getaway for Vermeer in Delft and a retreat for everybody in this busy world.

黃郁容

Vermeer, who was born in 17th century, is one of the three greatest Dutch artists. Despite his great skill in emerging light and shadows and saturated colors, his painting did not draw any attention in his lifetime. Not until 19th century, about two hundred years after his death, did his painting become famous and universally admired. After I have viewed all 34 forged paintings exhibiting in the Jiang Kai-shek memorial hall in Taipei, I was astonished that such a talented painter had fall into oblivion in his contemporary era. This reminds me of another painter great Dutch artist—Vincent van Gogh. Their paintings were not appreciated until long after their death, so they lived in destitution throughout their short lives. They had to sell their paintings for minimum remuneration in order to make a living. However, their works are now valued in the millions now. For instance, Van Gogh’s “Vase with Flowers” was once stolen from the Mahmoud Khalil Museum in 2010 and was estimated to be worth 50 million dollars now. What’s more ironic is that even the art forgers that imitate their paintings earn a fortune. Hans van Meegeren is one classic example; he forged Vermeer’s paintings so well that even the authoritative art specialists believed it was real and the ‘fake’ Vermeer painting brought in huge profits. Meegeren was finally convicted after WWII and admitted that he forged those paintings.

After the incident, some said that Vermeer’s painting are easy to be forged since there are too few of them and he often forgot to sign his own works. And even when he did, his signatures were never identical. No wonder even art specialists could be

wrong about evaluating Vermeer's painting. Both Vermeer and Van Gogh lived in poverty in their whole life, but the people who forged their paintings earned a fortune. This makes me wonder, what is the real standard of evaluating art? Why are there so many renowned painters or artists who became famous only after their death?

黃子維

Two weeks ago, my classmate, Gihon and I visited Vermeer's exhibition in Taipei. It was a cold and wet morning. When we arrived at our destination, National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall, the weather didn't turn better. What's worse, we missed the entrance of the exhibition hall and got lost in the big park for almost an hour. Finally, we found the place. I had started to think the day was really not my day; however, it proved not so after we got in.

The soft light inside warmed us up immediately. Leaning against the wall and watching the introduction video at the entrance, we gained more understanding about the famous painter. Johannes Vermeer lived in Delft in 17 century and captured the peace of his city as well as the spirit of the people in his paintings. I like the painting, "The Milkmaid." The painting was so lively that at first sight, I thought it was a real person pouring milk. It was truly life-like. Vermeer also likes to add imagery and metaphors to his painting. Another impressive painting for me is "The Little Street" that presented the people on a cozy afternoon. How I would like to be one of those characters and immerse myself in the peaceful and harmony afternoon!

In real life, the city of Delft had already been destroyed by war, so Vermeer was only painting the ideal city in his mind. Delft was one of the most prosperous cities in Vermeer's time. It had the biggest harbor in Holland for commercial activities, and traded with 17th century China as the best goods in the world concentrated in the city. Delft also produced precious porcelain for Europe's palaces as well as ordinary families. No doubt, Delft was the richest city in the Europe then. No wonder Vermeer's paintings are filled with the harbor, ships, geographers, the globe, astrologists, and all kinds of foreign things. What's more, Vermeer's paintings also told us about the social customs then. For instance, there is a painting in which a woman and a man sit alone in the room; it showed the society had become more open with courtships. Another painting, "The Procurors," seems to show Vermeer's concern over the commercialization of the body and sex.

After this visit, I'll take back my word: the exhibition is interesting and enlightening. I learned the hidden meaning of the paintings; I also learned that knowledge about the historical background can improve our understanding about the masterpieces. I'm glad to have gone to this exhibition. With this experience, I will try to see more exhibitions