



PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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Rare Houdon Work on Loan to The Frick Collection

Director Anne L. Poulet announces the loan to The Frick Collection of a stunning work by sculptor **Jean-Antoine Houdon** (1741–1828). The exquisite marble relief, *The Dead Thrush* (*La grive morte*), 1782, from The Horvitz Collection, Boston, has recently been placed on display in the North Hall across



Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828), *The Dead Thrush* (*La grive morte*), Marble relief. Signed and dated 1782, on loan from The Horvitz Collection, Boston, photo: Richard di Liberto

from the portrait of the *Marquis de Miromesnil* (1777), also by Houdon. There the relief may be viewed in proximity to Jean-Étienne Liotard's *Trompe L'Oeil* (1771), a painting closely related to it in style. *The Dead Thrush* is on loan to The Frick Collection through August 2006. Comments Poulet, who organized a critically acclaimed traveling exhibition of Houdon's sculpture in 2003–04, "we are delighted to be able to share with the public this rare and beautiful example of Houdon's treatment of an animal subject. In the context of our own holdings by the artist, which fall within his more typical genres of portraiture and mythological sculpture, it offers visitors a superb opportunity to consider his skill and oeuvre more completely." All

told, there are three masterful sculptures by Houdon in the Frick's permanent holdings: the aforementioned marble portrait bust of the *Marquis de Miromesnil*; a marble bust of the *Comtesse du Cayla* (currently on view in the Fragonard Room); and a full-length, life-sized terracotta statue of *Diana the Huntress*. The latter work, on view in the Oval Room of the Frick, represents a particularly fine example of Houdon's technical virtuosity in that delicate medium.

Indeed, a subject such as *The Dead Thrush* represented a rare departure for Houdon, who is best known for his portraits of major figures of the period. When he took up this animal subject, it was to prove his skill as a master carver of *trompe l'oeil* – a genre literally intended to "deceive the eye" into mistaking art

for reality. In this marble, Houdon emulated a composition popularized by *trompe l'oeil* paintings to prove that sculpture could surpass its sister art in its truth to nature. Aware that marble's uniform color made naturalistic illusion of a polychrome species difficult for the sculptor to achieve, Houdon probably chose the song thrush—a drab, solid brown plumaged bird—as his subject. Houdon magically transformed illusion into salient reality by depicting the thrush exactly life-size and added interest by extending one of its wings over the marble's frame.

Houdon's portraits, like The Frick Collection's *Marquis de Miromesnil*, were animated with a semblance of life so compelling that they were celebrated as “speaking likenesses.” *The Dead Thrush*, however, is inanimate and still, like marble itself. With understated virtuosity Houdon has created a haunting commentary on the transience of life and the permanence of marble, and his own remarkable ability to transcend both time and material through his art.

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; 1pm to 6pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (1 to 6pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$12; senior citizens \$8; students \$5

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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