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Focusing on the extraordinary Lacemaker from the Musée du Louvre, this beautiful book investigates the subtle and enigmatic paintings by Johannes Vermeer that celebrate the intimacy of the Dutch household. Moments frozen in paint that reveal young women sewing, reading or playing musical instruments, captured in Vermeer's uniquely luminous style, recreate a silent and often mysterious domestic realm, closed to the outside world, and inhabited almost exclusively by women and children.

Three internationally recognized experts in the field explain why women engaged in mundane domestic tasks, or in pleasurable pastimes such as music making, writing letters, or adjusting their toilette, comprise some of the most popular Dutch paintings of the seventeenth century. Among the most intriguing of these compositions are those that consciously avoid any engagement with the viewer. Rather than acknowledging our presence, figures avert their gazes or turn their backs upon us; they stare moodily into space or focus intently on the activities at hand. In viewing these paintings, we have the impression that we have stumbled upon a private world kept hidden from casual regard.

The ravishingly beautiful paintings of Vermeer are perhaps the most poetic evocations of this secretive world, but other Dutch painters sought to imbue simple domestic scenes with an air of silent mystery, and the book also features works by some of the most important masters of 17th-century Dutch genre painting, among them Gerard ter Borch, Gerrit Dou, Pieter de Hooch, Nicolaes Maes, and Jan Steen.

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