

numbers, symbolized the pluralist state of man who has not achieved inner unity (perfection) whilst the circle would correspond to this ultimate state of Oneness." It is highly significant that this yellow glass disc is only partially visible as is the astrolabe on the table, another disc, used for plotting the stars. There is the urge to unity here but it is not yet achieved. We are being shown process and means and a glimpse of a kind of mystical final state, but like the globes in both pictures we remain somewhere in the middle of the journey. The presence in The Geographer and The Astronomer of the light outside the upper windows is the same we saw in The Music Lesson and which was conspicuously absent in The Concert. This is symbolic of that final goal, but in all three pictures there is the containment of the room itself as the focus for transformation while the materiality of the glass window acts as a last barrier to be passed before a final "enlightenment." In The Art of Painting, the powerful wedge of light thrusting upward beside the woman posing as Clio, the muse of history, finally brings that light into the room itself in a powerful and dramatic fashion that not only explains Vermeer's final achievement, but the function of light in the other works connected with it.

For me, all of these paintings are expressive of a central crisis in Vermeer's life and of how he responded to it. His crisis was spiritual, a reflection of the time and place he lived in, Holland, in the seventeenth century, where in a town like Delft that legendary Dutch tolerance was less pronounced than in the larger cities. This was tempered by the Dutch penchant for money-making and a willingness to bend the rules and look the other way when it came to dealings with wealthy Catholics. For instance, Catholics could not hold public office nor worship publicly, but Vermeer was elected head of the artists' guild twice. As a Calvinist who had converted to

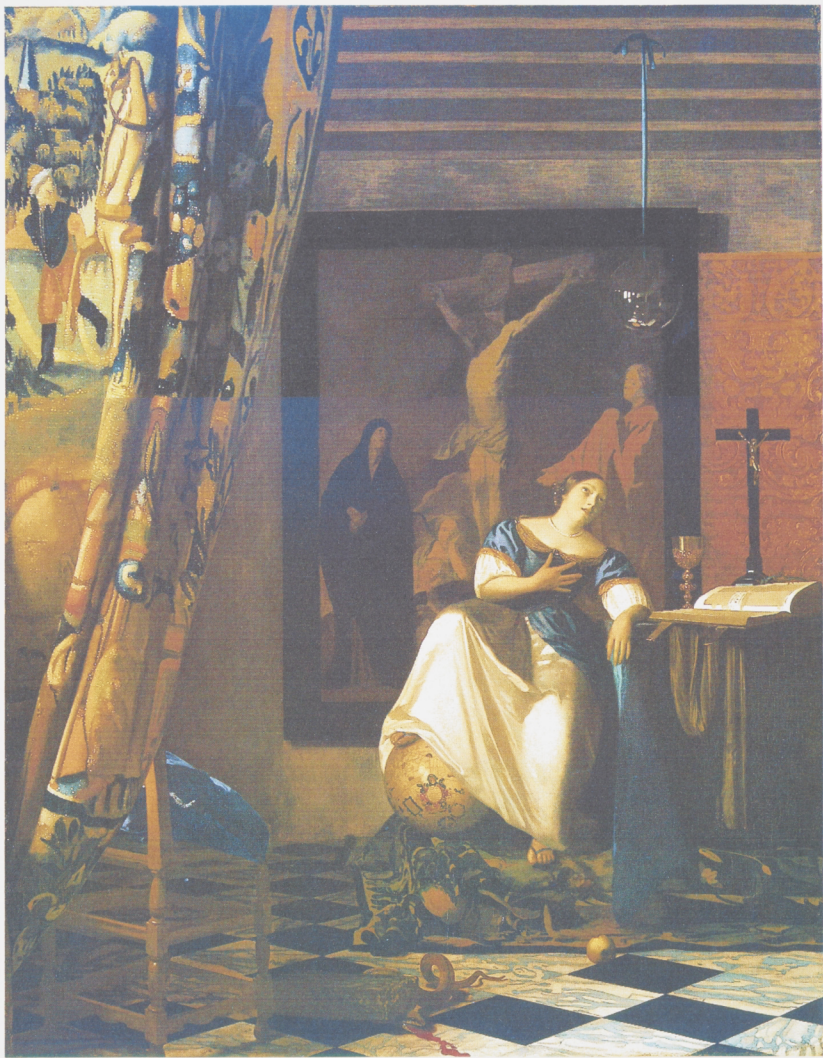


Plate IX: *Allegory of Faith*

Catholicism, he had a foot in both worlds which suggests Calvinism's belief in predestination held little appeal for a person of his willful temperament and creative mind. Still, from what I detect from his work, his coerced conversion was not a happy experience either. His paintings contain little evidence for any particular sectarian view with the notable exception of The Allegory of The Faith (Plate IX). Its Catholic histrionics, so reminiscent of Lorenzo Bernini's The Ecstasy of St. Teresa is a perfect example of his use of one theme to express something else, as he does by taking the subject of a passionate, blind faith, and revealing it to us in the most negative terms. He chooses a size and format that recalls The Art of Painting with the obvious intent that, by contrast, the one would reveal at least the nature of the other and through this process indicate to us where he stood in this contentious situation. I think the power politics and corruption of organized religion, its rigid dogmas and all the destruction of the previous century had pushed Vermeer into a singular and deeply personal view of Christianity, an unencumbered one which went back to the basics.

There is something of the contrary about him which reminds me of Carel Fabritius whose own works also contain this element of the rebel in them. Vermeer takes the popular painting genres of this time and makes every work so different from that of his contemporaries as to constitute a genre in its own right, unique in Dutch painting. His mastery of painting technique is revealed in the variety of styles he was able to bring to his work. Each picture seems to have been its own special project with its own personality and style of painting, changing just a little from one to the next, and when we consider that his career was only about twenty years long and that this mastery is confined to an output of only thirty-five works, it

challenges credulity. And it should. What we see in each work is the end product of a complicated and thorough process of preparation. And yet, we have no subject or compositional studies, no preparatory drawings, and even modern devices for seeing beneath paint layers have revealed no underlying drawing in his pictures, almost as if each painting we see, manifested itself complete on his canvas. Some have thought that he used a camera lucida, an image projection device, to project a completely orchestrated scene onto a canvas, and then of using a brush only to establish the foundations of his painting. What we have seen with the complex demands of composing within the geometry of the golden section, the system Vermeer used in The Art of Painting and the others should be enough to show clearly the impracticality of this approach. His realism itself argues for a careful preparation and the fact that none of this preliminary work survives must of course lay with Vermeer himself. We see only what he wanted us to see.

So, who was this "Sphinx of Delft," this riddle of light and shadow, who seems to have moved through his own world without a footprint, whose adamantine will pulled a spirit from the turmoil of his time and gave it light? We know so little about him, and yet he lives for us in that light and in a legacy of some thirty-five modestly sized paintings whose magic continues to cast a spell on all who have a spirit to fathom and eyes to see.

His quiet universe beckons to us, whispers to us from a place beyond all of the cacophony and stridence of a changing world. Aesthetic theories, "isms" and fashions have come and gone and will continue to do so, while he remains in his special place like the pole star around which time and space and change revolve.

But now, we have looked into this world of the seemingly real so

beautifully evoked and have found another, almost ineffable world within, where Vermeer tells us his story with a spirit only hinted at in much of his other work. In five paintings he gives us a spiritual journey that grew out of personal anguish and a tragic event. In The Art of Painting, he gives us the final steps in that journey choosing not the iconography of the religious art of previous centuries, but rather the imagery of enlightenment itself drawn from the independent realm of the hermetic arts. In this way only, could he avoid even the implication of dogma. By observing one of alchemy's most important concepts, that it was the pattern of all other work; he found a perfect model for his pictorial analogy. The alchemical process is systematic in that its operations take place in a certain order with established color sequences and even imagery. For Vermeer, its workings could express his own spiritual evolution without ever even hinting at sectarianism. The Tarot enigmas, the cycle of the Zodiac, numbers, levels and other symbolic ideas were brought into this synthesis as ways of thinking about life's mysteries and especially about perception itself. Since the painter in The Art of Painting is not painting, that is, giving us the act itself, the theme becomes not about art but about art's purpose and more particularly the purpose of the artist himself. A better title might have been The Art of My Art, and because of its singular and personal nature this work became one definitely "not for profane eyes." This is why he valued it so much. Never again would he approach a painting in this way, with so many levels working so secretly to one end.

The thrust of my argument here has been that Vermeer, upon completion of this work, felt a need, not to explain its uniqueness so much as to express its origins and to give it context. This is seemingly substantiated by Arthur Wheelock and others in the dating of Vermeer's works, that the

two pairs of pendants we have discussed followed directly after The Art of Painting and became its fundament, creating what should be seen as a set of five related works. That number five brings to mind, among so many meanings and associations, that connection it has with the meaning of the fifth enigma of the Tarot pack, The Archpriest, which announces "information, proof, philosophy and religion." The Art of Painting has them all.

The mystery and beauty of Vermeer's paintings are not diminished by a better comprehension of the nature of their reality; they are enhanced by it, and their spiritual and intellectual dimensions are expanded dramatically by this unique understanding of his art. I hope I have been able to present such a complex subject in a way that communicates its unusual and exotic nature to a contemporary audience overwhelmingly unprepared for it. Though it may appear so, this is not an eccentric exercise in decoding, nor is it a treatise on religion, or for that matter even a discussion of aesthetics. All of these play a part, but my primary aim has been to bring a portrait of this unusual artist into a greater focus for us, but to do it on his terms and in the context of his times. I have endeavored to build in you, the reader, the frames of reference that are absolutely necessary if you are to do this, and that without them, no matter how brilliant and intuitive your imagination might be, the full meaning of his work will be forever out of reach. This has not been speculation, but the story of a way of thinking that was anachronistic even in Vermeer's own time and now so lost in the past that even art historians, who should know better, are unaware of it. As I have shown, there is an abundance of available information out there for everything I have written here. Only the connections were lacking, until now. Whether I have been able to lead you to

make these connections yourself or not, will not affect the reality of their existence. Some will see this; others will not, but for all of us the poetry, mystery and beauty of Vermeer's incomparable works will still be there. The rest, as Shakespeare's Hamlet says is silence.

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Plate I: *The Art of Painting*

THE RED LION

The Hermetic World of Johannes Van der Meer



Scott Gentling





Plate IX: *Allegory of Faith*



Plate IV: The Music Lesson

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FACING PAGE



Plate V: *The Concert*

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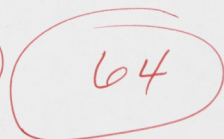
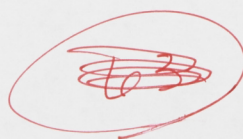
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Plate V: *The Concert*

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Plate VI: Dirck van Baburen, *The Procureess*, 1622

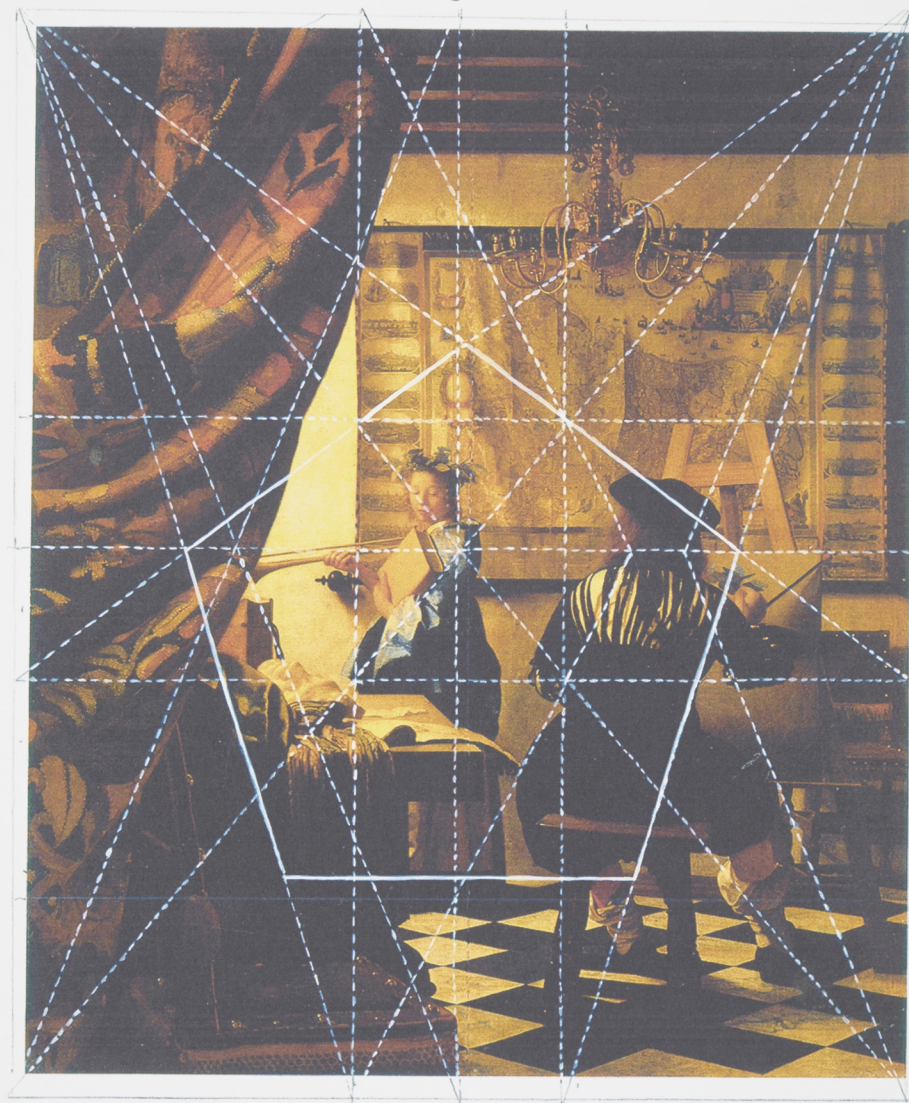




The Art of Painting (detail)
"Unpainting the picture"

45

Fig. 3



The Art of Painting
Geometry of the Golden Section

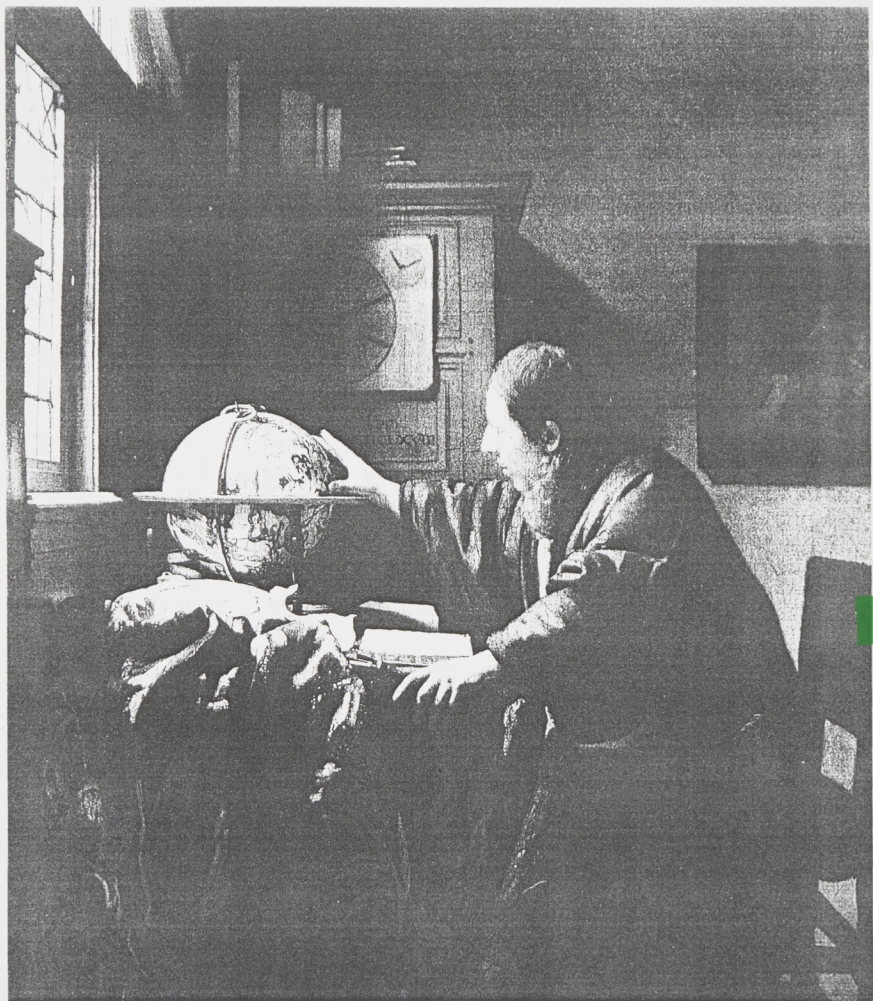
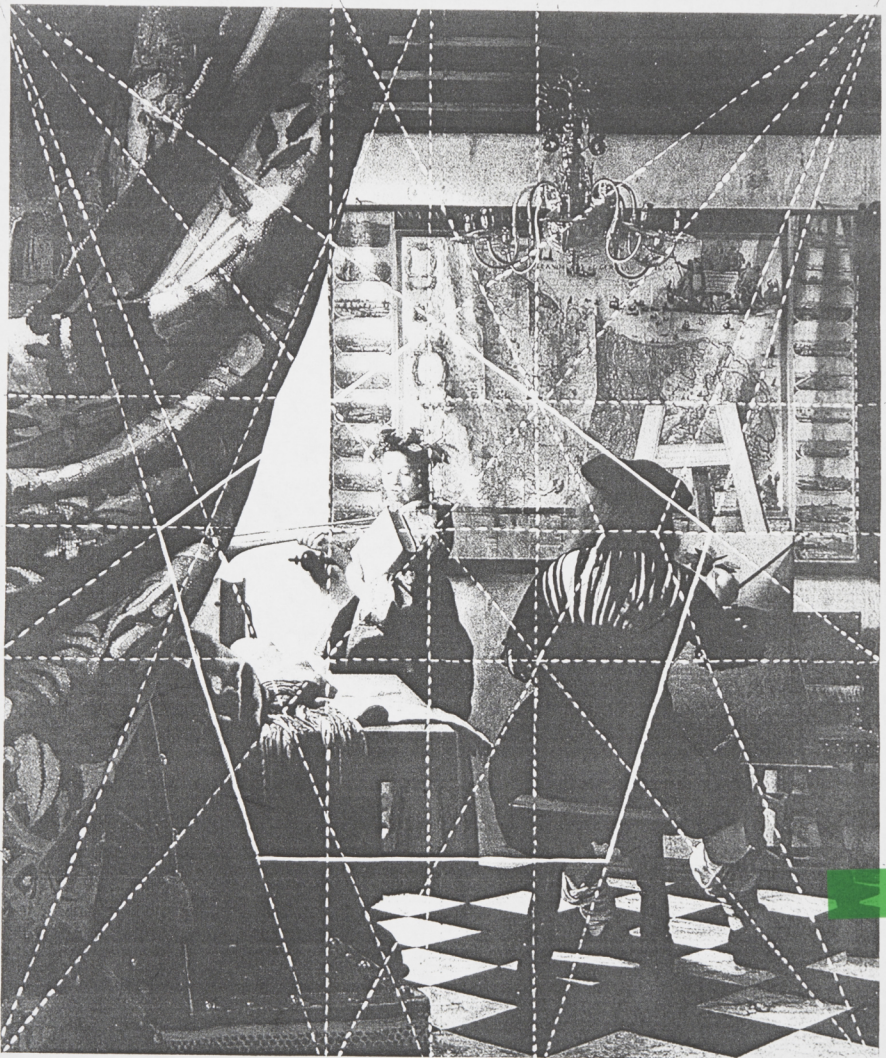


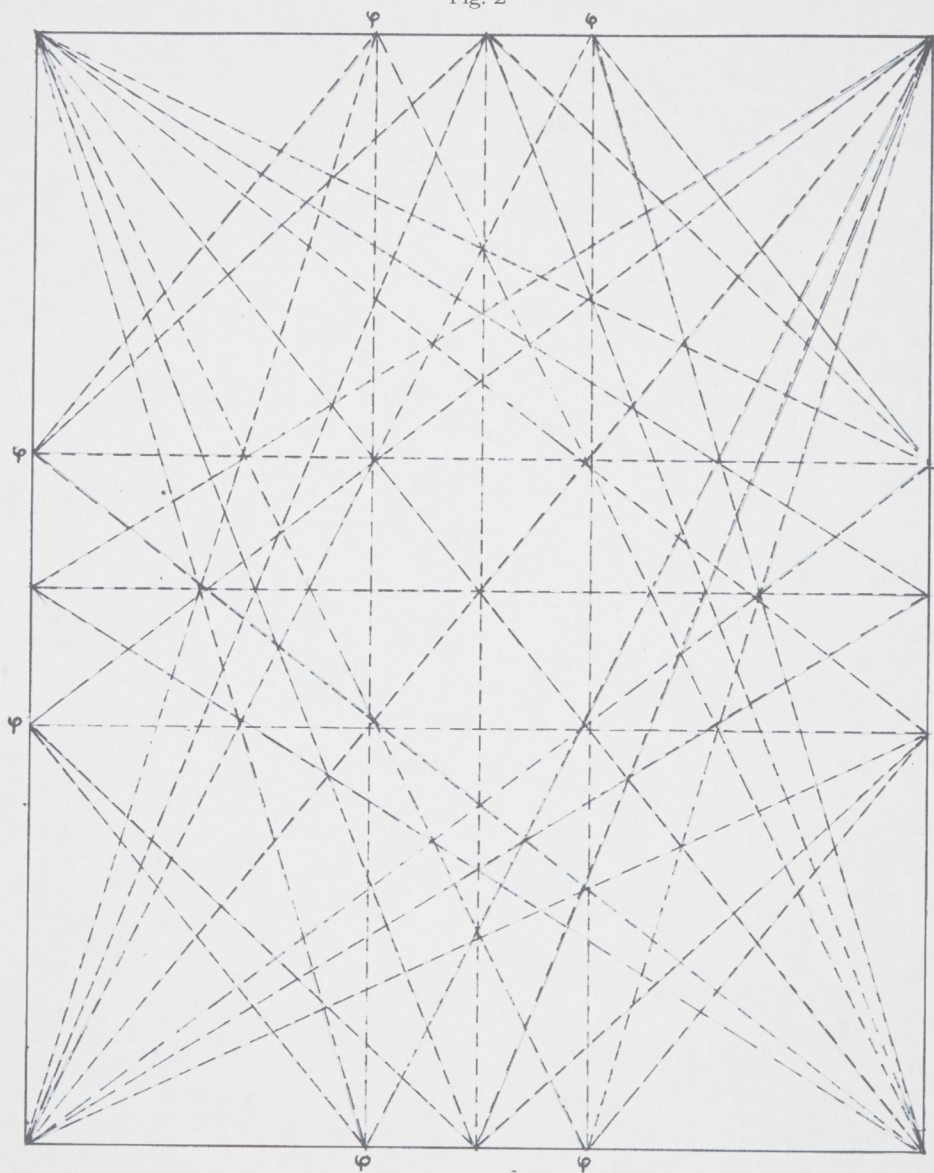
Plate VIII: *The Astronomer*

Fig. 3



The Art of Painting
Geometry of the Golden Section

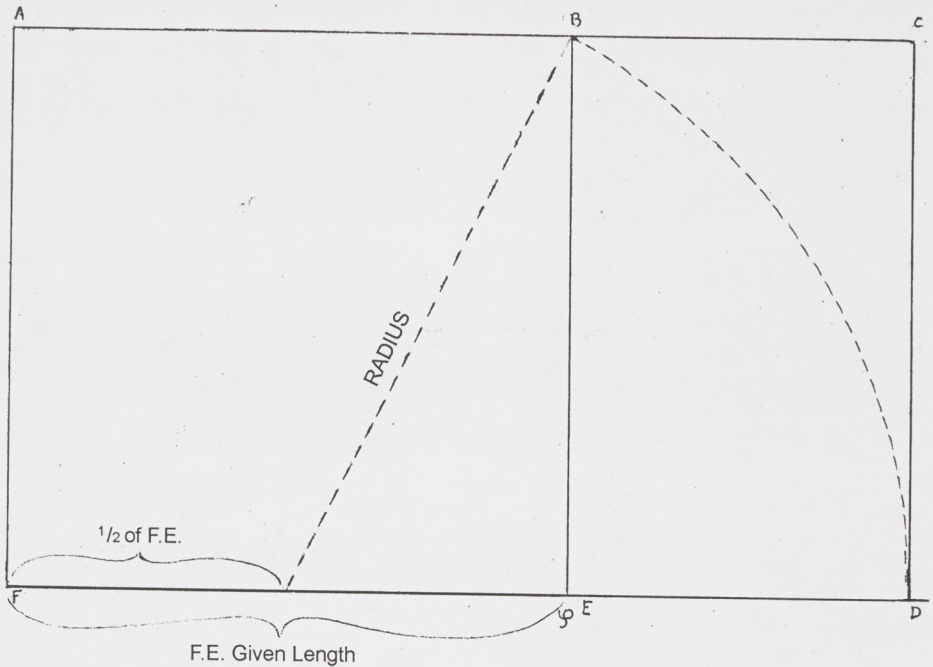
Fig. 2



Geometry of the Golden Section

Fig. 1

THE GOLDEN SECTION



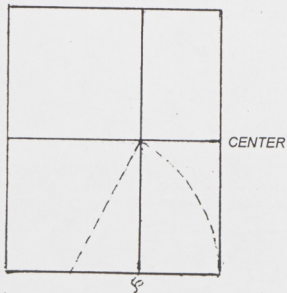
B ————— C

A ————— B

A ————— C

as AB is to AC

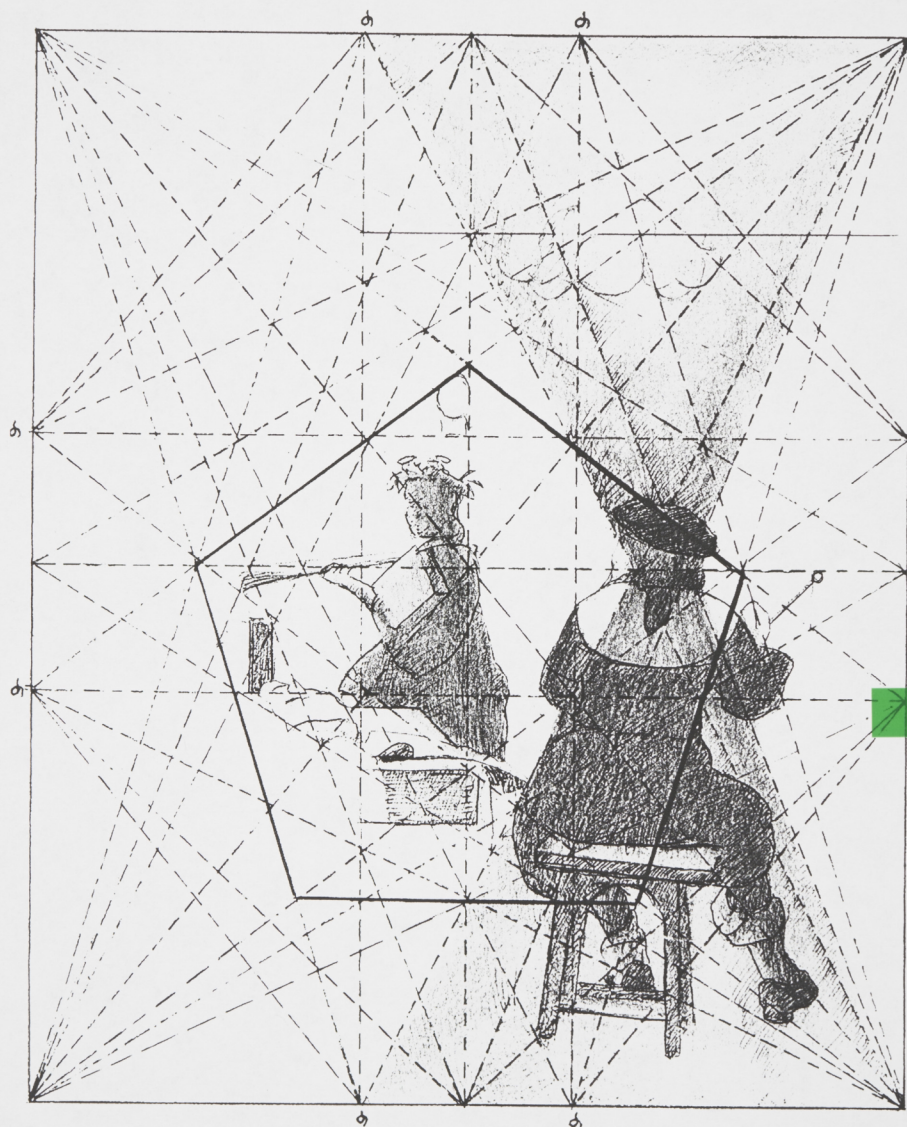
Above: B,C is to A,B as to A,C



Proportions of Jan Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*

PAGE NUMBERS
10 12 pt. Times

Fig. 4



Pentagon and Hour-glass



Park Place enterprises, inc.
A relaxed approach to the serious business of marketing

5-6-09

Louis,

This is last round of changes/corrections.

Green flags indicate a photo copy placeholder which you will need to replace with your color pages.

The new page number is circled in red on the color pages and you will need to set the page numbers for your pages in 12 pt. Times

I have left my marked-up pages for Table of Contents and List of Illustrations clipped to Scott's marked up version in the manilla folder.

thanks,

g.

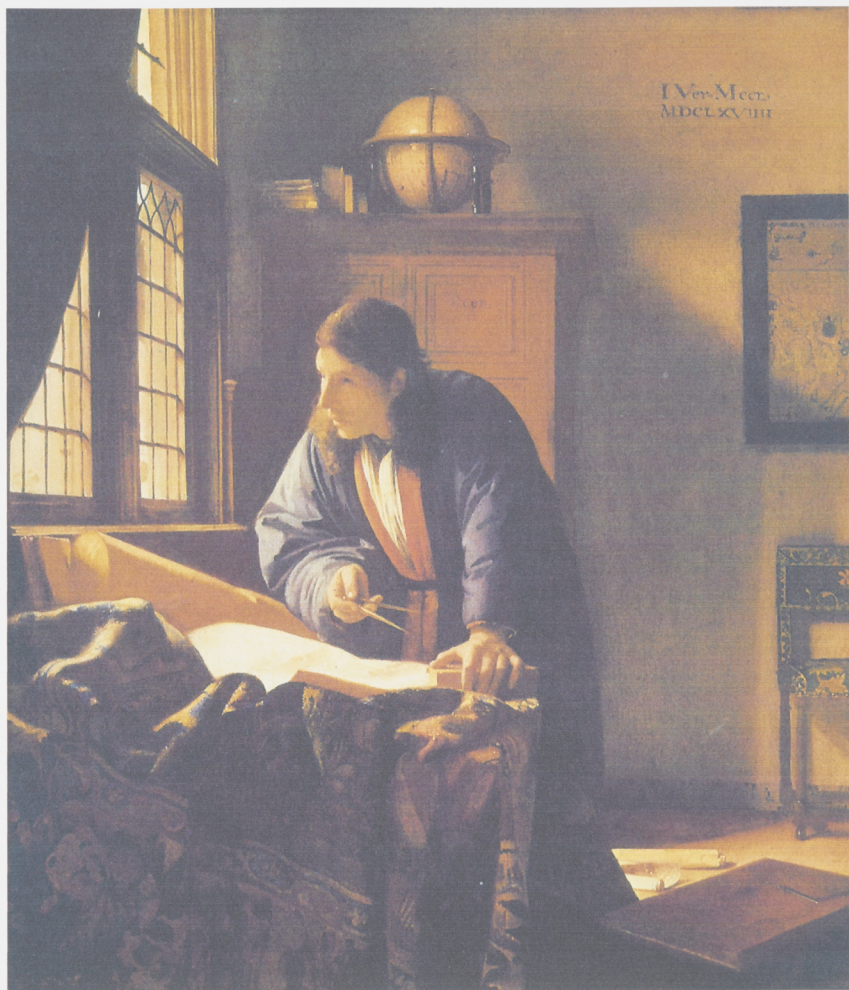
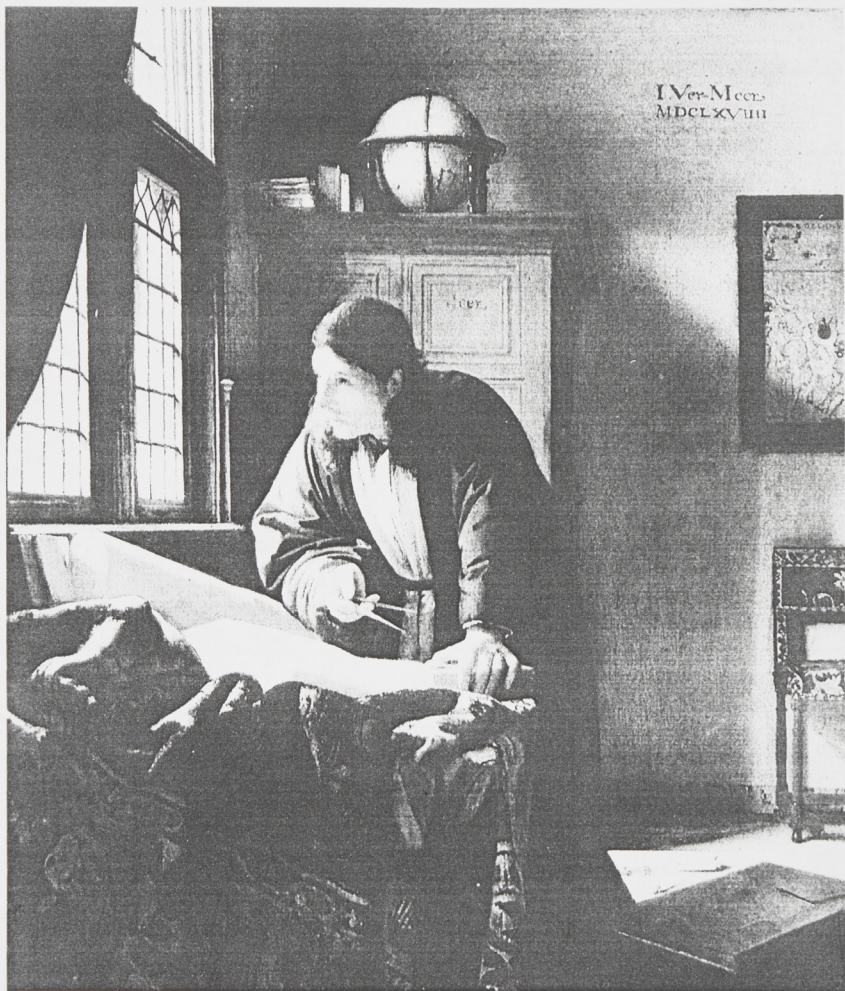


Plate VII: *The Geographer*



FACING PAGE

Plate VII: The Geographer

May 4, 2009

Louis,

What remains here is the last difficulty we have to deal with. — The page numberings.

I'm using a model here from another book.

- ① Small roman numerals begin with the number *X* on the "Contents" page. Here I number the blank backside of each page but only here in the beginning. These backside numbers are not printed on these, but implied.
- ② Where the color reproductions face each other as in Plates *IV*, *V* and *VII*, *VIII* I have given a page number for each painting so each can be listed on the "Contents" page with a page number.

This means, of course, that all of the pages will need to be renumbered now that

The illustrations are in the book.

The blue numbers I put in this last revision are not the numbers that will be in the final version but have been put in this one to fix their locations in the text only.

The page numbers in the Contents and Illustration pages cannot be put there until all the pages in the final version are renumbered. Then the final Contents and Illustration pages can be redone with their correct page numbers.

What a headache!

Scott

LA

"Les temps decouvrir las vérité"

John James Audubon, in his Journal





LOUIS DANIEL

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• Break the Tab on the rear side of the cassette to prevent
accidental erasure of pre-recorded material.