

The Frick Collection

A Legacy of Beauty



Above: Giovanni Bellini (c. 1430–1516), *St. Francis in the Desert*, c. 1480, tempera and oil on poplar panel, The Frick Collection; unless otherwise indicated, photographs are by Michael Bodycomb

The Frick Collection in New York City is renowned both for one of the world's great collections of fine and decorative arts and for its extraordinary research library for art history. Founded by Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919), a Pittsburgh coke and steel industrialist, the Collection opened to the public in 1935 and offers its visitors a stunning array of Old Masters in the opulent residential setting of a Gilded Age mansion. Among other treasures, the Collection includes a superb painting by Giovanni Bellini (above), three by Vermeer, an exquisite Rembrandt self-portrait of 1658, Fragonard's *Progress of Love*, and some of the finest Renaissance bronzes ever cast. Visitors come from around the world to enjoy not only the masterpieces that hang on its walls, but the contemplative ambience that sets it apart from other museums and cultural institutions. While the Collection retains the atmosphere of a distant age, recent years have seen a dramatic growth in the number of special exhibitions presented, including the critically acclaimed *Whistler, Women, and Fashion* (2003), *Memling's Portraits* (2005), *Goya's Last Works* (2006), *George Stubbs: A Celebration* (2007), *Gabriel de Saint-Aubin* (2007–8), and *Andrea Riccio: Renaissance Master of Bronze* (2008–9). Currently on view through May 10 is *Masterpieces of*

European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum. The exhibition, shown exclusively at The Frick Collection, is the first in a series of loan exchanges between the two institutions. Since the Norton Simon Museum rarely lends works from its collection, this presentation provides New York audiences with a unique opportunity to see and appreciate these important paintings. Beginning October 6, the Frick will present *Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection*. These and other special exhibitions—often inspired by works from the Frick's permanent collection—contribute to making the Frick what many have called “everyone's favorite museum.”

Adjacent to the museum is the Frick Art Reference Library, founded in 1920 by Henry Frick's daughter Helen Clay Frick. Today, with a photographic archive of more than one million documented images of European and American art from the fourth to the mid-twentieth century, many of which have rarely, if ever, been reproduced elsewhere, the Library serves an international community of scholars, art historians, curators, and dealers. The Library has an unparalleled collection of auction catalogues from the seventeenth century to the present day, as well as a rich array of archival materials and special collections; together, these resources make the Library



Above: Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *Comtesse d'Haussonville*, 1845, oil on canvas, The Frick Collection

a preeminent center for the object-based study of painting, sculpture, and decorative arts in the Western tradition. In 2007, the Library established the Center for the History of Collecting in America to foster scholarly exchange in a burgeoning field of interest. Through programs that include fellowships, symposia, and colloquia, the Center facilitates serious research on American collectors, dealers, and museums.

Henry Clay Frick grew up in the vicinity of Pittsburgh. From an early age he was interested in art, and his acquisitions over a span of forty years show an evolving knowledge and discernment. After concentrating initially on contemporary American artists, Salon pictures, and works by the Barbizon school (many of which now hang at the Frick Art and Historical Center in Pittsburgh), he purchased his first Old Master paintings around the turn of the last century. In the next decade he acquired many of the extraordinary works that form the core of the collection as we see it today.

At his death in 1919, Frick bequeathed his New York residence and the finest of his many artworks to establish a public gallery for the purpose of “encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts.” Chief among his bequests—which also included sculpture, drawings, prints, furniture, porcelains, enamels, rugs, and silver—were one hundred and thirty-one paintings. While the museum did not open to the public until 1935 (four years after the death of Mrs. Frick, in 1931), the Board of Trustees began to acquire additional works for the museum in 1924. By the end of 1935 they had purchased a total of nine paintings, among them Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's

Below: Gabriel de Saint-Aubin (1724–1780), *The Private Academy*, c. 1755, oil on panel, The Frick Collection, gift of Irene Roosevelt Aitken





Comtesse d'Haussonville of 1845 (page 9, top), which was acquired in 1927. Described by Charles Baudelaire the year it was painted as a work "of profound voluptuousness," Ingres's portrait of the twenty-seven-year-old Louise, Princesse de Broglie (1818-1882), ranks among the artist's greatest achievements. It was the focus of a 1985 exhibition at the Frick and was featured in the 2006 Ingres retrospective at the Musée du Louvre in Paris. One of the Collection's signature works, the *Comtesse d'Haussonville* is a favorite of museum visitors, art historians, and artists alike.

From 1919 to 1961, Helen Clay Frick served as the chairman of the Collection's acquisitions committee. Under her leadership, thirty-seven works were purchased by the trustees from an endowment provided by the founder and from gifts and bequests. Over the last several decades, new works added through the generosity of a

number of benefactors continue to augment the Frick's holdings. Most recently, *The Private Academy* (page 9, bottom) by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin was given to the Frick by Irene Roosevelt Aitken. The painting, executed in oil on panel about 1755, depicts a young draftsman absorbed in drawing a languorously posed model who reclines on a daybed in a small but well-furnished apartment, presumably belonging to the young man's teacher. The services of the model would have been both prized and expensive, since female models were not allowed to pose in the classrooms of the Royal Academy and therefore had to be hired privately by successful painters who could afford to do so. This splendid cabinet picture is the only painting by Saint-Aubin in a public collection

Above: *Maiolica dish with a scene of the Judgment of Paris after Raphael*, probably from the Urbino workshop of Orazio Fontana or his nephew Flaminio Fontana, c. 1565-75, tin-glazed earthenware, The Frick Collection, gift of Dianne Modestini



Left: Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656-1740), *Pietà with Two Mourning Putti*, probably 1715, terracotta on original ebony base, The Frick Collection, gift of The Quentin Foundation

in New York. Along with recent acquisitions of works by Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean-Étienne Liotard, it extends the Frick's representation of the major French artists of the ancien régime.

Another recent gift to the Collection is a beautiful maiolica dish showing a scene of the Judgment of Paris after Raphael (page 10). The flat rim and the shallow inner wall are painted with delicate grotesques on a whitened ground. This type of grotesque decoration, known as "a raffaellesca" style, appeared in the ceramic workshops of Urbino in the early 1560s and soon became fashionable among the Italian aristocracy. Probably from the workshop of Orazio Fontana or his nephew Flaminio Fontana, the dish illustrates the technical and artistic excellence reached in the Fontana workshop during the third quarter of the sixteenth century. The dish, which once belonged to the Rothschild family, is the generous gift of Dianne Modestini and is a wonderful addition to the Collection.

In 2006, three important acquisitions were made by gift and by purchase. The Quentin Foundation gave *Pietà with Two Mourning Putti* (above), a masterpiece of Florentine baroque sculpture by Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi. Created in the early eighteenth century, when Soldani was at the height of his fame as a bronze sculptor, the *Pietà* is one of four surviving versions by the artist and the only one that omits the mourning Virgin. It is his simplest treatment of the subject, a work of powerfully distilled emotional intensity. Although a highly finished model, intended for translation into more permanent bronze,

the *Pietà* was made when terracottas were beginning their eighteenth-century revival as an independent art form. Some of Soldani's rare terracottas survive because the sculptor himself gave them to highly regarded patrons. The clay captured the inventive movements of his hand, and they were valued as precious examples of artistic creativity.

Joining the Frick's outstanding ensemble of portrait busts is the stunningly elegant marble *Madame His* (page 12), by the great eighteenth-century French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon, an artist whose work was admired both by Henry Clay Frick and his daughter Helen Clay Frick. The bust is a gift from the noted art dealer, collector, and philanthropist Eugene Victor Thaw and his wife, Clare, and represents Marie Anne Damaris Dumoustier de Vastre, the wife of German banker Pierre-François His, who lived and worked in Paris. Houdon was a close friend of his sitter, whom he depicts in half-length. The large block of marble needed to create such a representation suggests that the work was a commissioned piece. *Madame His*'s intelligent, sensitive face, her elaborate upswept coiffure—which spills into a seductive tendril down her bare right shoulder—and the revealing neckline of her chemise imbue the piece with a sensuality and warmth that transcend the lustrous marble from which she is crafted. This exquisite work joins four others by Houdon in the permanent collection, in addition to Houdon's poignant relief, *La Grive Morte*, presently on loan from The Horvitz Collection, Boston.



Above: Claude Michel (1738-1814), known as Clodion, *The Dance of Time: Three Nymphs Supporting a Clock* by Lepaute, 1788, terracotta, brass, gilt brass, silvered brass, steel, and glass, The Frick Collection, purchased with funds from the Winthrop Edey Bequest

Left: Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828), *Madame His*, 1775, marble, The Frick Collection, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Victor Thaw



Above: The Fragonard Room of The Frick Collection, following recent conservation and the installation of a new lighting system

Below: The West Gallery of The Frick Collection





Above: The Reading Room of the Frick Art Reference Library;
photograph by Richard di Liberto

Below: Seventieth Street Garden of The Frick Collection

Also in 2006, the Frick purchased *The Dance of Time: Three Nymphs Supporting a Clock* by Lepaute (page 12), a masterpiece that beautifully harmonizes sculpture and clock design. Executed in 1788 by Clodion, one of the most inventive and technically gifted sculptors of the second half of the eighteenth century, the base features three terracotta nymphs, coiffed and draped in the antique manner, dancing around a fluted column that supports a gilt-brass pendulum clock by Jean-Baptiste Lepaute, a clockmaker to Louis XVI. Purchased with funds from the Winthrop Edey Bequest, the work was cleaned in preparation for its debut in the galleries, and the Lepaute clock is now in running order following conservation. When the clock chimes its hours, delicate bell-like sounds give voice to the nymphs' dance and celebrate this brilliant conceptual marriage of art and science.

It was the intention of its founder that The Frick Collection would evolve over time. Indeed, these new acquisitions, along with loans and special exhibitions, enliven the galleries while enhancing the visitor's experience and providing opportunities for furthering scholarship. As The Frick Collection anticipates its second century, the institution and those who love it are deeply indebted to the foresight of Henry Clay Frick and his daughter along with countless other generous donors who, over the years and going forward, seek to reaffirm Frick's gift to New York of a legacy of beauty.

The Frick Collection is located at 1 East 70th Street and the Frick Art Reference Library at 10 East 71st Street, New York City. For more information, please visit the Frick's Web site at www.frick.org.

