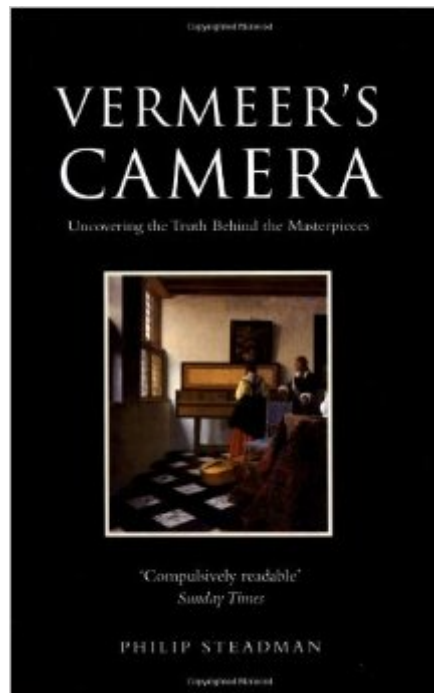




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# Vermeer's Camera: Uncovering The Truth Behind The Masterpieces



## Synopsis

Art historians have long speculated on how Vermeer achieved the uncanny mixture of detached precision, compositional repose, and perspective accuracy that have drawn many to describe his work as "photographic." Indeed, many wonder if Vermeer employed a camera obscura, a primitive form of camera, to enhance his realistic effects? In *Vermeer's Camera*, Philip Steadman traces the development of the camera obscura--first described by Leonardo da Vinci--weighs the arguments that scholars have made for and against Vermeer's use of the camera, and offers a fascinating examination of the paintings themselves and what they alone can tell us of Vermeer's technique. Vermeer left no record of his method and indeed we know almost nothing of the man nor of how he worked. But by a close and illuminating study of the paintings Steadman concludes that Vermeer did use the camera obscura and shows how the inherent defects in this primitive device enabled Vermeer to achieve some remarkable effects--the slight blurring of image, the absence of sharp lines, the peculiar illusion not of closeness but of distance in the domestic scenes. Steadman argues that the use of the camera also explains some previously unexplainable qualities of Vermeer's art, such as the absence of conventional drawing, the pattern of underpainting in areas of pure tone, the pervasive feeling of reticence that suffuses his canvases, and the almost magical sense that Vermeer is painting not objects but light itself. Drawing on a wealth of Vermeer research and displaying an extraordinary sensitivity to the subtleties of the work itself, Philip Steadman offers in *Vermeer's Camera* a fresh perspective on some of the most enchanting paintings ever created.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Philip Steadman's remarkable book *Vermeer's Camera* cracks an artistic enigma that has haunted art history for centuries. Over the years, artists and art historians have marveled at the extraordinary visual realism of the paintings of the 17th-century Dutch painter Jan Vermeer. The painter's spectacular *View of Delft*, painted around 1661, and the beautiful domestic interior *The Music Lesson* seem almost photographic in their incredible detail and precise perspective. Since the 19th century, experts have speculated that Vermeer used a camera obscura, an early precursor of the modern camera. However, conclusive proof was never discovered, until now. In *Vermeer's Camera*, Steadman proves that Vermeer did indeed use a camera obscura to complete his greatest canvases. Part art-historical study, part scientific argument, but mainly a fascinating detective story, *Vermeer's Camera* argues: Vermeer had a camera obscura with a lens at the painting's viewpoint. He used this arrangement to project the scene onto the back wall of the room, which thus served as the camera's screen. He put paper on the wall and traced, perhaps even painted from the projected image. It is because Vermeer traced these images that they are the same size as the paintings themselves. Steadman painstakingly develops his argument through careful study of the history of the camera obscura, an exploration of 17th-century optics, and a detailed study of the light, optics, perspective, and measurement of a series of Vermeer's paintings. He goes to remarkable lengths to reconstruct Vermeer's studio and its furnishings, down to the angle of the light from its windows. The science is complex, but always clearly explained. This is not an attempt to reveal Vermeer as an artistic "cheat." Steadman convincingly argues that "Vermeer's obsessions with light, tonal values, shadow, and colour, for the treatment of which his work is so admired, are very closely bound up with his study of the special qualities of optical images." *Vermeer's Camera* is a wonderful book that shows the ways in which, during the 17th century, art and science went hand in hand. It offers an enlarged, rather than reduced, perspective on Vermeer. --Jerry Brotton. .co.uk --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A professor of "urban and built form studies" at London's University College, Steadman has worked for more than 20 years on the question of whether 17th-century Dutch genius Johannes Vermeer might have used an optic device called a camera obscura (literally, a "dark room") to help create his paintings. Lucidly and with admirable concision, he discusses how the camera obscura works and how it affected painting in nine short chapters such as "Who Taught Vermeer About Optics?" (probably Antony van Leeuwenhoek, a pioneer developer of the microscope and other optic tools) and "Reconstructing the Spaces in Vermeer's Paintings." Steadman shows how Vermeer's paintings reproduce focal distortions and details of perspective that a camera lens would show, but

that do not ordinarily come clear to the naked eye, such as when two people sitting next to one another seem to have heads of dramatically different sizes. Steadman built miniature and full-size versions of the rooms shown in Vermeer's paintings (!) to see how the light would be captured and reflected had the painter used a camera obscura. The results yield no final answer to the question of Vermeer's techniques, but the book is a must-read for specialists in 17th-century Dutch art. Those with a more general interest in Vermeer will want to try the standard studies by Lawrence Gowing and A.K. Wheelock. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Steadman certainly did his research and calculations--all of which he tells you in sufficient detail so that you'll understand it all. Steadman explains the evidence he compiled to arrive at the conclusion that Vermeer certainly used an optical device to achieve his spectacular results. A couple of details may be still unsettled, but the evidence is convincing. Vermeer's wonderful paintings are by no means diminished: an artist can use whatever it takes to achieve the results he wants. One warning--do not get this book in the Kindle format. You need to go back and forth to refer to the diagrams and pictures that illustrate the text, a process I couldn't figure out on my Kindle--not to mention annoying.

Why just Vermeer? The book describes WIDESPREAD use of the camera by many artists, architects & engineers from the 17th century onward. Vermeer's use must be the MOST FAMOUS employment of the device. The book's language is textbook-like so be prepared to stop and think from time to time. It is science and mathematics as well as narrative. The photo plates are magnificent and the story of the TV studio reconstruction of Vermeer's Delft artist studio and setting for "The Music Lesson" is most fascinating.

After watching the movie, "Tim's Vermeer", where this book was referenced, I ordered it. It is actually quite technical and very well done. But it is definitely not a novel and is not an "easy" read. If you are in to scientific approaches then this is for you.

Fascinating and I am convinced about the use of camera obscura. Takes nothing away from Vermeer who was the master of light, shadows and colors. Highly recommend this book.

FIVE stars for Steadman's work, ONE star for the kindle version:1) None of the footnote numbers

were linked to the footnotes in the back of the book.2) None of the image/plate numbers were linked to their respective images.3) None of the pictures were in color; in the REAL text, surely the plates were in color, if not some or all of the figures.I have purchased six other kindle books and found them to be adequate with regards to links and image quality. I purchased one (a travel book) which I immediately returned because there were no pictures at all in it.I am loathe to purchase another kindle book from until I have some assurance that it will be a usable electronic resource, and not clearly inferior to its paper counterpart. Minimally, in the product details, all kindle books should be flagged as having footnote and image links, or not, and the number of both color and black&white images in the kindle version. Until gets serious about its kindle content, I'm afraid my kindle use will be reduced to surfing and sudoku.To make it clear, I am one very unhappy kindle customer.

Thought the book was very interesting. Bought it for a class and then ended up really enjoying it. Check it out if you love Vermeer!

Very detailed analysis of Vermeer's paintings that seem likely to have been done using a camera obscura. The DVD Video called Tim's Vermeer builds on the case made by the books author as to the possible combination of optical tools that Vermeer may have used.

I followed the author's view but it was not exactly exciting reading. Interesting though.

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