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- Admin on the Dutch Wikipedia since 2006
- Volunteer for Wikimedia Nederland (the Dutch Chapter) since 2007
- Email response team since 2008
- Admin on Commons since 2009



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## *The Milkmaid* (Vermeer)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

***The Milkmaid*** (Dutch: *De Melkmeid* or *Het Melkmeisje*), sometimes called *The Kitchen Maid*, is an oil-on-canvas painting of a "milkmaid", in fact, a domestic kitchen maid, by the Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer. It is now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, which regards it as "unquestionably one of the museum's finest attractions".<sup>[1]</sup>

The exact year of the painting's completion is unknown, with estimates varying by source. The Rijksmuseum estimates it as circa 1658. According to the *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in New York City, it was painted in about 1657 or 1658.<sup>[2]</sup> The "Essential Vermeer" website gives a broader range of 1658–1661.<sup>[3]</sup>

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## Descriptions and commentary [[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

The painting shows a milkmaid, a woman who milks cows and makes dairy products like butter and cheese, in a plain room carefully pouring milk into a squat earthenware container on a table. Milkmaids began working solely in the stables before large houses hired them to do housework as well rather than hiring out for more staff. Also on the table in front of the milkmaid are various types of bread. She is a young, sturdily built woman wearing a crisp linen cap, a blue apron and work sleeves pushed up from thick forearms. A foot warmer is on the floor behind her, near *Delft wall tiles* depicting *Cupid* (to the viewer's left) and a figure with a pole (to the right). Intense light streams from the window on the left side of the canvas.<sup>[4]</sup>

The painting is strikingly illusionistic, conveying not just details but a sense of the weight of the woman and the table. "The light, though bright, doesn't wash out the rough texture of the bread crusts or flatten the volumes of the maid's thick waist and rounded shoulders", wrote Karen Rosenberg, an art critic for *The New York Times*. Yet with half of the woman's face in shadow, it is "impossible to tell whether her downcast eyes and pursed lips express wistfulness or concentration," she wrote.<sup>[4]</sup>

"It's a little bit of a *Mona Lisa* effect" in modern viewers' reactions to the painting, according to *Walter Liedtke*, curator of the department of European paintings at *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, and organizer of two Vermeer exhibits. "There's a bit of mystery about her for modern audiences. She is going about her daily task, faintly smiling. And our reaction is 'What is she thinking?'"<sup>[5]</sup>

## Dutch iconography of maids [[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]



The woman would have been known as a "kitchen maid" or *maid-of-all-work* rather than a specialised "milkmaid" at the time the painting was created: "milk maids" were women who milked cows; kitchen maids worked in kitchens.<sup>[5]</sup> For at least two centuries before the painting was created, milkmaids and kitchen maids had a reputation as being predisposed to love or sex, and this was frequently reflected in Dutch paintings of kitchen and market scenes from Antwerp, Utrecht and Delft.<sup>[6]</sup> Some of the paintings were stly suggestive, like *The Milkmaid*, others more coarsely so.<sup>[2]</sup>

The leading artists in this tradition were the Antwerp painters *Inachim Beuckelaer* (c. 1535–1575) and *Frans Snyder* (1579–1657) who had many followers and imitators, as well as *Pieter Aertsen* (who like Beuckelaer had



**Arti**: Johannes Vermeer  
**Year**: c. 1657–1658 (though estimates differ)  
**Medium**: (Paint) Oil Paint on Canvas  
**Dimensions**: H 45.5 cm × W 41 cm (177⁄8 in × 161⁄8 in)  
**Location**: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands



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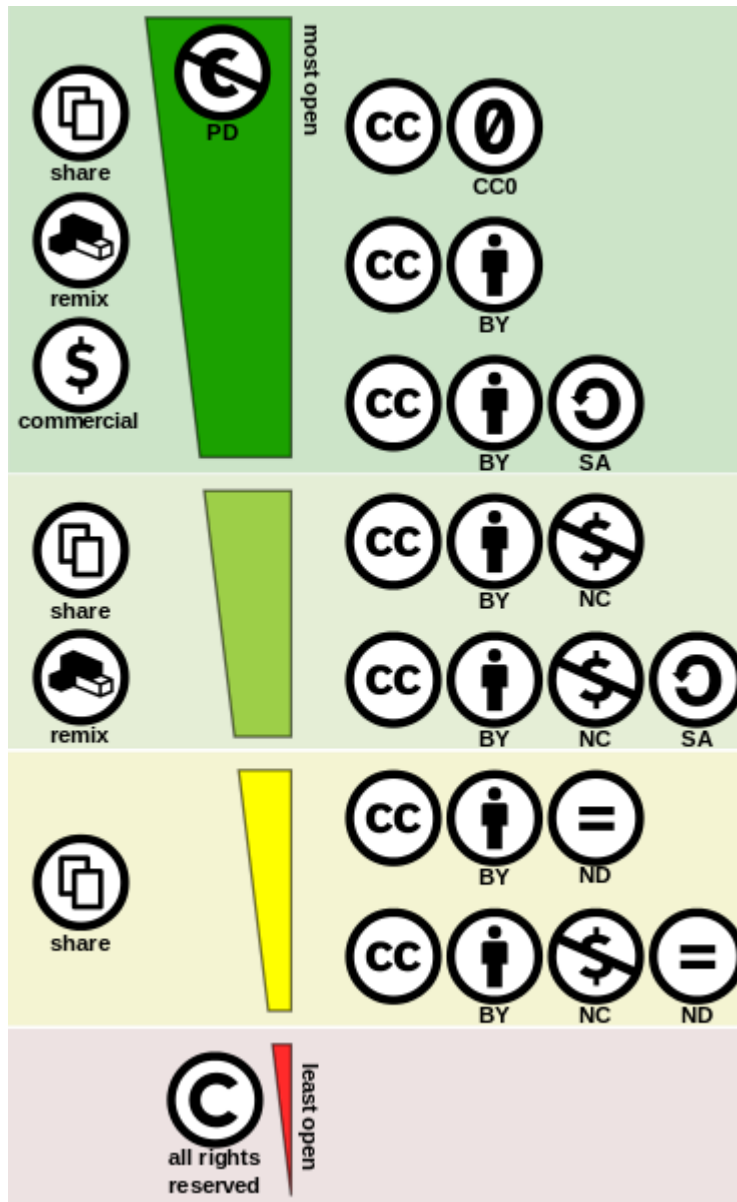
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