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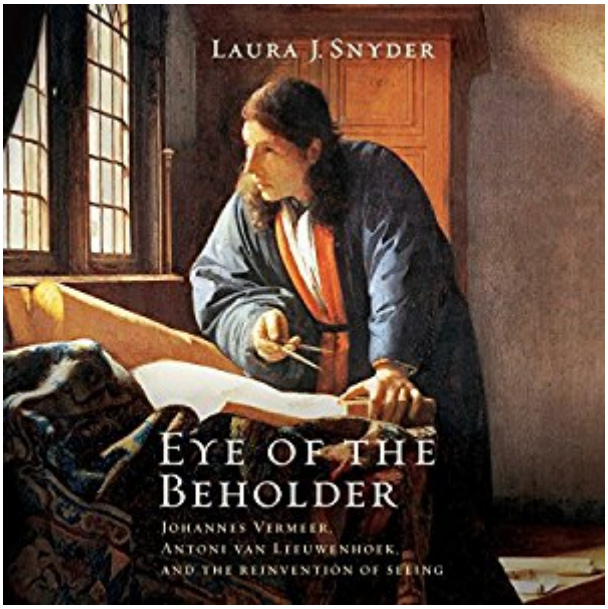
# Eye Of The Beholder: Johannes Vermeer, Antoni Van Leeuwenhoek, And The Reinvention Of Seeing

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## Synopsis

"See for yourself!" was the clarion call of the 1600s. Natural philosophers threw off the yoke of ancient authority, peered at nature with microscopes and telescopes, and ignited the scientific revolution. Artists investigated nature with lenses and created paintings filled with realistic effects of light and shadow. The hub of this optical innovation was the small Dutch city of Delft. Here Johannes Vermeer’s experiments with lenses and a camera obscura taught him how we see under different conditions of light and helped him create the most luminous works of art ever beheld. Meanwhile his neighbor Antoni van Leeuwenhoek’s work with microscopes revealed a previously unimagined realm of minuscule creatures. The result was a transformation in both art and science that revolutionized how we see the world today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Laura Snyder has written a generally informative but flawed account about the extent to which optical devices in seventeenth century Europe contributed to an ever expanding, "enlightened" knowledge about the material world, a process that continues to anchor contemporary scientific inquiry and will become increasingly important in and for the future. Snyder weaves a complicated narrative about how hundreds of people, led initially by the likes of Francis Bacon, Galileo, Johannes Kepler, reciprocally honed their thinking and developed increasingly sophisticated optical technology, throughout focusing upon the intertwining careers of the microscopist Antoni Van Leeuwenhoek and the painter Johannes Vermeer, exact contemporaries (born within days of each

other in 1632) and lifelong neighbors in the Dutch town of Delft. Nearby lived the the influential statesman, Constantijn Huygens; his son, Christiaan, the most accomplished of the century's astronomers; and Baruch Spinoza, perhaps the century's greatest rationalist who died most likely of silicosis as he hand ground lenses for a living. Rene Descartes, while living in Leiden, published his "Meditations," a treatise in large part about the nature of human perception and the means by which people could discern trustworthy knowledge. All, to one extent or another, used optical devices--a variety of lenses, mirrors, magnification glasses--to inform their work.This kaleidoscope of interlacing optical activity constitutes the book's great value, bringing together in one rather chatty volume the key players and evolving optical technology that now undergird much of culture.

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