

# THE FRICK COLLECTION

MEMBERS' MAGAZINE FALL 2003 / 2002 ANNUAL REPORT



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ON OUR COVER:

**François Boucher** (1703–1770), detail of *Young Woman with Two Cupids and a Vase on the Extrados of an Arch*, c. 1768, reddish brown chalk heightened with white on tan paper. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; bequest of Forsyth Wickes, The Forsyth Wickes Collection

# THE FRICK PHOTOARCHIVE: A TREASURY OF UNPUBLISHED IMAGES OF WORKS OF ART

A graduate student interested in fifteenth-century frescoes by Baronzio da Rimini would find it difficult, if not impossible, to travel to the out-of-the-way Italian villages where examples of the artist's work still exist. While a few frescoes might be illustrated in books, most are unpublished. For more than eighty years, scholars in similar situations have turned for help to the Photoarchive of the Frick Art Reference Library, one of the world's richest repositories of reproductions of works of art. There, a researcher can access thousands of photographs of paintings and drawings found in remote, often private locations, discover unpublished preparatory sketches for famous portraits, or identify key works that support attributions to particular masters.

Founded in 1920 by Helen Clay Frick, the Frick Art Reference Library's Photoarchive today contains at least one million images by more than thirty-five thousand artists working from the fourth to the mid-twentieth century. The Photoarchive was established at about the same time as Sir Robert Witt and Hofstede de Groote and Frits Lugt founded their photoarchives, respectively, in London and The Hague. At the time, relatively few art books were well illustrated, thus scholars depended on reproductions of questionable fidelity or, in rare instances, firsthand knowledge of an artist's work. Miss Frick and her counterparts abroad changed this situation by making accessible vast numbers of images by both well-known and little-recognized artists.

This 1951 photograph of *The Shepherdess*, an 1880 Winslow Homer watercolor from a private collection, is just one of the thousands of unpublished images of works of art contained in the Photoarchive.

The majority of images in the Photoarchive were acquired both by gift and by purchase from museums, art dealers, and auction houses. Among the most valued acquisitions are photographs taken at Sotheby's

and Christie's over seven decades by the London firm of A. C. Cooper. These photographs essentially serve as "illustrations" for many of the unillustrated catalogues in the Library's collection. The Library also



Materials in the Photoarchive enable scholars to study the condition of paintings over time, such as this early nineteenth-century portrait of Dr. Alexander Lindsay by Sir Henry Raeburn. The Photoarchive contains visual records of the portrait both in its original full-length state (*below*) and after it was cut down, probably around 1940 (*right*).



maintains an ongoing subscription to the Courtauld Photographic Survey of works in private hands in England and is one of only four American research institutes to subscribe to the Gernsheim Corpus Photographicum, which is dedicated to documenting photographs of drawings in all major European and American collections.

In the early days of the Library, Miss Frick sponsored photography campaigns throughout the United States and Europe that documented little known and generally unpublished works of art in private collections. These expeditions produced more than sixty thousand negatives, many of which were enriched by information gath-

ered from the owners about provenance, subject matter, or other documentation known only to them.

Over the decades, scholars and curators using the Photoarchive have contributed their knowledge and opinions about specific works of art, rendering the documentation that accompanies the images as valuable as the images themselves. Photoarchive materials pertaining to any given artist vary widely, from more than twenty-five hundred images of works by John Singer Sargent to only one image by Sigmund Lachenwitz, a mid-nineteenth-century German animal painter.

The Photoarchive also includes images of now lost or destroyed works of art, prepara-

tory drawings and copies, and information documenting the condition of paintings at different moments in time. A case in point is the color reproduction of Sir Henry Raeburn's three-quarter-length portrait of Dr. Alexander Lindsay as it appeared when it was sold at auction in 1990. This image might well be taken as an accurate record of the painting's original appearance, were it not for the existence of a second photograph of the portrait, purchased by the Library from Knoedler & Co., which shows the original full-length portrait with a spaniel resting comfortably at the doctor's feet. Accompanying the two images is documentation that suggests that the original full-

length portrait was cut down sometime before 1940. (Interestingly, the dog has yet to be found as an independent picture and may, in fact, no longer exist or be attributed to Raeburn.)

The Frick Photoarchive serves more than six thousand researchers annually. Together with documentation from more conventional published sources, it offers its users some of the most complete information on individual works of art, making the

Library one of the world's most important resources for the study of art in the Western tradition.—*Inge Reist, Chief, Collection Development and Research*

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*This year, thanks to generous funding from The Carl and Lily Pforzheimer Foundation, the first phase of a major project to digitize the images captured during the Library's early photography campaigns is underway.*



ABOVE:

Information from the Photoarchive indicates that Jean François Millet's *The Baker* (1848) was offered at a 1912 auction at the Plaza Hotel in New York City and again at a Sotheby's sale in 1987, before being acquired in 1992 by the Murauchi Art Museum in Hachioji City, Japan. The whereabouts of tens of thousands of works of art can be similarly traced.

LEFT:

The Photoarchive preserves hundreds of images of works of art that have been lost or destroyed, such as this 1948 photograph of a portrait of Mrs. James Erwin Yeatman, painted shortly after her 1838 marriage. The portrait, by the Hungarian immigrant artist Mygand, was destroyed in a house fire in Glencoe, Missouri, in 1955.