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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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FIRST NORTH AMERICAN EXHIBITION TO FOCUS ON CELEBRATED EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COURT PAINTER

JEAN-ÉTIENNE LIOTARD (1702–1789): SWISS MASTER

June 13, 2006, through September 17, 2006



Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Liotard Laughing*,
c.1770. Oil on canvas, Musées d'Art et
d'Histoire, Département des Beaux-Arts photo:
Bettina Jacot-Descombes

A prolific pastelist, painter, and miniaturist who traveled throughout Europe and the Near East, Jean-Étienne Liotard is one of the most fascinating, yet least familiar, artists of the eighteenth century. Although Liotard enjoyed an international reputation in his own time, today his work is relatively little known outside his native Switzerland, even among specialists. The Frick Collection is pleased to present the first monographic exhibition in North America devoted to this intriguing artist. Inspired by Lore Heinemann's generous 1997 bequest, *Trompe l'Oeil*, the exhibition *Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702–1789): Swiss Master* will present more than fifty paintings, drawings, miniatures, and engravings from the Musées d'art et d'histoire in Geneva, the world's most extensive repository of Liotard's oeuvre, together with pastels and other works from Swiss private collections. As few of these masterpieces have been seen in the

United States, the exhibition will provide a singular opportunity for viewers to become more familiar with Liotard's remarkable achievements. Its exclusive presentation in New York, through September 17, 2006, will be accompanied by the first general introductory publication on the artist in English as well as free public lectures and related concert programs.

Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702–1789): Swiss Master has been organized by Chief Curator **Colin B. Bailey** with the assistance of **Kristel Smentek**, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow. Its presentation is made possible, in part, through the generous support of Margot and Jerry Bogert; Melvin R. Seiden in honor of Jean A. Bonna and Inez and Yves Oltramare, with additional support from Inez and Yves Oltramare; Jean A. Bonna; Pro Helvetia, Arts

Council of Switzerland; The Helen Clay Frick Foundation; and the Fellows of The Frick Collection. Transportation costs have been generously underwritten by Swiss International Air Lines. The catalogue is made possible, in part, by Lawrence and Julie Salander.



Comments Chief Curator Colin B. Bailey, “The Frick Collection is one of the very few museums outside Geneva to own a masterpiece in oil by Liotard, and it is his *Trompe l’Oeil* of 1771 bequeathed by Lore Heinemann in 1997 that inspired the current exhibition. Liotard is one of the most original—and eccentric—of all eighteenth-century artists, whose fame during his lifetime spread from the courts of Europe as far afield as Constantinople, and even to the colonies in Boston, Massachusetts. Thanks, above all, to the extraordinary generosity of the Musées d’art et d’histoire in Geneva—which boast the foremost holdings of works by Liotard in the world—a New York audience will have the opportunity to discover this Swiss master in all the media in which he excelled: from paintings in oil and pastel, to drawings in three crayon, engravings, and miniatures.”

When Liotard exhibited the Frick’s *Trompe l’Oeil* in London in 1773, he described it as a “*deceptio visus*” (visual deception). With its illusionistic plaster reliefs suspended from screws and drawings adhered with sealing wax to a simulated pine panel, *Trompe l’Oeil* is both a delightful piece of visual trickery and a masterful demonstration of the artist’s mimetic powers. Although Liotard began painting trompe l’oeil images relatively late in his career, the goal of exact imitation evinced in this small work characterizes the artist’s oeuvre as a whole. To his admirers, Liotard was the “painter of truth.” Whether



Liotard, *Trompe l’Oeil*, 1771, Oil on silk transferred to canvas, The Frick Collection, bequeathed by Lore Heinemann in memory of her husband, Dr. Rudolph J. Heinemann, 1997, photo: Richard di Liberto

executed in oil, pastel, or in graphic media, his portraits and genre scenes are so closely observed and so startlingly direct that one can’t help but marvel at their realism. Indeed, Liotard was unsparing in his depiction of his sitters, including himself (see front page), avoiding the flattery and embellishment that characterized the art of his colleagues. He also avoided the “*touche*,” or painterly touches, and visible brushstrokes of his contemporaries, railing in his *Treatise on the Principles and Rules of Painting* (1781) that, since one did not see such flourishes in nature, they had no place in art. While his ideas accorded with the tenets of Enlightenment empiricism, they put him at odds with the artistic establishment. His insistence on painting only what he saw may have given some of his sitters pause as well; according to one observer, Liotard’s penchant for the real over the artificial meant that many women of “middling beauty” trembled at the thought of having him paint their portraits. It was the veracity of his art, however, that was the foundation of his great success and his international reputation.

Born in Geneva in 1702, Liotard was the son of a French Huguenot family that fled to Geneva following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which rescinded the religious and civil rights of Protestants living in France. He began his artistic training with the Genevan miniaturist Daniel Gardelle (1673–1753), then moved to

Paris to apprentice with the portraitist, miniaturist, and printmaker Jean-Baptiste Massé (1687–1767). By 1726, Liotard had left his master’s studio and was active independently in Paris, executing miniatures, oil paintings, and etchings and experimenting with color printmaking.

Liotard’s trip to Paris was only the first of many voyages he undertook to further his career. After an unsuccessful bid to enter the French Royal Academy in 1735, he left Paris for Naples at the invitation of the marquis de Puysieux, the newly appointed ambassador of the French court to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. From Naples, Liotard traveled to Rome, where he executed portraits of such prestigious sitters as Pope Clement XII (now lost) and the family of James Stuart, pretender to the English throne. Liotard’s very fine miniature of 1738 of the Old Pretender’s sons, Prince Henry Benedict Stuart and Prince Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie), will be included in the Frick exhibition. Liotard’s first extant works in pastel—a medium in which he was to excel—date from his Roman sojourn as well. While in the Eternal City, Liotard met two English Grand Tourists, the Earl of Sandwich and William Ponsonby (later the Earl of Bessborough), who invited him to accompany them to the Greek islands and to Constantinople. This visit to the Ottoman capital was to be the defining moment of Liotard’s career.

LIOTARD BECOMES “LE PEINTRE TURC”

Liotard arrived in Constantinople in May or June of 1738, and the city so captivated him that he remained there long after the departure of his English patrons. His decision may have been prompted by the recent death of Jean-Baptiste Vanmour (1671–1737), the city’s resident Western painter. During Liotard’s four years in Constantinople, he worked assiduously, compiling a repertoire of highly detailed drawings of men and women in sumptuous Turkish dress, posed in recognizably Turkish interiors, that would serve him as models throughout his career. He



Liotard, *Presumed Portrait of Maria Theresa (1717-1780) in Turkish Costume*, 1743-1745. Watercolor and gouache on vellum, 7.3 x 5.4 (2 7/8 x 2 1/8), Musée de l’Horlogerie et de l’Émaillerie, photo: Maurice Aeschimann

established himself as a portraitist to foreigners, receiving commissions for pastels and oil paintings from Western diplomats, merchants, and travelers, many of whom chose to be represented in Turkish costume. Like some of his Western sitters, Liotard adopted Turkish dress—a long robe and loose pants gathered at the ankles complemented by a fezlike cap; unlike his patrons, he continued to wear these garments for the rest of his life, some fifty years after he had left the Levant. Liotard’s exotic appearance was made even more extraordinary by the long beard he grew in imitation of the local nobility of Jassy, Moldavia (present-day Romania), a court he visited in 1742. Although Liotard remained in Jassy for less than a year, he retained his distinctive beard until his marriage in 1756.

To sport facial hair of any sort was unusual in eighteenth-century Europe, and when Liotard arrived in Vienna in 1743 from Moldavia, his hirsute appearance and Turkish clothing caused a sensation (as they did in every European city he was to visit). In Vienna, he attracted the attention of the Empress Maria Theresa, who became his lifelong

patron. (In 1763, she became the godmother of Liotard's second daughter, her namesake, Marie-Thérèse.) Liotard had brought Turkish costumes with him from Constantinople, and several of his sitters are known to have worn them for their portraits. An exquisite miniature of a woman in Turkish dress believed to be Maria Theresa suggests that even the empress herself may have donned them for a likeness by "le peintre turc," as he had become known.

THRIVING IN PARIS, LONDON, THE NETHERLANDS, GENEVA

From Vienna, Liotard traveled to Venice, Milan, Frankfurt, Darmstadt, Geneva, and Lyons, arriving back in Paris in 1748. Despite the hostility of the French artistic establishment toward him and his lack of any official affiliation, Liotard thrived in Paris, executing and exhibiting portraits, genre scenes, and Turkish subjects. Among his sitters were members of the French royal family, important figures in the French court, and numerous English visitors to Paris, including the actor David Garrick, who remarked on the striking likenesses of Liotard's portraits. The artist's scrupulous realism did not, however, please all of his sitters. Madame de Pompadour, mistress to Louis XV, wrote to her brother in 1750, informing him that she would not send him her portraits by Liotard, but preferred instead to send a copy of a much more flattering representation by François Boucher, a copy that, as she wittily remarked, greatly resembled the original picture, but did not resemble her.



Liotard, Archduchess Marie-Antoinette of Austria (1755–1793), 1762. Black chalk, graphite pencil, watercolor, and pastel on very thin white laid paper, heightened with color on the verso, 31.1 x 24.9 cm (12 1/4 x 9 13/16 in.). Musées d'Art et d'Histoire, Cabinet des Dessins, Photo: Bettina Jacot-Descombes

In early 1753, Liotard moved from Paris to London, where he renewed contact with his former traveling companions, the earls of Sandwich and Bessborough, and where he secured commissions from numerous patrons, including Augusta, Princess of Wales. As he had in France, the artist commanded high prices for his work. A contemporary reported that Liotard had earned a total of between £6,000 and £7,000 during his stay in London, a very handsome sum at the time. From England, Liotard traveled to the Dutch republic, where he portrayed members of the House of Orange as well as courtiers and nobles. While in the Netherlands, Liotard met Marie Fargues, the twenty-seven-year-old daughter of an Amsterdam merchant of French Huguenot descent. They married in August 1756, when Liotard was fifty-four years old. As a wedding present to his new bride, he shaved off his trademark beard.



Liotard, Jean-Étienne Liotard, Eldest Son of the Artist, Buttering a Piece of Bread, c. 1770, 63 x 70 cm (24 13/16 x 27 9/16 in.), Oil on canvas, Private collection

Shortly after their marriage, Liotard and his wife settled in Geneva. Married life and the birth of five children over the next ten years did little to dampen his wanderlust, however. Although showered with commissions by prominent citizens of Geneva, in 1762, Liotard traveled to Vienna, where he executed his stunning portrait drawings of eleven of Maria Theresa's twelve children.

Liotard's masterful likeness of the seven-year-old Marie-Antoinette, the future

ill-fated queen of France, exemplifies the unsparing realism and startling directness that characterize his drawings of the imperial children. So fond was

Maria Theresa of these portraits that she took them with her whenever she traveled. And so appreciative was she of his talents that, in 1771, she asked Liotard to visit Paris in order to execute another portrait of Marie-Antoinette, by then the Dauphine of France and living far away from the Viennese court.

In London in 1774, Liotard executed his beautiful pastels of the second Earl of Clanbrassill and his bride, Grace, Countess of Clanbrassill (both included in the exhibition). Proud that his artistic mastery remained undiminished despite his advanced age, he signed the portrait of the countess, “by J. E. Liotard at 71 ½ years.” In October 1777, at the age of seventy-five, Liotard and his elder son, also named Jean-Étienne, traveled once more to Vienna. This was to be the artist’s last major journey. Except for a trip to Lyons in 1781 to oversee the publication of the aforementioned treatise, he stayed in Geneva or its environs until his death in 1789 at the age of eighty-seven. His legacy is a fascinating body of work, as sure to captivate visitors to The Frick Collection as it did his eighteenth-century patrons.

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

Date: Wednesday, June 14, 2006, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker: Marcel Roethlisberger, Professor of Art History, Université de Genève
Title: *Liotard Beyond the Exhibition*

Many of Liotard’s pastels, miniatures, and works on paper were too fragile to travel to New York for the exhibition. This lecture will focus on aspects of these works, as well as on his position in the art world during his time.

Date: Wednesday, June 28, 2006, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker: Kristel Smentek, Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, The Frick Collection
Title: *Liotard, “the Turkish Painter”*

During his lifetime, Liotard’s fame was attributable as much to his exotic appearance as it was to his art. Focusing on his four-year sojourn in Constantinople and the lifelong impact the city had on him, this lecture will explore how Liotard’s Turkish themes and extraordinary self-fashioning as “le peintre turc” ensured his pan-European success.

Date: Wednesday, September 13, 2006, 6:00 p.m.
Speaker: Edgar Munhall, Curator Emeritus, The Frick Collection
Title: *Liotard’s Last Laugh*

The lecture will examine The Frick Collection’s *Trompe l’Oeil* painting by Liotard within the context of the artist’s life work, relating it specifically to his late self-portrait *Liotard Laughing*, included in the current exhibition.

CONCERTS

This summer's concerts include music from the period of Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702–1789), the subject of the Frick's special exhibition. Tickets, \$20 each, are available online at www.frick.org, by telephone at (212) 547-0715, and by mail. (Please mail requests to the Concert Department and enclose a check payable to The Frick Collection, along with a telephone number.) Children under ten are not admitted. The program also can be heard in the Garden Court, where no tickets are required.

Thursday, July 13, 6:00 p.m.

VIENNA PIANO TRIO: Mozart; Schumann; Schubert, Trio No. 2 in E-Flat Major, D. 929, Opus 100

Thursday, August 24, 6:00 p.m.

TRIO SETTECENTO, *violin, cello, and harpsichord*, in New York debut: Corelli, Veracini, J. S. Bach, and Handel.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color illustrated catalogue (120 pages), *Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-1789): Masterpieces from the Musées d'art et d'histoire de Genève and Swiss Private Collections*, published by Éditions d'Art Somogy. The first general introductory publication in English on this artist, the book includes an essay by Marcel Roethlisberger that situates Liotard's art and life in its eighteenth-century context. Subsequent essays examine Liotard's practices as a pastelist and miniaturist, his sojourn in the Levant, his work for the courts of Europe, especially that of Empress Maria Theresa, his fascinating self-portraits, as well his late still life production. It will be available in hardcover (\$45) in the Museum Shop of the Frick, on the institution's Web site (www.frick.org), and by phone (212) 288-0700.

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: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$15; senior citizens \$10; students \$5; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.

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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