Vermeer's the Music Lesson in Modular Perspective

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Abstract

This workshop has the aim to recreate the perspective outline of the Music Lesson. The reader may notice in Figure 1, how the painting's image formation clearly fits in my *RMS90 Modular Scale*. We will learn the basic use of this *scale* to directly deduce all the elements of the scene in perspective. Therefore, neither a plan nor an elevation is required for the practice, just a good photograph copy of the painting is needed. I will provide these copies and the *scales* as well, while the participants should bring some A4 sheets, a portable drawing board, squares, eraser, and pencils (gray and yellow). It would take about 75 minutes to perform it. You will remember those high school days.

Theoretical Basis for the Practice

A fine proof of the use of a camera obscura (a darkened chamber in which the real image of an object is received through a small opening or lens and focused in natural color onto a facing surface rather than recorded on a film or plate.) in Vermeer's paintings is supported by the same image formation that several of them seem to have. I have found this feature in: The Music Lesson, Lady Standing at the Virginals, the Concert, The Girl with a Wineglass, Lady Written a Letter, The Glass of Wine, the Allegory of Faith, and the Art of Painting. In my opinion, such a feature was unattainable by using any type of perspective method available at the time. To fully capture the Music Lesson's floor in perspective, Vermeer could have removed the furniture to catch it with the camera obscura, and later go back to recompose the scene. Otherwise, the accurate rendering of the floor would have been difficult to achieve. Let us suppose that he put marks at the canvas' border to retain the vanishing lines of the floor, or even better, using a removable frame to put them over it. What advantage could he have gained? Simply, he could verify the outline of the floor at any time during the painting's process without the aid of the camera obscura. Therefore, it is doubtful that he used both lateral *distance vanishing points* (*dvp*) for this task since they fall outside of the canvas.

The Workshop

To begin, we will draw the floor tiles with the aid of the *RMS90 scale*. Place the P scale at the left border of your drawing to measure and trace all the transversal lines of the floor. Then deduce the *dvp* through the bottom modulation of the floor —although Vermeer most likely did not use them— since they are essential to recreate the perspective outlining of the floor. Second, all the architectural measures are determined by using the floor tiles modulation as a spatial reference. In Figure 1, for instance, the column width can be related to the floor by carrying vertical lines to it, finding its position between the P = 3.5 *m* and P = 5 *m*. Hence, by using the floor modulation at either of these depths, the column height is determined as well. Third, the characters and furniture are deduced in the same manner. Finally, once the *vdp'* are determined, at both sides of the drawing board, the 'real' observer's distance can be measured modularly, and prove that the painting's image formation corresponds to an approximate angle of 90 degrees.
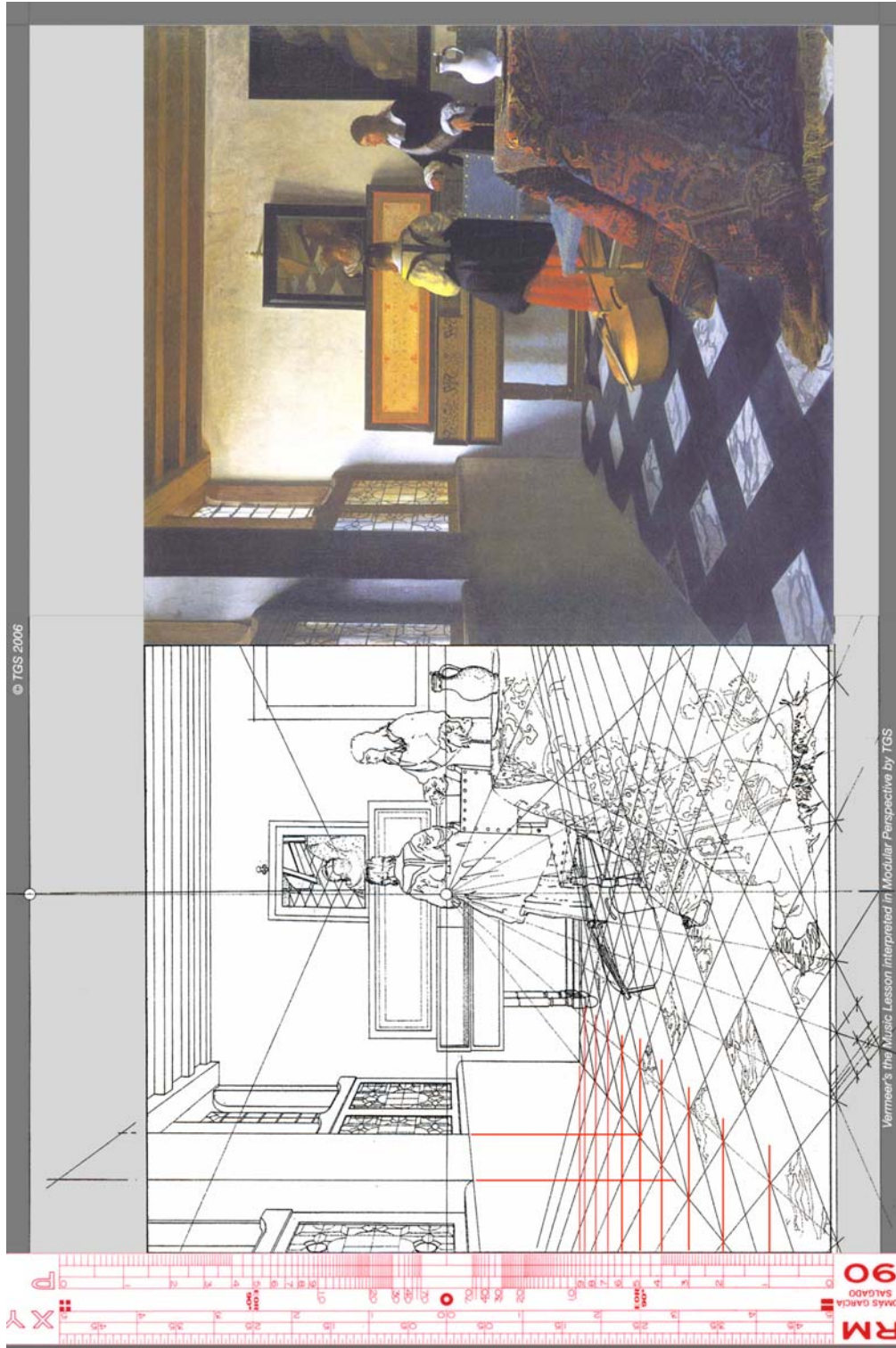
Figure 1. *Vermeer's the Music Lesson perspective outlining according to my Modular Perspective method. You may notice how the RMS90 scale perfectly matches with the floor-tiled depths one by one. The main problem in perspective is to solve depths, which is exactly what the RMS was invented for.*