

## Object Information Sheet

### Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, ca. 1665

- This painting is not considered a portrait, as it does not represent a real person and his or her individual characteristics. Instead it is a *tronie*, a character study of facial expressions and costumes.
- Many artists who painted *tronies* also painted portraits. As members of the middle class gained new wealth and prosperity, many commissioned portraits of themselves to demonstrate their affluence. Group portraits also became important means for honoring and recording charities or political groups.
- Johannes Vermeer created a relatively small number of paintings—only thirty-five—but they have been well preserved.
- Vermeer started out making history paintings, but eventually concentrated on interior scenes and became admired for his technique and illusions of light.
- The girl in this painting wears exotic and expensive clothing and jewelry. The turban was imported from Turkey and was not typical attire for Dutch girls in the seventeenth century. Artists of this period often included clothing and ornamentation obtained through trade from far-off places in their artworks.
- The blue of the girl's turban, called ultramarine, was a very expensive color for artists to buy because it was made from lapis lazuli, a costly stone.
- The camera obscura was an optical device that led to the invention of the camera. Vermeer may have used the camera obscura in the making of this work. Despite the mechanism's accuracy, seventeenth-century lenses could not focus perfectly. Like objects seen through the camera obscura, Vermeer's forms are defined by contrasting areas of light and dark color rather than by hard outlines. This can be seen particularly in the softness of the girl's face and the use of light and shadow to form the bridge of her nose.