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Above: *The Little Street (Het Straatje)*, by the Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, is exhibited at Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. Below: *Sunset at the Spiegelgracht* in the old town of Amsterdam

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between the gabled elevations and Voldersgracht, where Vermeer was born. It was also the new location of the Guild of Saint Luke, the local corporation in charge of regulating artists' businesses. Others identified the view as Vlamingstraat, where Vermeer's aunt lived. The reality is, the view and the buildings might not even be real. Who would have dared build such a frail brick wall above two open archways?

There are four characters in this painting, yet we cannot see anyone's faces, for they are not individuals, but symbols of their time. Whether the scene is authentic or reconstructed doesn't really matter, as Vermeer gave us something far more precious than a streetscape. His outdoor vanishing perspective, unique in his body of work, opened a window onto domestic life in the 17th century, freezing time in its steps to give us the truth about an everyday life that no longer exists.

While visiting the Rijksmuseum, rushing to see the *The Milkmaid* and other world-renowned portraits by the artist, you might easily pass *The Little Street* by. Come back and have a look, as this painting holds the key to the Dutch Golden Age.



The **BIGGER** picture

If you're going to see one work of art in Amsterdam, this is the piece to make time to see

Words: MAÏA MORGENSZTERN

It's the year 1657 in Delft, The Netherlands. It's been two years since Johannes Vermeer, born in the city 25 years ago, debuted his professional life as a painter. He is starting to work on quiet scenes, a stark contrast with his bubbly home filled with his children's laughter. Slowly, the artist meticulously infuses his landscapes with so much detail that French existentialist Marcel Proust would later zoom in on a yellow wall spotted in the painting *View of Delft* to declare Vermeer a master.

For now, the painter is working on *The Little Street*, a small composition depicting a row of worn façades stretching towards a cloudy sky. Over the years, the oil on canvas has been the centre of many debates. Some scholars have pointed out the resemblance