



PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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PORTICO INSTALLATION HIGHLIGHTS STRENGTHS OF NYC-AREA COLLECTIONS WITH RARE LOANS AND SPECIAL GATHERING OF FRICK HOLDINGS

ENLIGHTENMENT AND BEAUTY: SCULPTURES BY HOUDON AND CLODION

April 1, 2014, through April 5, 2015



Jean-Antoine Houdon, *The Comtesse du Cayla*, 1777, marble, The Frick Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

The age of Enlightenment, which flourished in France in the eighteenth century, centered on the belief that social and moral advancements stemmed from the application of reason and knowledge. In looking forward to the future, some of the greatest thinkers and artists of the period also looked to the achievements of the ancient past as foundation for modern progress. Two of the foremost French sculptors of the late eighteenth century—Claude Michel, called Clodion (1738–1814), and Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828)—used the language of the antique to articulate the flowing grace and expressive naturalism that typified the contemporary art of the period. These artists are celebrated at The Frick Collection in the exhibition *Enlightenment and Beauty: Sculptures by Houdon and Clodion*, on view

in the Portico Gallery. The installation illuminates Houdon and Clodion's defining contributions to the art of the Enlightenment by presenting a selection of their works from the Frick's holdings. These objects, assembled by Henry Clay Frick, his daughter Helen Clay Frick, and more recent gifts and purchases, will rotate throughout the year-long presentation with rarely seen loans from private collections (twelve objects will be on view at all times, with seasonal changes enhancing the presentation). Among them are portrait busts, reliefs, figure groups, and (for the later part of the show's run), Houdon's remarkable, life-size terracotta *Diana the Huntress*, considered one of the



Claude Michel, called Clodion, *Zephyrus and Flora*, 1799, terracotta, The Frick Collection, New York, Henry Clay Frick bequest; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Frick's masterpieces. Together, the sculptures highlight the freedom of the artists' responses to classical motifs, which they interpreted in marble and terracotta with the realism, beauty, and astonishing technical facility that testify to the innovative spirit of the age. The exhibition is organized by Denise Allen, Curator, and Katie Steiner, Curatorial Assistant, with Alyse Muller, Ayesha Bulchandani-Mathrani Curatorial Intern. Support for the presentation is generously provided by Margot and Jerry Bogert and Mrs. Henry Clay Frick II.

At the outset of their careers, both Houdon and Clodion followed similar paths, studying at the French Royal Academy in Paris and winning the prestigious *Prix de Rome* for sculpture. This award enabled them to travel in the 1760s to the French Academy in Rome, where they overlapped for a time and engaged first-hand with the antique. In Italy and during their mature years in the French capital, the two artists adapted their deeply internalized knowledge of classical art to suit distinct creative objectives, exemplified by Houdon's exquisite marble portrait busts and Clodion's lively terracottas. They maintained, however, a shared commitment to the models of antiquity as well as direct observation from life.

CLODION'S EARLY INSPIRATION BY THE ANTIQUE



Claude Michel, called Clodion, *The Cupid Seller (La marchande d'amours)*, c. 1765–70, terracotta, anonymous loan; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Works in the exhibition dating to or shortly after Houdon and Clodion's foundational periods in Rome convey their inventive, rather than dryly imitative, treatment of antique prototypes even in the early phases of their careers. Two related reliefs of *La marchande d'amours (The Cupid Seller)* by Clodion, who lived in Italy from 1762 to 1771, offer a case in point. The panels portray a youthful vendor who eagerly proffers the promise of love—embodied by a winged cupid—to a buyer and her attendant. Clodion's composition closely mirrors that of a renowned ancient wall painting discovered near Herculaneum in 1759, which was soon after reproduced in engravings. The artist departs from his

two-dimensional source, however, by translating it into low-relief sculpture. In his terracotta relief, he uses raised modeling to emphasize the female figures' profiles and pleated garments and delicate incising to indicate the graceful contours of their limbs, which recede into space. Clodion's skillful handling of the clay softens the topical character of the scene in the Roman original, and endows his intimately-scaled work with a charming quality suited to the playful sensibilities of eighteenth-century France. The marble version of the relief attests to the appeal of the *Cupid Seller* subject as well as the success of Clodion's terracotta, which likely inspired the subsequent commission in the more costly material. The panel also illustrates the artist's versatile adaptation of the composition to suit a different medium, as he replaces gestural modeling in clay with refined carving in marble to convey the stately, eternal permanence of his highly classicized figures.



Claude Michel, called Clodion, *The Cupid Seller (La marchande d'amours)*, c. 1765–70, marble, private collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

THE IMPACT OF THE ANTIQUE UPON HOUDON



Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Vestal*, c. 1767–68, terracotta, private collection

The earliest sculpture by Houdon in the exhibition, an understated yet remarkable terracotta statuette, suggests the direct impact of the antique on the artist while immersed among the treasures of Rome, where he worked for four years beginning in 1764. His elegant, draped female figure replicates a life-size marble statue in the Capitoline Museum, identified at the time as Pandora or Psyche. Houdon reimagines the figure as a follower of Vesta, the Roman goddess of the hearth whose temple attendants—known as *vestals* and sworn to a vow of chastity—guarded a perpetual flame. With a serene, blank-eyed expression and draped hands holding an urn of the sacred fire, Houdon’s vestal exhibits the grace and modesty befitting her role. In keeping with the Enlightenment’s emphasis on the individual, the artist downplays the austere, generic qualities of his antique prototype in favor of humanizing the vestal through the subtle, animated sway of her stance and the gentle turn of her head. As a

student of anatomy who observed nature as closely as the antique, Houdon suggests the form of the statuette’s figure, (note, especially, her bent knee), beneath the delicately articulated folds of her garment. The work also shares a connection to the Frick family, since a plaster version of the *Vestal* (now in the Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh) was acquired in the 1930s by Helen Clay Frick, an ardent admirer of Houdon who praised him as “. . . one of the greatest sculptors of all times” in her unpublished monograph on the artist. On loan from a private collection, the terracotta statuette is featured in the exhibition from its April opening through September 2014.

ENDOWING LATER WORKS WITH A CONTEMPORARY, NATURALISTIC SPIRIT

Back in Paris, both Houdon and Clodion continued to rely on the classical tradition as they explored increasingly ambitious and expressive compositions. Two similar works by Clodion in *Enlightenment and Beauty* straddle the divide between the artist’s youth and maturity and attest to the development of the heightened lyricism that is the hallmark of his sculpture. The earlier work in this group, likely made in France in the wake of his Italian sojourn, portrays the Three Graces as caryatids, or female figures serving as architectural pillars. Demonstrating his signature skill in highly finished terracotta, Clodion reduces the monumental scale of prototypes from classical buildings while preserving the figures’ weight-bearing function, in this case for a marble basin now lost. The artist, however, embellishes upon the traditional, single-figure caryatid by encircling the Graces, who link hands in accordance with custom, around a central column. Subtle variations in the figures’ poses, elaborate coiffeurs, and classical costumes enliven the ordered rhythm of the composition, endowing it with a contemporary, naturalistic spirit.



Claude Michel, called Clodion, *Three Graces*, early 1770s, terracotta, private collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb



Claude Michel, called Clodion, and Jean-Baptiste Lepaute, *The Dance of Time: Three Nymphs Supporting a Clock*, 1788, terracotta, gilt brass, and glass, The Frick Collection, New York; purchased through the bequest of Winthrop Kellogg Edey; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Clodion's continued interest in animated caryatids emerges in a second treatment of this theme in the exhibition, which postdates the *Three Graces* by nearly twenty years and pushes the nascent experiments it embodies to daring new heights. The artist's *Dance of Time: Three Nymphs Supporting a Clock*, acquired by the Frick in 2006, features an extraordinary trio of gamboling figures that serve as a base for an equally spectacular, glass-enclosed timepiece by the renowned French horologist Jean-Baptiste Lepaute (1727–1802). With boldly outstretched limbs, the carefree nymphs of Clodion's terracotta nearly break free from the fluted pillar they surround, playfully flouting their role as buttresses. The circular momentum of their joyous dance, suggested by their billowing draperies, proceeds in harmony with the rhythm of the clock's pendulum and the horizontal rotation of its dial. Together, Clodion's exuberant nymphs and Lepaute's ingenious device form a unified expression of the grace, modernity, and classicism that epitomize the art of the Enlightenment. At the start of

the exhibition, this work will be on view in its customary location in the Fragonard Room, joining the installation in the Portico in July and remaining there through the rest of the run.

The latest work by Clodion presented in the exhibition exemplifies the poise and enchanting beauty for which his statuettes were celebrated. Dating to 1799, the small-scale terracotta figure group on page one of this release depicts Zephyrus, the god of warm, westerly winds, embracing the lithe body of Flora, the goddess of flowers, as he crowns her with a wreath of roses. The attributes identifying the subjects, such as the breeze-blown drapery encircling Zephyrus and the putti scattering flowers near Flora, offer a bravura demonstration of Clodion's mastery at modeling in clay. Although the artist draws his subjects from the antique, he interprets them using an imaginative approach to nature that expresses the ideals of the period. As a culminating statement, *Zephyrus and Flora* provides a particularly apt illustration of biographer Antoine Digné's comments on the artist in 1814: "The admiration that the precious remains of Greek and Roman antiquities inspired in [Clodion] did not close his eyes to the beautiful works that had been created by some of the moderns; and, while studying the great masters, he sought, as they did, truth and beauty in nature."

The validity with which Digné's incisive observations apply to Houdon as well as Clodion is striking, especially in reference to the former's portrait busts. *Enlightenment and Beauty* features several important examples of Houdon's work in this genre, for which he achieved great renown. Carved in marble with the same refined skill that Clodion brought to his modeling, Houdon's portraits adopt the format of truncated classical busts, yet he transcends that convention through his extraordinary mode of naturalistic representation, derived from close observation from life. In Rome, while making careful studies of ancient art and human anatomy, the artist learned the process of plaster casting, which allowed him to create masks of his sitters' features and enhance the accuracy of his carved likeness. His attention to the distinct qualities of his subjects, as well as the growing demand for portraits, reflect the prominence of the individual during the Enlightenment.

HOUDON AND THE PORTRAIT BUST: A FLUID APPROACH

Although one of the earlier busts by Houdon in the exhibition is an allegorical representation rather than a portrait, the artist approaches the work with the same specificity that defined his portrayals of his contemporaries. Taking his subject from popular anecdote, Houdon depicts the Young Lise, a provincial girl who arrived in Paris under the naïve assumption that husbands as well as weddings would be offered to eligible maidens during a municipal celebration. Houdon endows his imaginary depiction of Lise, who gazes demurely downward, with palpable reality through the virtuosic naturalism of his carving. He expertly modulates the textures of her smooth, unblemished features and bountiful hair bound beneath a wide ribbon, rendering the rear bow in daringly thin, pierced marble. By adopting the idiom of a classical bust, Houdon elevates his subject to that of a timeless manifestation of youthful innocence. This special loan is featured in the exhibition from April through June.



Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Young Lise in the Guise of Innocence*, 1775, marble, private collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

In the same way that Houdon's bust of Lise personifies a concept, his portrait of Élisabeth-Susanne de Jaucourt, comtesse du Cayla (shown on page one), depicts the young noblewoman embodying the role of a bacchante, or female follower of Bacchus. The grape leaves across her breast, as well as her windswept hair and sidelong glance, suggest that she is turning to run or dance in celebration of the god of wine and revelry. Through his use of Bacchic imagery, Houdon not only alludes to the comtesse's husband's family name, Baschi, but also explores the possibilities of the portrait bust format to convey motion. The classical guise she adopts and the animation of her pose thus enables the artist to portray her sprightly youth as well as her handsome features, offering a more complete and intimate suggestion of her character to Enlightenment audiences.



Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Madame His*, 1775, marble, The Frick Collection, New York, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Victor Thaw, 2007; photo: Michael Bodycomb

The contrast between the exuberant *Comtesse du Cayla* with two other, more restrained busts in the exhibition conveys Houdon's fluid approach to portraiture and the classical tradition, which he adapted to suit his distinct aims and the individual qualities of his sitters. In his bust of Marie Anne de Vastre, wife of German banker Pierre-François His, Houdon unites the dignity of a Roman portrait with close observation from life to depict his subject's external appearance as forcefully as her noble bearing and intelligence. In contrast to the downwardly tumbling curls of her elaborate coiffeur and the flowing undulations of her mantle and chemise, Madame His holds her head erect and looks outward with a direct gaze. Through the uncanny realism of her carved eyes, in which minute reserves of marble serve as highlights in the darker recesses of her drilled pupils, Houdon suggests the sharpness of her intellect.

The artist's use of the classical bust format to convey Madame His's stately self-possession is echoed in his portrait of Armand-Thomas Hue, Marquis de Miromesnil. With his buttoned cassock, sash, and voluminous robe, the Marquis wears the costume of his august office as France's Minister of Justice, a role he held for thirteen years beginning in 1774. The crisp articulation of the garments is distinct from the delicately textured carving that defines the sitter's wig and frames his fleeting expression, which conveys Miromesnil's quickness of mind. The taught lines around the Marquis's mouth, like the slightly parted lips of Madame His, suggest that he is on the verge of speaking, lending lifelike animation to the bust. As a critic commented in 1783, "M. Houdon lacks only the means to make his portraits speak, since in likeness he lacks nothing." By pushing the expressive possibilities of marble to new heights, Houdon not only communicates the personalities of his subjects, but also allows them to speak across time about the rationality and admiration of the classical past that were central to the Enlightenment.



Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Armand-Thomas Hue, Marquis de Miromesnil*, 1777, marble, The Frick Collection, New York, purchased 1935; photo: Michael Bodycomb

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Lecture

This lecture is free, and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. Reservations are not accepted. This program will be webcast live and made available on our Web site and The Frick Collection's channel on FORA.tv. Please visit our Web site for details. This lecture is made possible by the generous support of the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation.

Date Thursday, April 3, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker Anne Poulet, Director Emerita, The Frick Collection
Title *The Sculpture of Houdon and Clodion: Reflections of Antiquity*

As students in Rome in the 1760s, both Clodion and Houdon were schooled in Greek and Roman culture and studied vast collections of antiquities. Yet what they absorbed from their training and the paths they chose to follow were quite different. This lecture will explore the sculptors' respective sources of inspiration and patronage.

Special Exhibition Gallery Talks—Spotlight on Sculpture

Ongoing, Tuesday through Friday in July, 12:00 noon and 4:00 p.m.

A five-minute talk by an Education Intern on a single work of art from the exhibition, *Enlightenment and Beauty: Sculptures by Houdon and Clodion*. These talks are free with museum admission; reservations are not necessary.

Course: The Frick Connection

For college students and recent graduates under age 39; Courses are free with a \$25 student membership or a full membership for recent graduates. Advance online registration is required; please visit our Web site to register.

Date Three-part course: Wednesday, March 26, April 2 & 9, 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
Speaker Olivia Powell, Associate Museum Educator for Academic Programs, The Frick Collection
Title *The Loves of the Gods*

GUIDED SCHOOL VISITS (GRADES 5–12)

Classes of up to fifteen students are invited to experience works of art in this special exhibition. By looking closely at important examples of late eighteenth-century sculpture, students will engage with major trends in French art, from classical motifs to lifelike portraits. These hour-long visits will also include the Fragonard Room, where sumptuous ensembles of paintings and decorative arts provide a domestic context for the marble busts and terracotta figural groups and reliefs on display in the special exhibition. All visits will be led by the Associate Museum Educator for Academic Programs and reservations will be taken on a first-come, first-served basis. Follow this link for further information (registration is required) www.frick.org/schools

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$20; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.
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Subway: #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide audio tour of the permanent collection offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Museum Shop: the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Admission for the Permanent Collection: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and all content is available online.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

Media Relations Phone: 212.547.6844; E-mail address: mediarelations@frick.org