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from
THE FRICK COLLECTION

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**TWO CIMABUE PANELS REUNITED IN US
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN
*CIMABUE AND EARLY ITALIAN DEVOTIONAL PAINTING***

October 3 through December 31, 2006

For the first time in America, The Frick Collection will reunite two diminutive, jewel-like panels by the early Italian Renaissance master Cimabue: *The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels* from the National Gallery in London and the Frick's *Flagellation of Christ*. Technical and stylistic studies reveal that these two paintings once formed part of the same ensemble featuring various scenes from the life of Christ.

Discovered in a private collection in Britain in 2000, the National Gallery panel was immediately recognized as a work

by Cimabue, an attribution that confirmed the authorship of the Frick panel. *The Virgin and Child Enthroned* and *The Flagellation of Christ* are the only known small-scale works by Cimabue, and they survive as a unique testament to this artist's exploration of narrative devotional painting. To contextualize the discovery of the Cimabue panels' kinship, the installation will also feature representative examples of devotional art from early Renaissance Italy. Several altarpieces, manuscripts, and *verre églomisé* (customarily reverse-painted glass, but in this case gilding is used) loaned from New York collections will illustrate the various small-scale media and narrative presentations with which Cimabue and his contemporaries experimented. During her tenure as an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow at the Frick, Holly Flora, presently Curator of the Museum of Biblical Art, coordinated this Cabinet installation in conjunction with Associate Curator Denise Allen. It has been generously underwritten by Jon and Barbara Landau. Additional support has been provided by The Council of The Frick Collection and



Cenni di Pepo called Cimabue, *The Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, c. 1280, Tempera on poplar panel, 10 x 8 in. (25.7 x 20.5 cm), National Gallery, London

Cenni di Pepo called Cimabue, *The Flagellation of Christ*, c. 1280, Tempera on poplar panel, 9 3/4 x 7 7/8 in. (24.7 x 20 cm), The Frick Collection

The Helen Clay Frick Foundation. The publication is made possible, in part, by Lawrence and Julie Salander. With the Frick as the exclusive US venue, *Cimabue and Early Italian Devotional Painting* follows a large exhibition on the artist shown to great acclaim in spring 2005 at the Museo di San Matteo in Pisa, as well as a dossier exhibition reuniting the Cimabue panels at the National Gallery in London in the fall of 2005.

A DISCOVERY CONFIRMS ATTRIBUTION

The artist Cenni di Pepo (c. 1240–c. 1302), known as Cimabue, has long been considered the founder of Italian Renaissance painting. Those of Cimabue’s generation endowed their works with greater emotional expression and a more naturalistic approach than had his forebears, revolutionizing Italian art during the late thirteenth to the first half of the fourteenth centuries. The Frick Collection is fortunate to possess a painting by Cimabue, *The Flagellation of Christ*, purchased by the trustees in 1950. Although it was acquired as a work by Cimabue, over the next half century scholars debated whether it was painted by him or the Sienese master Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1255–1319). The Cimabue attribution was affirmed six years ago by the discovery of the panel by the same artist that emerged on the British market, the National Gallery’s *Virgin and Child*. Technical studies revealed that it once had formed part of the same larger painted ensemble as the Frick panel.

At first glance, the two Cimabue works appear different owing to the presence of a modern-day varnish on the National Gallery panel. Their carpentry, condition, style, and technique, however, attest to their origins as part of the same work, either a small altarpiece, diptych, or triptych. The grain of the wood, the thickness of the panels (which both have been thinned down since they were first painted), the pattern of *craqueleure* in the paint, and even the worm holes in the wood are comparable. Both feature a similar border in the gold ground, consisting of two rows of pinprick-like indentations surrounding a delicate scroll pattern formed by tiny punch marks.

Such parallels between the *Virgin and Child* and the *Flagellation* confirm that both were once part of the same work. At an unknown date, the larger ensemble was cut apart, probably so that smaller pieces of it could be sold as individual works, a fate that befell many early Italian pictures during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On the *Flagellation*, the painted surface stops short of the edge of the panel and curls upward with raised edges (barbes) at the bottom and right sides, indicating that it once was framed on those two sides and therefore must have been positioned at the lower-right corner of a larger painted panel. Similarly, the left side and top of the *Virgin and Child* is barbed, indicating that it formed the upper-left corner of the same work.

QUESTIONS REMAIN

But what was in between? Were the National Gallery and Frick works originally at the upper-left and bottom-right corners of a single panel, or were they portions of different panels that were part of the same ensemble? How large

was the original work, and how many scenes did it contain? These questions remain unanswered, as the two paintings do not constitute enough pieces of the puzzle to allow for its definitive solution.

Although vastly different in emotional tenor, both panels emphasize Christ's humanity, a theme particularly important to members of the Franciscan Order, the most powerful religious group in Italy during the thirteenth century. In literature and art, the Franciscans emphasized the stories of Christ's Infancy and his Passion. The fact that the lost Cimabue work contained at least one scene each from Christ's Infancy and Passion points toward the patronage of the Franciscans, who commissioned Cimabue several times throughout his career to execute monumental panels and frescoes in Pisa, Florence, and Assisi. In Cimabue's day, the Franciscans and other religious groups encouraged pious people to imagine themselves interacting with Christ and participating in the events of his life, events to be relived daily in the imagination during prayerful meditations. Painted panels and other images heightened this sense of participatory devotion, and the convincing naturalistic representation Cimabue achieved in the Frick and National Gallery panels would have reinforced the impact and immediacy of the religious narratives.



Magdalen Master, *The Virgin and Child and Scenes from the Passion*, c. 1280. Tempera and gold on panel, Central panel 16 x 11 1/8 in. (40.6 x 28.3 cm), left valve 15 x 5 5/8 in. (38.1 x 14.3 cm), right valve 15 x 5 1/2 in. (38.1 x 14 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.100.8), Photograph © 2004 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

OBJECTS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND MEDITATION

In Cimabue's time, many kinds of painted objects were used in personal devotional practices, including painted panels, manuscript illuminations, and *verre églomisé* (gilded glass). In the exhibition, four objects from New York



Pacino di Bonaguida, *St. John on Patmos, Virgin and Child Enthroned, Death of the Virgin, Crucifixion with Saints*, c. 1310, Tempera on panel, Left valve 24 3/8 x 16 in. (61.9 x 40.6 cm), right valve 24 3/8 x 15 3/4 in. (61.9 x 40 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Irma N. Straus, 1964 (64.189.3ab), Photograph © 1993 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

public collections represent the small scale, variety of media, and narrative presentations with which Cimabue and his contemporaries experimented. These works include a triptych with multiple scenes from the Life of Christ by a prolific, anonymous Florentine artist known only as the Magdalen Master, who was a contemporary of Cimabue's. A painted diptych (left) and a richly colored illuminated manuscript by Pacino di Bonaguida, a Florentine from the generation succeeding Cimabue, illustrate the ease with which artists at the time worked in different media. Among such representative works, Cimabue's achievements as a painter of vivid naturalism stand out in high relief.

The precise use of these objects is not known, but their diminutive size and religious content would have made them ideally suited for individuals and small groups engaging in prayer and meditation. Much smaller in scale than

the massive panels associated with the high altars of major churches (for example Cimabue's Pisa Maestà stands almost fourteen feet tall and more than nine feet wide) diptychs and triptychs like these by Pacino and the Magdalen Master (both less than two feet tall and less than three feet wide) may also have functioned as backdrops and/or visual aids to the performance of Mass in more intimate settings, such as secondary altars, family chapels, or confraternity chapels. These small works invited use in multiple ways, in part because they could be transported, either taken along by a friar on a preaching mission, or moved by a monk from his cell to the convent church to be used on different occasions. Cimabue's *Flagellation* and *Virgin and Child* are close in size to two of the scenes painted on the Pacino diptych, and they could have been part of a likewise potentially portable, intimately scaled panel or set of panels.

THE FRICK ACQUIRES AN IMPORTANT GROUP OF ITALIAN PRIMITIVES

The fact that The Frick Collection owns the *Flagellation*—the only painting by Cimabue in the United States—may seem surprising since Henry Clay Frick did not collect Italian gold-ground paintings and, in general, eschewed religious works in favor of portraits and landscapes. His daughter, Helen Clay Frick, however, had a particular interest in early Italian pictures. Her love for Italian art was nurtured through a visit to Italy during the winter of 1923–24 and again in the summer of 1925. Miss Frick chronicled her travels in scrapbooks in which she pasted carefully labeled photographs and postcards, annotated with commentaries on the works of art she had seen. A postcard of Cimabue's *Santa Trinità Madonna* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) is among the images collected from her Florentine sojourn.

A few months after Miss Frick returned from Italy in early 1924, the Board of Trustees authorized her to purchase The Frick Collection's first early Italian Renaissance painting, *The Annunciation* by Fra Filippo Lippi. Over the next three decades, Miss Frick served as chair of the acquisitions committee, and under her leadership the Frick gradually assembled a small but extremely important group of Italian primitives, including the Cimabue *Flagellation*. When the painting was offered to the Frick for sale in 1950 by the dealer Knoedler and Company, Miss Frick and the other members of the acquisitions committee unanimously agreed on the panel's rarity, quality, and beauty, and immediately sought to acquire it. By February 1, 1951, the *Flagellation* was on view at the Frick, and that morning the *New York Times* heralded it as “the best of the rare thirteenth-century Italian paintings in America.”

Without question, the Frick and National Gallery panels rank among the finest works of thirteenth-century painting. The engaging expressions of Christ, the Virgin, and the angels, combined with the delicacy of the paintings' execution attest to Cimabue's ability to create powerful, timeless images truly revolutionary for their day. The panels are emblematic examples of Cimabue's genius and, after seven centuries, still have the power to connect celestial glory to earthly experience.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color illustrated publication (54 pages), *Cimabue and Early Italian Devotional Painting*. It features an essay by Holly Flora that presents the two panels in the context of devotional painting during Cimabue's period and the generation that followed, as well as a biography of the artist, a discussion of his major works, and a historiographic review of the discovery and acquisition of each work. An essay by Rachel Billinge, Rausing Research Associate, Conservation Department, the National Gallery, London, features the results of her close study of the Cimabue panels using an infrared camera and a discussion of the artist's drawing and painting techniques. A comprehensive bibliography and checklist of works in the exhibition are included. It will be available in softcover (\$15.95) in the Museum Shop of the Frick, on the institution's Web site (www.frick.org), and by phone (212) 288-0700.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE *(SEATING FOR LECTURES IS LIMITED AND UNRESERVED)*

Date: Wednesday, November 8, 2006, 6 p.m.
Speaker: Dillian Gordon, Consultant Curator of Early Italian Paintings,
National Gallery, London
Title: *Cimabue's Virgin and Child: Lost and Found*

The authorship of the Frick's *Flagellation of Christ* was confirmed in 2000 when a panel of the *Virgin and Child* (now in the National Gallery, London) was discovered and identified to be by Cimabue. This lecture, presented in conjunction with the current exhibition, will focus on the panel's discovery and its implications for the understanding of thirteenth-century painting in Tuscany.

Presentation of this lecture has been made possible by the Italian Cultural Institute of New York.

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: (212) 288-0700

Website: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

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

Admission: \$15; senior citizens \$10; students \$5; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11am to 1pm

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection, and those under sixteen must be accompanied by an adult.

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 INFORM® Audio Tour of the permanent collection, provided by Acoustiguide. The tour is 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 Visits: Please call (212) 288-0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing, or Geetha Natarajan, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

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