

A Boy Bringing Bread - Pieter de Hooch



Oil on canvas, 1663, 74.5 cm × 60 cm, Wallace Collection London

- Floor tiles of different colours and laid to different patterns give sense of perspective
- Upright stance of boy draws attention to doorways beyond
- Series of dark and light interiors and exteriors visible through doorway
- Orangey light shining through curtains and reflected off buildings
- Main interest in left hand side of painting

Description

At the doorway of a house a woman chooses some bread from a tray held by a small boy. The two figures are placed in the left half of the painting. In the right half a chair is painted with quite some detail to the chair itself and the cushion on it. Above the chair is a large window with leaded glass. The bottom half of the window is covered by a thin orange coloured voile or net. The painter has rendered extremely well the way in which the net is illuminated by the daylight outside; you really get a sense of the light shining through it. Above the curtain you can see the shapes of the buildings outside, themselves reflecting a yellowy/orange light.

The boy stands at the doorway, beyond which is a courtyard, then another doorway onto the street and what appears to be a canal. Beyond the canal is a bank with a tree growing on it and beyond that the doorway to another house with a distant figure in it.

The device of painting doorways within doorways all the way to the other side of the street effectively gives a deep sense of perspective. The shadow to the corner of the room on the right hand side of the painting also gives a sense of perspective.

Interpretation

There is a strong sense of perspective in this painting. The explanatory notes besides the painting at the Wallace Collection explain how this was achieved “the drawn perspective was created by placing a pin at the vanishing point The principal lines of the composition converge on this point”.

The notes also describe how the boy may have been used as a motif to create a narrative to this story and that he draws attention to the woman in the doorway to the house on the other side of the canal (and states that it may possibly be his mother).

Evaluation

Chilvers (2009 p302) considers that with de Hooch there is “a kinship of spirit with his great Delft contemporary Vermeer and de Hooch sometimes approaches him in delicate observation of light and lucidity of composition although not in beauty of brushwork”.

Murray (1997 p256) note that de Hooch must have known Vermeer “He chose the same kind of subject – an interior with two or three figures engaged in some household task and he occupied himself with rendering the fall of sunlight on surfaces, his favourite effect being that of a dark foreground with an open door leading through into a second room which is brightly lit”.

492 words

References

Chilvers, I. (2009) *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* (4th edition). Oxford: Oxford University

Murray, P. & L. (1997) *Penguin Dictionary of Art and Artists* (revised 7th edition). London: Penguin

<http://www.wallaceprints.org/image/321667/pieter-de-hooch-a-boy-bringing-bread>