

>Dear Professor Stachel,

>

>Thank you for the copy of your paper with Professor Gutruf, which I  
>have been interested to read. Since the paper argues 'contra Ph.  
>Steadman's theory' you will not I imagine be expecting me to agree  
>with you. I have a number of reactions.

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>Your first purpose is to demonstrate that 'the picture composition is  
>not an imitation of a stage-like scene'. I don't feel that you have  
>done this: in fact I think you have helped to do the opposite. You  
>show that the perspective construction of The Art of Painting is in  
>general extremely accurate, and consistent with a real space, and that  
>'the precision of the depicted tiles is quite remarkable'. You point  
>to what you suggest are some small anomalies in the stool and chair.  
>But these are very minor, and could be due to inaccuracies in your own  
>assessment of exactly where the feet of the furniture fall on the  
>floor grid. There is a larger point. Although I argue that Vermeer  
>transcribed his compositions from images in a camera obscura, this  
>does not mean that they must have 'photographic accuracy' in every  
>part. A tracing from a camera obscura image is not a photograph.  
>Slight changes might have occurred in the positions of objects or in  
>the focus of the camera during the protracted process of tracing. In  
>certain small details Vermeer may well have decided to depart from the  
>optical image. But in general of course I believe that he is broadly  
>>true to the image in the camera.

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>My perspective analyses in Vermeer's Camera are not just of one  
>painting but of many: and I have succeeded in showing that at least  
>six pictures and probably more show what is in architectural terms the  
>same room. (You may want to look at the drawings at [www.vermeerscamera.co.uk](http://www.vermeerscamera.co.uk) )  
This is surely powerful evidence for the room being an actual space,  
>not an imaginary construct. The room is Vermeer's studio in the house  
>of his mother-in-law Maria Thins. A reconstruction of the house made  
>by the Dutch architectural historian Ab Warfemmius in 2002 showed that  
>the real room has precisely the same length as the room I have  
>reconstructed - quite independently - from the paintings.

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>The second important point is that we know that many items in The Art  
>of Painting are real objects, of which exemplars survive in museum  
>collections and libraries today. Chairs of this general design can be  
>found in the Rijksmuseum and the Prinsenhof in Delft. The Vienna  
>exhibition displayed a chandelier of more or less identical design to  
>Vermeer's. The tapestry is Flemish, of the 'verdure' type. And of  
>course the map is an extraordinarily accurate copy of Visscher's 1595  
>map of the Seventeen Provinces of the Netherlands, as again exhibited  
>in Vienna. Throughout Vermeer's oeuvre there are many other  
>recognisable pieces of furniture, virginals by known designers, maps,  
>globes, paintings by Vermeer's contemporaries and so on. So in your  
>claim that these are not tableaux, the facts are against you. These  
>are real objects in Vermeer's actual studio.

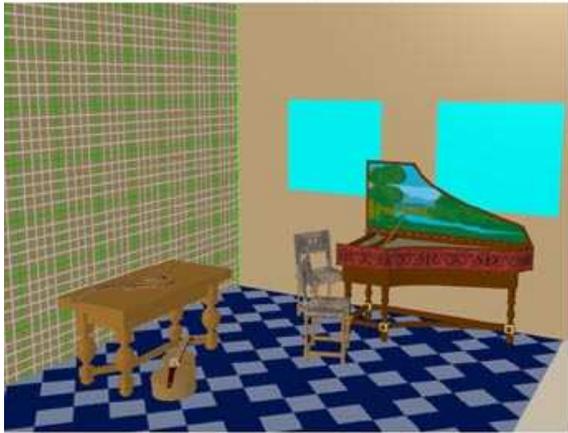
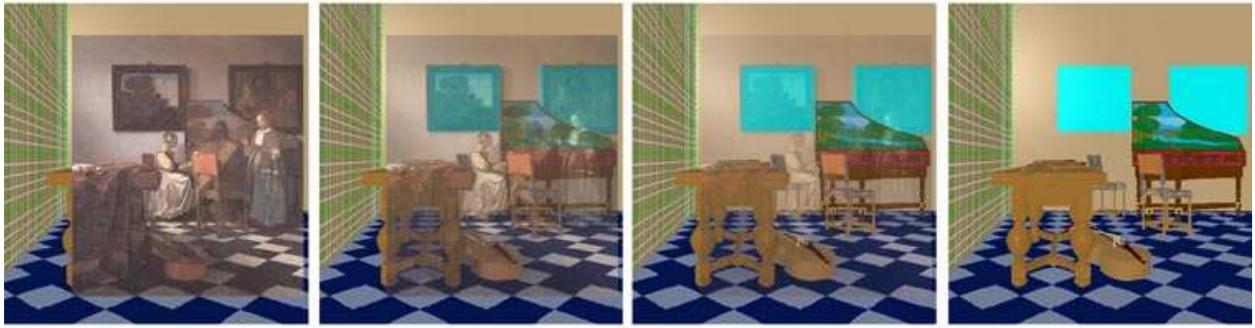
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>You say (p.6) that you are 'not able to figure out the true sizes of  
>the depicted objects'. But you are. You only need to look at my book  
>to find out the true sizes of the chairs and Visscher's map. So you  
>can scale everything else in The Art of Painting (assuming Vermeer  
>depicted them at their actual sizes, allowing for perspective  
>diminution - which in general he did). In my book I showed how a  
>common size for the marble tiles in several paintings brings many  
>items in numerous pictures close to their known actual sizes.

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>I have collaborated with a Japanese colleague Yasuo Furuichi who has  
>built a 3D computer model of Vermeer's studio. He has also modelled  
>all the items of furniture and other 'props', to their real sizes  
>where these are known, or to the sizes that I calculated from my  
>reconstructions where the real sizes are not known. Mr Furuichi stores  
>all these items in 'Vermeer's warehouse', as in the attached image. He

>can then reconstruct the various paintings by moving the pieces of  
>furniture into position in the room. I have attached a series of  
>images of The Art of Painting, where he shows the match of the 3D  
>model to the actual painting.  
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>  
>Some technical points about the camera obscura. You talk in the  
>Abstract of your paper about scaling a 'tiny' camera obscura image. My  
>central argument in Vermeer's Camera shows that the painter worked  
>from camera projections at the actual sizes of the canvases  
>themselves. He would have used a large booth camera which he sat  
>inside. This is technically quite feasible. I have built several such  
>large cameras myself and obtained nice bright images, indoors,  
>measuring a metre or more across. We did this in Vienna for The Art of  
>Painting (for which the space and furniture were rather roughly mocked  
>up). There is a photograph in the exhibition catalogue of a camera  
>image at the actual size of The Art of Painting, around 1m x 1.5m.  
>There is some softening of the image at the edges: but the whole of  
>the tiled floor is in focus. I have used modern lenses, but of a kind  
>that would have been available in the 17th century. Technical analysis  
>of actual 17th century lenses has shown that they compare well with  
>their modern counterparts.  
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>You have perhaps been misled by the small box camera that Robert Wald  
>showed in the exhibition. I have not proposed that Vermeer used a  
>camera of this kind, and I have not argued that Vermeer would have  
>'scaled' camera images as you suggest on p.7. (On the other hand my  
>geometrical demonstration in Vermeer's Camera does not apply to The  
>Art of Painting - which like the Allegory of Faith is much bigger than  
>all of Vermeer's other interiors.)  
>  
>You ask, what would be the meaning of the hole at the central  
>vanishing point in The Art of Painting. (And there are similar holes  
>in other paintings.) Presumably you have in mind that this hole might  
>have played some part in the geometrical construction of the  
>perspective. However I pointed out in my book that a pin at the  
>vanishing point would have been equally useful for a camera method -  
>for ruling lines over the images of the receding orthogonals. I also  
>pointed out that there is no unambiguous physical evidence of Vermeer  
>using geometrical methods for his - extremely accurate - perspectives.  
>There is little or no under-drawing of any kind, and certainly no  
>underlying drawn grids.  
>  
>Your second argument against the camera obscura theory (p.7) is not an  
>argument but an assertion: that for Vermeer, composition and allegory  
>were more important than geometrically exact depiction. (But of course  
>his depiction is in large part geometrically exact.) For me this a  
>>false opposition. I agree that Vermeer was extremely interested in  
>composition: however I think that Vermeer achieved this, and truth to  
>a real scene, simultaneously. This is because he could have used the  
>camera in the very process of composition: the camera is a  
>'composition machine'. Vermeer could have provisionally placed the  
>furniture, sitters and other elements, and looked at the resulting  
>image on the camera screen. He could then have embarked on a prolonged  
>process of adjustment of their positions, until he achieved what he  
>wanted in the image. He composed that is to say with the real scene  
>and the real objects - much as studio photographers and film-makers do  
>today.  
>  
>He could even have placed the edge of the map to divide the width of  
>The Art of Painting in the golden section - except that in my  
>calculation he didn't. I find that the ratio is 1: 1.67, rather than  
>1: 1.62  
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>  
>Best wishes,  
>Philip Steadman



↑ The Concert VWH Version 0.01 (May 29, 2002 YF)

↓ Art of Painting VWH Version 0.01 (May 30, 2002 YF)

