

The Interior of the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam

by [Jen Stewart Fueston](#) in the [November 21, 2018](#) issue

Emanuel de Witte, 1660

In the corner, doused in light that spills
over her bundled hair and shoulders, and the basket
holding round loaves wrapped in linen, she nurses a child
who looks old enough to walk, and another waits in shadows
with a mangy dog. Who knows if this is the painter's plain
Madonna, the middle-class Dutch version of divinity?
She is not robed in color on the walls. Her sturdy arms and legs
have been lifting milk-jugs and the children, and wrestling
with that dog for kitchen scraps. And I can tell you
she is tired, tired in the marrow of her bones, too tired
to tarry here much longer modeling the Holy Mother
with this homespun basket of Eucharistic bread.
The baby's crying and no doubt there are meals to make
beyond the one that's made of her own body. I can hear her
scolding the painter as she sits, her head spinning
with all the rough chores that stand between her and the moment
she lies down on her 17th-century bed at last, unwraps
her hair from its linen halo and finally sleeps.