

Schwierigkeiten bereiten dem Rezensenten die als F. I. Leicher angesehenen Nummern 28 („Wetter/Blitz-Heilige“) und 29, da bei dem auch von Unterberger und Sambach beeinflussten Leicher ab 1770 schon stärker klassizistische Elemente erwartet werden können (z. B. „Hl. Sippe“, Österr. Barockmuseum, Wien, Inv. Nr. 4080). Im Vergleich mit dem Entwurf für die Clarissinnenkirche Prag (Sammlung Rossacher, Inv. Nr. 0353) erscheinen die Bozzetti Nr. 30 und 31 für die Seitenaltäre in der Hofkapelle z. Hl. Kreuz auf dem Hradschin, Prag, um einiges schwächer und lassen — wenn original — die von Klara Garas in: *Orient und Okzident im Spiegel der Kunst. Festschrift für Heinrich Gerhard Franz zum 70. Geburtstag*, Graz 1986, Seite 115, angesprochene und auch vom Rezensenten aus zu geringer Werkkenntnis vermutete Bedeutung Franz Anton Palkos nicht erkennen. Der ältere Palko-Bruder verbindet v. a. bei der Ausführung wenig innovativ böhmische (z. B. Brandl) und venezianische (v. a. Piazzetta und Ricci) Einflüsse.

Ab Katalognummer 32 folgen Zeichnungen des für Mildorfer, Bergl, Kracker (v. a. Nr. 33) und Maulbertsch wichtigen Initiators Paul Troger. Die Nummer 34 stellt wohl nicht den „hl. Joseph“, sondern „Jesaias umgeben von Noah, Abraham, Isaak, etc.“ dar. Das Troger-Œuvre befindet sich ebenfalls noch in einem schlecht geordneten Zustand. Unseres Erachtens handelt es sich bei der erwähnten Zeichnung um ein Produkt Mildorfers oder F. K. Palkos. Nummer 35 ist ebenfalls eher eine variierte Nachzeichnung der Werkstatt denn ein originaler Troger. Der Entwurf für Melk (Nr. 36) zeigt die Bedeutung Trogers für die österreichische Malerei um 1750 (z. B. für F. K. Palko). Dem Umkreis des mehr plastisch empfindenden Michelangelo Unterberger wird zu Recht die Katalognummer 37 zugewiesen.

Weitere Ausstellungen und Gegenüberstellungen dieser Art (z. B. früher *F. A. Maulbertsch und sein Kreis in Ungarn*, Langenargen 1984) könnten in Verbindung mit gut bebilderten und zuverlässigen Monographien des gesamten Maulbertsch- und Wiener Akademie-Umkreises (ein Desiderat und eine Aufgabe nicht zuletzt für den wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchs) die „wilde Deponie: Maulbertsch“ weiter „entsorgen“ und letztlich unser Urteil über Maulbertsch „klären“ helfen.

Hubert Hosch

## Rezensionen

JOHN MICHAEL MONTIAS: *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1989. 407 pp., 57 figs. \$ 49,50, Paperback edition \$ 19,50.

It is certainly true that the more we like specific works of art, the more we want to know about the circumstances of their creation, especially about the artists who created them and the milieu in which they worked. Such knowledge usually deepens our understanding and appreciation of the works by bringing us closer to the spirit of the times, the values of the artists, and the artists themselves. Moreover, it is generally true that the artists we especially admire today are the ones about whom we have the greatest amount of information, largely because they were also the ones whose praises were most

loudly sung in their own time and who therefore come forward frequently in documentary sources, especially biographies.

However, Johannes Vermeer has remained an enigma for us. His works have certainly been greatly admired. Since his own day connoisseurs have prized his paintings, and for more than a century he has been ranked among the very finest painters in the entire history of art. Yet while we often find his jewel-like paintings to be of unparalleled beauty, we know precious little about the man. His name appears only once in a short poem published in D. E. Bleywick's seventeenth-century chronicle of Delft, while among the eighteenth century biographers, Houbraken merely mentions him, and J. C. Weyerman and J. van Gool omit him from their studies. To help remedy this shortcoming, Professor Montias, in a logical sequel to his pioneering study of *Artists and Artisans in Delft* (Princeton University Press, 1982), has directed his efforts and his archival skills toward shedding more light on Vermeer and the surroundings in which he lived and worked. The result is *Vermeer and His Milieu: A Web of Social History*.

Of particular interest to the reader is the *Introduction*, in which Montias traces the history of the archival search that over the years has been directed toward bringing to light Vermeer the man. The search began in the late nineteenth century with the efforts of J. Soutendam, Henry Havard, and, especially, Abraham Bredius. Montias then recounts his own Odyssey through the documentary sources upon which his book is based, and in the discussion of his own research he tells us that, "*it differs from that of my predecessors in one important respect: I paid at least as much attention to the milieu in which Vermeer and members of his family lived and worked as I did to details concerning him directly.*" He writes with ease and in such a straightforward manner that we seem to share with him some of the principal discoveries made in his search. And he is candid in warning us that the nature of the sources on which his study is based is likely to present an unbalanced picture of the artist, his family, and his relationships with others: "*The material evidence for seventeenth-century Dutch artists consists chiefly of depositions, business transactions, and other documents drawn up by notaries and municipal clerks that force us to consider a person's life from a particular angle, closer to his adversarial than to his amicable relations with his fellow men. We are more likely to know that a painter had a knife fight with somebody in an inn than that he admired or befriended another artist.*"

The first five chapters of the book deal principally with Vermeer's ancestry on both sides of the family, helping us to see the social level from which Delft's finest painter emerged. We become acquainted with Balthasar Claes Gerrits, Vermeer's maternal grandfather, who rose from a stevedore-like position to that of a real estate broker but is best remembered in documentary sources, along with his son, as a counterfeiter of money. Another chapter is devoted to the painter's paternal grandmother, a colorful character who outlived three husbands, engaged in a variety of potential money-making activities, and died in poverty. We also meet Reijnier Jansz. Vos, alias Vermeer, the painter's father, who was trained as a silk worker but succeeded in improving his station in life by becoming an inn keeper and an art dealer. Probably important for the young Vermeer were his father's associations with painters active in Delft.

Following the discussions of some of Vermeer's more colorful relatives, Montias turns his attention in Chapter Six, *Apprenticeship and Marriage*, to the painter himself. Although lacking a firm documentary foundation for much of his speculation, Montias has made this one of the most rewarding chapters in the book as he bases his suppositions on logic and circumstantial evidence. His discussion of the probable reasons for the initial objections of Vermeer's future mother-in-law to the painter's marriage to her daughter is enlightening, making it seem almost certain that Vermeer converted to the Catholic faith shortly before the wedding. Further reasoned speculations center on Vermeer's years of apprenticeship. His acquaintance with Gerard Ter Borch is discussed, but on stylistic grounds an apprenticeship with the older painter is deemed highly unlikely. Others are considered as possible teachers during the first years of Vermeer's training. But for the final years of his apprenticeship, Montias has another suggestion: "*My guess is that Vermeer was apprenticed for the last two to four years of his training in Amsterdam or in Utrecht, or possibly in both these cities in succession. My (ever so slender) evidence for the Amsterdam connection turns on his father's own apprenticeship in that city and on influences in his first paintings; for the Utrecht connection, on his future in-laws' relation with the painter Abraham Bloemaert, who worked all his life in that city.*" Although no known documents support Montias's theories regarding Vermeer's apprenticeship, the stylistic grounds favoring an Amsterdam connection, and the circumstantial as well as stylistic evidence offered for Vermeer's relationship to Bloemaert and Utrecht are quite strong. He further suggests, with reason, that it may have been at Bloemaert's house that Vermeer first met his future wife.

Chapters Seven and Nine focus on the family of Catharina, Vermeer's wife. Especially interesting as a personality and important for the welfare of the painter and his family is Vermeer's mother-in-law, Maria Thins. We learn of her high-born connections and her relationship through marriage to the Utrecht painter, Abraham Bloemaert. Documentary sources supply abundant evidence of her problems with her husband, Reynier Bolnes, and their son, Willem, whose violent nature was sometimes directed toward his mother and toward his sister, Vermeer's wife.

The emphasis is principally on Vermeer himself in Chapters Eight, *The Mature Artist*, and Ten, *Frenzy and Death*. Contrary to the general belief that Vermeer's residence during most of his career was the inn Mechelen on Delft's Great Market Square, we learn that by at least December 1660 Vermeer and his wife were living with her mother in a house in the "Papists' Corner" which may have been secretly owned by the Jesuits who lived nearby. Montias's discussion of some of the neighbors in that predominantly Catholic enclave sheds further light on the milieu in which Vermeer lived and worked.

In addition to his earnings from painting, Vermeer was to some extent a dealer in pictures, although probably on a very small scale. It seems that the principal means through which the painter and his wife supported themselves came through subsidies from Catharina's mother and other sources from his wife's family. Montias sums up his impression of Vermeer's financial situation and its meaning for his art: "*Vermeer was not poor by the standards of his day. If he had money troubles, the reason lay in the extraordinary expenses of raising eleven children, none of whom supported themselves*

from adolescence on, as children normally did in less well-situated families ... The financial independence Vermeer enjoyed, partial and precarious as it was, gave him a greater opportunity to follow his own artistic inclination than most of his fellow members of the guild, who had to adapt their art to suit market demand." In 1670 both his mother and his sister died. The war with France, which soon followed, depressed the art market and added to the painter's woes. In December 1675 Vermeer died, leaving his wife impoverished and with most of their children still in her care.

Chapter Twelve, *Aftermath*, provides us with a picture of the problems that beset Vermeer's widow and his mother-in-law following his death. Especially interesting is Montias's discussion of Anthony van Leeuwenhoek, a prominent natural scientist and a major contributor to the development of the microscope, who was appointed curator of the Vermeer estate. It has sometimes been suggested that his interest in lenses contributed to Vermeer's use of the camera obscura. Montias, however, points out that no earlier direct evidence links the two men or their families and, based on circumstances and Leeuwenhoek's subsequent dealings with Vermeer's widow, deems a relationship between the scientist and the painter unlikely. And yet, in light of the fact that Van Leeuwenhoek is not known to have served in a similar capacity on other occasions, his selection in this instance still seems to me to leave open a possible relationship. Montias further traces Vermeer's children and even grandchildren through documents, providing the reader with a picture of five generations. "*In five generations the Vermeer family had risen from a lowly status — an obscure craftsman, a fiddler, a secondhand dealer, a counterfeiter of coins — to high social and artistic distinction in the artist's lifetime, to descend again to the level of an illiterate craftsman.*"

The final chapter, *Vermeer's Clients and Patrons*, is essentially a reprint of Montias's article from the *Art Bulletin* of March 1987, in which he demonstrates convincingly that Pieter Claesz. van Ruijven was Vermeer's principal patron, perhaps with right of first refusal, through most of his career. Van Ruijven, who purchased perhaps half of Vermeer's output from 1657 until the artist's death in 1675, was related to Pieter Spierinx Silvercroon, the patron of Gerard Dou of Leyden. It was perhaps through that connection that Vermeer came in close contact with the painters of Leyden whose influence is apparent in several of his works. Montias also clarifies the role of Jacob Dissius, who had married Van Ruijven's daughter and in 1683, following his wife's death the previous year, came into possession of twenty Vermeer paintings (not nineteen as is usually cited), all of which she had presumably inherited from her father.

The book contains three appendices, the first of which gives the basis for Montias's estimate of the number of paintings Vermeer produced between 1656 and 1675. The second appendix is considerable, both in length and significance, for it lists in chronological order, from January 1596 until 1749, the more than four hundred documents that form the foundation of this study. The third appendix consists of four genealogical charts.

The greatest strength of the book lies in the many archival gleanings which serve as the foundation for Montias's web of social history. While many documents pertaining to Vermeer had been published previously, this study expands their number and brings them together as a unit. What is still painfully apparent, however, is that Vermeer

himself, in contrast to several of his relatives, seems to have been adroit at avoiding documentary exposure. Montias acknowledges this shortcoming in the *Introduction*: “*In spite of all my efforts and those who preceded me in combing through Delft’s archives, less documentary evidence has survived regarding Vermeer himself than regarding his grandparents, his uncles and aunts, and especially his in-laws: Maria Thins, the formidable mother of his wife Catharina, and Catharina’s irascible brother Willem. Vermeer seems to have been exclusively devoted to his art. He left few traces in the notarial archives and none in the judicial records of his time. There is little to go on to reconstruct his personality, beyond his ability to get along with a very domineering and contentious mother-in-law.*”

Nevertheless the reader is given an engaging picture of five generations of life in Delft. Being at the mercy of available documents, the narrative moves from one archival revelation to another, with the author discussing the significance of the evidence and making a Herculean attempt to give life to the protagonists. He succeeds admirably, for he writes with a warmth that runs throughout the book and seemingly reflects his own enjoyment in his discoveries. Especially vivid is his characterization of Maria Thins, Vermeer’s resourceful mother-in-law, a woman firm in her convictions, often domineering and cantankerous, and yet extremely considerate of the painter and his family.

In the chapters that concentrate on the painter, the paucity of documents relating to Vermeer himself makes Montias’s dependence on the paintings all the more necessary, for he discusses them not only as works of art but primarily as visual evidence shedding further light on Vermeer’s milieu. Through a study of Vermeer’s belongings listed in the inventory of 1676 as well as those objects depicted in two or more of his paintings and therefore presumably present in his household, Montias gives us an insight into the artist’s standard of living. He further shows us that Vermeer did not hesitate to alter the forms and colors of the objects he included in his paintings, thereby placing aesthetic considerations above verisimilitude.

In discussing the elements within the paintings, he speculates on the possible identity of some of the figures. He finds a self-portrait in the long-haired young man with a beret in *The Procuress* in Dresden, based on its apparent derivation from a similar figure identified as a self-portrait in a work by Frans van Mieris. The painter in *The Art of Painting* in Vienna is dressed in similar fashion to the figure in *The Procuress* and is therefore also suggested as a representation of Vermeer. The thread of probability is stretched to the breaking point when the *Head of a Young Girl* in the Metropolitan Museum in New York is suggested as a portrait of Vermeer’s eldest daughter, Maria, on the basis of its supposed family resemblance to the figure in *The Procuress*. But considerations of family resemblance aside, *The Head of a Young Girl* is certainly a portrait, and if we must seek a candidate, Vermeer’s daughter is at least a possibility. Montias also suggests the same person appears in *The Guitar Player* (Kenwood) and even possibly in *Lady Writing a Letter* (National Gallery, Washington). Vermeer’s wife, Catharina, is identified as the model for *The Lady with the Maidservant* in the Frick Collection. Her yellow jacket with white fur trim was listed in the 1676 inventory and appears in five other paintings. The apparent age of the figure is appropriate for Catharina, who was in her mid-thirties when the painting was produced in the late 1660s. Assuming the identification is correct — and it probably is — it seems unlikely that Catharina appears in only this one example. Perhaps Montias could have suggested her as the model in other works, such as the *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden), *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter* (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam), and *Woman Holding a Balance* (National Gallery, Washington).

While his speculations on the identity of the figures within the paintings all fall within the realms of “possible” or “probable,” Montias admits with all honesty that his attempts at identification are “*tantalizingly inconclusive.*” Moreover, he points out that while the contents of Vermeer’s

paintings add to our picture of the milieu in which he lived, certain omissions, notably the absence of children — he and Catharina had eleven — and of any expression of family strife, such as that resulting from the violent nature of his brother-in-law, belie his daily life.

When dealing with primarily visual problems, Montias tends wisely to rely on earlier scholarship, especially works by Lawrence Gowing, Albert Blankert, Arthur Wheelock, and others with proven eyes for style. Nevertheless he does not hesitate to express his own opinion on matters of aesthetics and attribution when he feels it is warranted. In his Appendix A, note 2, for example, he disagrees with Blankert and Wheelock, both of whom reject the *Girl with a Flute* in the National Gallery in Washington as a work by Vermeer. Montias suggests that it was begun by Vermeer and “finished after his death by an inferior painter, perhaps by Jan Coelenbier, who bought paintings from Vermeer’s widow soon after his death.” I am inclined to believe his judgement on this is not far from the truth.

In keeping with the direction of the book, however, his major emphasis is on the content of the paintings, finding there potential insights into the artist’s milieu. In discussing Vermeer’s early years as a painter, he reviews the pros and cons of the attribution to him of the *St. Praxedes* (New York, Spencer Samuels and Co.), which is a copy after the Florentine Master, Felice Ficherelli. The attribution has been accepted by Michael Kitson and Arthur Wheelock and rejected by Albert Blankert. In addition to the style of the painting, which Montias finds compatible with more acceptable early works by Vermeer, he points to the nature of the subject and its attractiveness to the Jesuits who were the painter’s neighbors in Delft’s “Papists’ Corner.”

Less rewarding is the author’s speculation on the reason for Vermeer’s choice of subject for his *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh), suggesting that it could reflect his early life when he “may well have been spared from everyday chores to cultivate his talent.” The choice of the subject, then, may reflect an “idyllic family situation,” extolling the contemplative, artistic life above “the bustling activity of an inn keeper or a housewife.” In a book that abounds in insightful, persuasive speculations, this example seems to stand out as singularly far-fetched, not because it may not be true, but because it lacks even a modicum of support.

In a discussion of a book of this quality, which makes a major contribution to our knowledge concerning the arena in which a major painter lived and worked, any mention of its shortcomings will seem by its very nature to be out of proportion to the overwhelmingly positive elements. Moreover, the arguable drawbacks are all very minor. For the reader unfamiliar with Vermeer’s ancestry, the early chapters of the book can be a challenge. The genealogical charts in the Appendix are an absolute necessity, and it may be helpful to have photo-copies of them on hand to avoid frequent reference to the Appendix. Even so, some confusion may persist. For example, on p. 14 we are told that Reynier Balthens was the paternal uncle of Reynier Jansz. Vos, the painter’s father, when in reality Balthens was his brother-in-law. And on p. 15, and again on p. 36, 1617 is given as the year of the death of Claes Corstianenz., the second husband of Vermeer’s paternal grandmother, while on the genealogical chart it is the following year that is given. Tryntje Isbrantsdr. is cited on the chart as both a sister to Reynier Jansz. Vos and the wife of his brother, when fortunately she was only the latter. Such oversights can make discussions of relationships unnecessarily confusing.

While Appendix B, the documents, and Appendix C, the genealogical charts, are absolutely indispensable to the book, the material covered in Appendix A, *An Estimate of the Total Number of Paintings Vermeer Painted Between 1656 and 1675*, tends to repeat the earlier discussion on pp. 183 and 184. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to limit the discussion to one place only. In any event, in using the same guidelines as Montias, my own arithmetical calculations differ

somewhat from his. In his second hypothesis (p. 266), which assumes that of the twenty-six paintings by Vermeer mentioned in documents, twenty are still extant (a survival rate of 76.9 percent), and that the noncited paintings, eleven of which are still extant, would have had a similar survival rate, he finds the low end of his estimate of the number of paintings Vermeer produced during the last nineteen years of his life to be 43.4, while my own figures based on his hypothesis suggest even fewer: 40.3. In view of the fact that this is mere speculation in the first place, the difference in our calculations is of little consequence.

If this were a study placing major emphasis on the quality of the works of art themselves, we would lament not only the small size of the illustrations but also the fact that none of them is in color. However, in light of the purpose of this book, most of the illustrations are adequate as visual reminders of the paintings under discussion. Very disappointing, nevertheless, are the illustrations of the map and city plans, for their small size usually means the names of towns and streets are illegible. This is most disturbing because of the emphasis placed on them in the text.

We might ask ourselves just how this book is most likely to function in the future, for it seems to me that it has value on at least two levels. In the first place, it reads well as a narrative, giving us the flavor of interpersonal relations, of life in the "Papists' Corner," and of the personalities of the principal figures. In this respect it functions as well as we could wish, given the limitations of the documentary evidence on which the narrative is based. Secondly, it will be significant as a reference tool, containing as it does the more than four hundred documents associated with Vermeer and his family, along with four genealogical charts. And as a reference tool, the significance of the individual documents is apparent in the text, where each is woven into the fabric of the narrative. There are, of course, times when the two functions of the book seem to come into conflict. In Chapter Nine, for example, the discussions of the wills of Cornelia and Maria Thins seem overly long for the flow of the narrative, but their thoroughness will be helpful for the book's function as a reference.

In sum, this study is a major contribution to Vermeer scholarship and a model for future investigations of the social context in which significant painters lived and worked. The research is thorough, the conclusions are drawn with reason, insight, and intelligence, and the narrative is written with a warmth that brings to life the characters that would otherwise be mere entries in documentary sources.

Roland E. Fleischer

MARTIN KEMP, *The Science of Art. Optical themes in western art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*. London, Yale University Press 1990. 375 und VIII Seiten, 16 Farbabbildungen, 553 Abbildungen und Figuren in Schwarzweiß. £ 45.00.

This is an important, beautiful and complex book. Professor Kemp is concerned with affinities between science and art in the period 1400—1880 which "centred upon the belief that the direct study of nature through the faculty of vision was essential if the rules underlying the structure of the world were to be understood" (p. 1). Each of the book's three parts is devoted to a specific theme: perspective (7—162), mechanical devices (165—257) and colour (261—331). A coda discusses philosophical problems. There are appendices on principles of perspectival construction and Brunelleschi's demonstration panels, copious notes, a select bibliography and an index which tends to omit authors of secondary literature. At a later date he plans to write a companion