



# ARCHIVED PRESS RELEASE

from

# THE FRICK COLLECTION

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## FRICK COLLECTION WELCOMES PUBLIC TO VIEW NEWLY REOPENED AND REFURBISHED FRAGONARD ROOM



Visitors may now enjoy one of The Frick Collection's most remarkable and signature galleries, the Fragonard Room, which has undergone its first major relighting and refurbishment in sixty years. This initiative required the temporary closure of the room in June, during which time the principal panels of his masterpiece series *The Progress of Love* were placed on view in the East Gallery. The

panels were recently reinstalled in the gallery bearing the artist's name, which reopened on Tuesday, October 23, 2007. The paintings are on display with important decorative art objects from the collection, all of which will benefit greatly from the new system of illumination. Among them is the recently purchased Lepaute clock featuring a sculpture by Clodion as well as a rare tinted plaster study of *Diana the Huntress* by Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), a generous gift from Frederick R. Koch. The latter acquisition made in 2006 had not yet been placed on public view at the Frick and makes its debut on this occasion. The relighting and refurbishment project, an important capital improvement, was made possible through the generosity of the members of the Director's Circle and an anonymous donor.



Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–93), *Diana the Huntress*, probably 1777–93, tinted plaster, 24 inches high. The Frick Collection, gift of Frederick R. Koch; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Comments Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator **Colin B. Bailey**, “It is immensely gratifying to see Fragonard’s masterpiece, as well as some of the Frick’s finest objects of eighteenth-century decorative art, so well illuminated. Such is the discretion of Renfro’s renovations, that visitors may find it hard to discern the fundamental changes in lighting that have been incorporated in the Fragonard Room, but they will certainly delight in the new, even lighting of these great panels, the subtle highlighting of furniture, porcelain, and sculpture, and the elegant refurbishment of floor and ceiling. The long and careful planning and expertly managed implementation—which has engaged several departments in the Frick—has wonderfully burnished the jewel in the Frick’s crown.”

## **INNOVATIVE LIGHTING FOR FRAGONARD’S MASTERPIECES**

Though state of the art when it was installed in 1947, the previous lighting system in the Fragonard Room had a narrow color spectrum and provided an uneven distribution of light. The innovative new system now truly illuminates to best advantage the palette Jean-Honoré Fragonard used in creating *The Progress of Love*, his masterful ensemble for Madame du Barry’s pavilion at Louveciennes.

Lighting designer Richard Renfro and his associate Eileen Pierce of **Renfro Design Group, Inc.** were charged with illuminating the wall-sized paintings without detracting from the ambiance of the historic house. Their goal was to give the impression that the panels were lit only by natural light and the room’s chandelier. The large scale of the pictures and the fact that they are recessed into the room’s decorative paneling eliminated the possibility of using individual picture lights, which are employed in other parts of the museum. A second goal of the project was to highlight the French sculptures and other decorative objects displayed, bringing them into balance with the paintings. Numerous tests were conducted using various lamps to determine the optimum effect and to ensure that illumination levels would be within museum standards. Ultimately, low-voltage halogen reflector lamps were chosen, as these produce a soft light for the paintings and provide better color rendering. Fiber-optic fixtures, which emit light from a remote source, were selected to provide subtle accents for the three-dimensional objects. An elaborate, preprogrammed control panel will allow for a wide range of adjustment to compensate for shifting natural light caused by seasonal changes and even the time of day. Now reinstalled, the Fragonard paintings appear much as they did when they were first hung in 1773 at Louveciennes, the *maison de plaisance* built for Madame du Barry, Louis XV’s mistress. The four largest paintings were created for the *salle de jeu*, a sunbathed room that the building’s architect, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806), designed to be adjacent to the gardens. In this setting, the paintings would have been brilliantly illuminated by natural sunlight.

## **DECORATIVE ARTS OBJECTS BENEFIT FROM LIGHTING PROJECT**

It appears that Madame du Barry found the combination of Ledoux’s neoclassical architecture and Fragonard’s rococo works to be an uneasy marriage and had the paintings removed shortly after they were hung. As installed in The Frick Collection, the Fragonard Room contains several objects from the same period, illustrating how

harmoniously the two styles can be bridged. A transitional commode made in 1769 by Giles Joubert (1689–1775) and Roger Lacroix (1728–1799) for Louis XV’s daughter, Madame Victoire, features an undulating rococo case dressed with gilt-bronze mounts that are, for the most part, quintessentially classical. Similarly, Jean-Antoine Houdon, the great neoclassical sculptor, seems to have been glancing back to the earlier period when he produced the marble portrait bust of the *Comtesse du Cayla* (1777), also displayed in the room, adjacent to Fragonard’s *Lover Crowned*. Among the other treasures to benefit from the new lighting system are the rare Sèvres porcelain *Pot-Pourri Vase in the Shape of a Masted Ship* displayed in the center of the room and the recently purchased Lepaute clock *The Dance of Time: Three Nymphs Supporting a Clock by Lepaute* (1788) that features a terracotta sculpture by Clodion, both now spotlighted in a way that is sensitive and appreciative of their shape and form.

### ON VIEW FOR THE FIRST TIME: HOUDON SCULPTURE OF *DIANA THE HUNTRESS*



With the reopening of this room, visitors may also see for the first time the 2006 gift from Frederick R. Koch of a plaster statuette of *Diana the Huntress* by Houdon. At two feet tall, this *Diana* is an exact reduction of the celebrated life-size composition Houdon designed in the 1770s for Duke Ernst II of Saxe-Gotha, a full-size terracotta version of which was acquired by The Frick Collection in 1939. Although many copies and reductions of *Diana the Huntress* were made well into the nineteenth century, only two small-scale plasters bear the wax seal of Houdon’s atelier, an indication that they were produced in the studio during the artist’s lifetime: one is in the Musée Lambinet, Versailles, and the other can now be seen in the Fragonard Room of The Frick Collection. The study sits atop a magnificent commode by French royal furniture maker Jean-Henri Riesener (1734–1806).

Houdon’s *Diana the Huntress* now on view in the relit, refurbished Fragonard Room of The Frick Collection, photo: Michael Bodycomb

### OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE ROOM’S PRESENTATION COMPLETED

As a part of a larger project, ultraviolet-protected windows have been installed throughout the mansion, including the Fragonard Room. Additionally, the wood paneling of the Fragonard Room has been given an eighteenth-century-inspired faux finish by Grand Illusion Decorative Painting, Inc. Modern materials were used to simulate the matte glue-based paint often used on boiseries from the period of Fragonard’s panels. Though somewhat coarse in texture, such surfaces were cherished for their pearl-like sheen. This surface has been glazed with turpentine and poppy seed oil to give the appearance of age.

## ABOUT THE FRAGONARD PANELS

The gallery is named for Fragonard's Progress of Love (four panels painted between 1771 and 1772, the remaining ten between 1790 and 1791), considered by many to be the artist's masterpiece and one of the greatest decorative ensembles of the eighteenth century. Fragonard (1732–1806) was commissioned to complete four large canvases—which have since come to be recognized as *The Pursuit*, *The Meeting*, *The Lover Crowned*, and *Love Letters*—for Madame du Barry. The series was installed at Louveciennes by 1772, but by 1774 the inventory of paintings at the château recorded the series as having been returned to Fragonard and supplanted by works from another artist, Joseph Marie Vien (1716–1809), probably because of a change in the tastes of the period. Fragonard retained the paintings in his studio until 1790, when he spent a year living with a cousin at Grasse, where they were then installed. In Grasse, Fragonard painted ten additional panels (the two large-scale works *Love Triumphant* and *Reverie*, four *Hollyhocks*, and four overdoors of putti) to complete the ensemble. In February 1915, through the dealer Joseph Duveen, Mr. Frick acquired the set from the sale of the banker and art collector J. P. Morgan's extraordinary collection of furniture, bronzes, enamels, and paintings. Duveen Brothers made no profit on the transaction and agreed to install these large wall paintings and overdoors in what was to be the Fricks' Drawing Room, all costs of fabrication and lighting to be borne by the dealer. The resulting gallery is one of the most favored by visitors to the museum.

## BASIC INFORMATION

**General Information Phone:** (212) 288-0700

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

**E-mail:** [info@frick.org](mailto: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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