THE FORGER'S SPELL

A TRUE STORY OF VERMEER, NAZIS, AND THE GREATEST ART HOAX OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

EDWARD DOLNICK

THE MAN WHO MADE VERMEERS

UNVARNISHING THE LEGEND OF MASTER FORGER HAN VAN MEEGEREN

JONATHAN LOPEZ
A NEW VERMEER  BY ABRAHAM BREDIUS

T is a wonderful moment in the life of a lover of art when he finds himself suddenly confronted with a hitherto unknown painting by a great master, untouched, on the original canvas, and without any restoration, just as it left the painter’s studio! And what a picture! Neither the beautiful signature “I. V. Meer” (I.V.M. in monogram) nor the pointillé on the bread which Christ is blessing, is necessary to convince us that we have here a—I am inclined to say—the masterpiece of Johannes Vermeer of Delft, and, moreover, one of his largest works (1.29 m. by 1.17 m.), quite different from all his other paintings and yet every inch a Vermeer. The subject is Christ and the Disciples at Emmaus and the colours are magnificent—and characteristic: Christ in a splendid blue; the disciple on the left, whose face is barely visible, in a fine grey; the other disciple on the left in yellow—the yellow of the famous Vermeer at Dresden, but subdued so that it remains in perfect harmony with the other colours. The servant is clad in dark brown and dark grey; her expression is wonderful. Expression, indeed, is the most marvellous quality of this unique picture. Outstanding is the head of Christ, serene and sad, as He thinks of all the suffering which He, the Son of God, had to pass through in His life on earth, yet full of goodness. There is something in this head which reminds me

of the well-known study in the Brera Gallery at Milan, formerly held to be a sketch by Leonardo for the Christ of the Last Supper. Jesus is just about to break the bread at that moment when, as related in the New Testament, the eyes of the Disciples were opened and they recognized Christ risen from the dead and seated before them. The Disciple on the left seen in profile shows his silent adoration, mingled with astonishment, as he stares at Christ.

In no other picture by the great Master of Delft do we find such sentiment, such a profound understanding of the Bible story—a sentiment so nobly human expressed through the medium of the highest art.

As to the period in which Vermeer painted this masterpiece, I believe it belongs to his earlier phase—about the same time (perhaps a little later) as the well-known Christ in the House of Martha and Mary at Edinburgh (formerly in the Coats collection). He had given up painting large compositions because they were difficult to sell, and painters like Dou and Mieris were already getting big prices for their smaller works.

The reproduction [Plate] can only give a very inadequate idea of the splendid luminous effect of the rare combination of colours of this magnificent painting by one of the greatest artists of the Dutch school.
Baldur von Schirach sentenced to 20 years
Changes in the Price of “Christ and the Adulteress”
(actual price in 2008 U.S. dollars)

- 1942: $8,255,483.13
- 1945: $11,961,277.78
- 1947: $0
**Movement**

1. Industrial robot
2. Android
3. Moving corpse/uncanny valley
4. Prosthetic hand
5. Handicapped person
6. Bunraku puppet
7. Unhealthy person
8. Healthy person

**Appearance**

1. Stuffed toy
2. Noh mask of thin man
3. Corpse/uncanny valley
4. Decorative robot
5. Doll

**Overall**

1. Toy robot
2. Uncanny valley
3. Bunraku puppet
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1937</th>
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<th>1941</th>
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<td>Price (guilders)</td>
<td>520,000</td>
<td>219,000</td>
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<td>1,270,000</td>
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Changes in the Price of Van Meegeren Forgeries 1937-1944 (actual price in guilders)
FOREIGN NEWS

ITALY
Whirlpool of Grief

The sea was calm under the harsh Riviera sun. Eighty-two children crowded the small 30-ft. motor launch Abnusaria as it pulled out from the little seaside town of Leona. With shrill chatter and singing, the children (aged ten to twelve) set forth with six women guardians and three crewmen for the island of Gallinaria, six miles away.

Suddenly one of the crew shouted something to the helmsman, but his warning was drowned by the children’s singing. The launch plowed into a rusty underwater steel pylon, placed there by the Germans as an anti-submarine obstacle. For a moment the launch’s prow hung in the air, then the stern slid swiftly under water. Without a punctuating pause, the children’s songs became screams.

Eventually fishermen, vacationers, cara-baniers from the village of Albenga and the three crewmen brought in 44 small corpses and three of the women. On a long, banquet-sized table covered with a white cloth in the White Cross aid station, the 44 children were laid in a neat row, side by side. Each child’s hands were carefully clasped on his breast, each tiny fist held a flower. When the parents and relatives arrived from Milan, one Italian reporter wrote, the grisly hall became “a wild whirlpool of grief and lashsialty.”

Two thousand miles away, in Bombay harbor, the 400-ton coastal vessel Ramdar, its decks crowded with more than 700 people, headed out for the one-hour run to Rewa. A wall of water swept in from the open sea, struck the Ramdar a reeling blow. A second huge wave crashed down on the decks, sweeping the screaming passengers into the sea. No lifeboats were launched, no radio messages sent. Clinging to the floating wreckage were 179 survivors. In exactly two minutes, 563 people were lost.

GERMANY
The Women

Present, as at a Kaffeeklatsch in the good old days, were Frau Feld Marshal

warm sun. A man, whose dirt-streaked face is stubbed with beard, squats on a knapsack near her, staring out before him. A youth on crutches hobbles out on the broad concrete highway and hikes a truck which has just left the check-point. As it stops, all scramble to their feet and crowd around the driver. They are the potato seekers, hitchhiking their way out to the flat farm country, where they will try to trade their few belongings for food.

Before the driver lets them climb aboard, he demands at least one cigarette from each of them. "What the hell," he says, "I've got to live, too, don't I?" Truck drivers prosper that way.

As evening falls, the potato seekers drift back to the Autobahn. Some have full knapsacks; others are empty-handed. A father and three daughters wave down a passing American car. They are filthy. For two days they have tramped across plowed fields, barefooted, to save their shoes. They have had one meal of bread and water, "not even coffee," they say. "We got nothing," said the eldest daughter. "The peasants told us we had nothing they wanted in trade." The youngest girl, twelve years old, falls immediately into a deep sleep, clutching a six-week-old puppy which they got because a farmer wanted to drown it.

Party-Liners. In a three-room flat in Hochstrasse, outside Frankfurt, sits Peter Fischer, a tubby, earnest little man who spent a lifetime in the parties of the working class—first the Social Democrats, then the Communists. He helped form the Frankfurt city government when the Nazis fled.

"I never rejoiced a political party after the war," he explains, "because I do not believe that this is a time for party lines."
Han van Meegeren
Teekeningen