

The temporary new home of The Frick Collection

## *Living Histories* Project Continues with Final Chapter This Spring and Summer

### Monumental Drawing by Toyin Ojih Odutola Shown with Frick's Rembrandts

**MARCH 31 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 11, 2022**



**New York** (March 22, 2022)— While its historic buildings have been undergoing renovation, the Frick has presented a reframed view of its holdings at Frick Madison, its temporary home. The critically acclaimed installation has offered the public an unprecedented experience of the permanent collection, in a very different setting. Beginning last fall, the Frick's curatorial team added an evolving project in the second-floor Northern European galleries that welcomes the perspectives of four living artists, each of whom presents a single new work in conversation with iconic paintings from the Frick's holdings. The four contemporary works—on view at different times—bring to each respective gallery a fresh means of considering the museum's Old Masters, prompting explorations of gender and queer identity that are typically excluded from narratives of early modern European art.

This spring and summer, *Living Histories: Queer Views and Old Masters* continues with a work by **Toyin Ojih Odutola** (b. Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 1985). On view to the public from March 31, Ojih Odutola's *The Listener* will be presented alongside Rembrandt's early portrait of Nicolaes Ruts (1631) and the iconic late *Self-Portrait* (1658). The third featured painting from the project, *What Am I Doing Here? I Should Ask You the Same* by Jenna Gribbon (b. Knoxville, Tennessee, 1978), installed in February, remains on view through May 22 next to Hans Holbein's portrait of Thomas Cromwell. This well-received series began last September with presentations by Salman Toor (b. Lahore, Pakistan, 1983) and Doron Langberg (b. Yokneam Moshava, Israel, 1985), whose paintings were displayed alongside masterpieces by Vermeer and Holbein, respectively.

*Living Histories* is jointly organized by Xavier F. Salomon, Deputy Director and Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, and Aimee Ng, Curator. It is the most recent project in a series of collaborations with contemporary artists. These initiatives include installations at the Frick mansion by Arlene Shechet and Edmund de Waal and related publications and lectures.

To commemorate the project, the Frick and Rizzoli will co-publish a related book in the fall of 2023. It features essays, interviews with the four artists, and contributions by Salomon, Ng, and **Hanya Yanagihara**, author and editor best known for her novel *A Little Life*; **Jonathan Anderson**, fashion designer and art collector; **Jessica Bell Brown**, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, Baltimore Museum of Art; **Christopher Y. Lew**, Director, Horizon Art Foundation (formerly Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, Whitney Museum of American Art); **Legacy Russell**, Executive Director and Chief Curator, The Kitchen; **Russell Tovey**, English actor and art collector; and **Stephen Truax**, Director, Cheim & Read (partial list).

Comments Xavier F. Salomon, “Each artist collaborating on *Living Histories* has brought to the project contemporary perspectives on Frick works, resulting in a celebration of the past and present that reveals the power of creating conversations across histories, geographies, and cultures. Like myself and so many of the Frick’s staff, none of the four artists are originally from New York, but all chose this city as a home for their careers and relationships.”

Adds Ng, “Over the course of this year-long project, these four artists have brought us on an extraordinary journey through time and place, with their own backgrounds and histories drawing out new themes and surprising elements in the Frick’s paintings. Toyin’s masterful and monumental *The Listener* transforms the Rembrandt room of Frick Madison, where, among other things, its complex layers of myth and invention underscore the fictions of Rembrandt’s most famous self-portrait.”

## ABOUT TOYIN OJIH ODUTOLA AND HER WORK

**Toyin Ojih Odutola** (b. Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 1985) is known for works on paper that explore the malleability of identity and possibilities in visual storytelling. She has a distinctive style of mark making using basic drawing materials, such as pens, pencils, pastels, and charcoal. This technique involves the building up of layers through blending and shading, creating compositions that reinvent and reinterpret the traditions of portraiture. Ojih Odutola credits the development of her style from using pen, which, as a writing tool, links her work to fiction in crafted narratives that unfold through series of artworks like the chapters of a book. Her work is inspired by both art history and popular culture, as well as her own personal history—from her birth in Nigeria to her childhood move to America, where she was raised in conservative Alabama. In more recent series, she has explored the depictions of landscapes, architecture, and domestic interiors. Ojih Odutola’s work has been presented in several shows at Jack Shainman Gallery; her first solo museum exhibition in New York, *To Wander Determined*, was held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2017–18. In late 2020, London’s Barbican Centre presented *A Countervailing Theory*, an installation of forty drawings that traveled in the spring of 2021 to the Kunsten Museum of Modern Art in Aalborg, Denmark, and to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., in the fall of 2021 into spring 2022 (closing April 3).

Ojih Odutola’s chalk, pastel, and charcoal drawing, *The Listener*, shown this spring and summer at Frick Madison, is part of the series of life-size works conceived for *A Countervailing Theory*. They take visual inspiration from, among other sources, distinctive rock formations found in her native Nigeria. The cycle chronicles an elaborate narrative of a prehistoric civilization of the artist’s creation, one ruled by queer female warriors, the Eshu, who dominate a serving class of male laborers, the Koba. These works are presented as societal relics, as printed scans of fragile rock tablets unearthed during a fictional archaeological dig. Ojih Odutola’s narrative, which centers on a forbidden union between a ruling Eshu warrior and a Koba slave, proposes an imagined world in which traditional relationships codified in historic European art are inverted: heterosexuality is aberrant, homosexuality is compulsory, and women rule men. Not surprisingly, the artist sees structures of power in this fictive world that bear resemblance to those of our own.





Ojih Odutola’s mythical subject draws attention to the many fictions present in Old Master works. Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait* is the largest and most magisterial of the artist’s many such works. The aging artist depicts himself holding a scepter-like staff and enthroned as if he were a king, yet Rembrandt was destitute when he painted it. The lone figure Ojih Odutola depicts in *The Listener*—derived from a past as invented as Rembrandt’s self-presentation and, more broadly, canonical histories of art—sits informally, her own staff resting in the crook of her arm. The similarities between the patterns on the figure’s flesh and the surrounding landscape evoke the artist’s long-standing interest in the “topography of skin,” a luminous, sculptural depiction of Black skin employed as a narrative device of its own. The juxtaposition of the works also emphasizes the difference of the materials used by the two artists: Rembrandt’s thickly painted oils versus Ojih Odutola’s charcoal, pastel, and chalk, laboriously applied on a black ground. Through medium and technique, they offer disparate approaches to skin, color, form, and shadow. Ojih Odutola’s drawing immerses the viewer in a world apart though not without parallels to our own. *The Listener* peers out, the force of her sparkling eyes prompting reflection on myth and history; selfhood and identity; and the power and privilege to create one’s own story.

Rembrandt’s *Polish Rider* is currently on loan to the exhibition *The King’s Rembrandt: The Polish Rider from The Frick Collection in New York* at the Royal Łazienki Museum, Warsaw.

## ABOUT THE FRICK COLLECTION AND FRICK MADISON


Internationally recognized as a premier museum and research center, The Frick Collection is known for its distinguished Old Master paintings and outstanding examples of European sculpture and decorative arts. The collection originated with Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919), who bequeathed his home, paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts to the public for their enjoyment. The institution’s holdings—which encompass masterworks from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century—have grown over the decades, more than doubling in size since the opening of the museum in 1935. A critical component of the institution is the Frick Art Reference Library, founded in 1920 by Helen Clay Frick, daughter of the museum’s founder. Recognized as one of the world’s top art history research centers, it has served students, scholars, and members of the public free of charge for generations.

The Frick’s historic buildings are currently closed for renovation. Honoring the Frick’s architectural legacy, the plan designed by Selldorf Architects will provide unprecedented access to the 1914 residence, while preserving the intimate visitor experience and beloved galleries. The plan will create new spaces for the display of art, conservation, education, and programs, while improving amenities and overall accessibility.

During the renovation, the museum and library collections remain accessible five blocks north at Frick Madison, the Marcel Breuer–designed building that was once the home of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Audiences may enjoy a substantial gathering of highlights from the Frick, reframed in a setting that inspires fresh perspectives. In a departure from the Frick’s customary presentation style, works are organized at Frick Madison chronologically and by region, allowing for fresh juxtapositions and new insights about treasured paintings and sculptures by Bellini, Bronzino, Clodion, Gainsborough, Goya, Holbein, Houdon, Ingres, Piero della Francesca, Rembrandt, Titian, Turner, Velázquez, Vermeer, and many others. The installation also spotlights the Frick’s impressive holdings of decorative arts and sculpture, as well as rarely seen works.

Images: Toyin Ojih Odutola. Photo: Beth Wilkinson; Toyin Ojih Odutola (b. Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 1985), *The Listener*, 2021, charcoal, pastel, and chalk on linen over Dibond panel, 84 x 50 x 1 3/8 inches (unframed), 85 5/8 x 51 3/4 x 2 inches (framed), © Toyin Ojih Odutola. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669), *Self-Portrait*, 1658, oil on canvas, 52 5/8 x 40 7/8 inches, The Frick Collection, New York. Photo: Michael Bodycomb

## INTERACT

   /FrickCollection

#FrickMadison

#LivingHistories

## BASIC INFORMATION

**Website:** [www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)

**Building project:** [www.frickfuture.org](http://www.frickfuture.org)

**Bloomberg Connects app:** [frick.org/app](http://frick.org/app)

**Frick Madison visitor address:** 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York, NY 10021

**Museum hours:** Thursday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.; closed Monday through Wednesday. See website for holiday schedule.

**Admission:** Timed tickets are required and may be purchased online. \$22 general public; \$17 seniors and visitors with disabilities; \$12 students. Admission is always free for members. Pay-what-you-wish admission is offered Thursdays from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

**Please note:** Children under ten are not admitted to the museum.

**COVID-19/health and safety policies:** [frick.org/visit/guidelines](http://frick.org/visit/guidelines)

**Ticket purchase link:** [frick.org/tickets](http://frick.org/tickets). For questions: [admissions@frick.org](mailto:admissions@frick.org)

**Group reservations:** For questions: [groupreservations@frick.org](mailto:groupreservations@frick.org)

**Public programs:** A calendar of online, virtual, and video events is available on our website.

**Shop:** Open during museum hours as well as online daily.

**Refreshments:** A light menu, offered by Joe Coffee, is available on the lower level during museum hours.

**Subway:** #6 local to 77th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 75th Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 74th Street

**Museum mailing address:** 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10021

**Photography:** Allowed only in the Frick Madison Lobby.

**Reading room:** Access is offered by appointment Tuesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For further information, visit [frick.org/tickets](http://frick.org/tickets).

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For further press information, please contact us at [communications@frick.org](mailto:communications@frick.org).