



# ARCHIVED PRESS RELEASE

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## THE FRICK COLLECTION

1 EAST 70TH STREET • NEW YORK • NEW YORK 10021 • TELEPHONE (212) 288-0700 • FAX (212) 628-4417

### ENAMELS ROOM REOPENS JULY 25 FEATURING AN IMPORTANT ADDITION TO THE DECORATIVE ARTS COLLECTION: REMARKABLE MAIOLICA CHARGER

After nearly two months of refurbishment, the Enamels Room at The Frick Collection reopens on July 25. This diminutive but impressive gallery, with its display akin to a Renaissance collector's cabinet, features a gathering of about twenty-five objects—among them enamels, bronzes, and clocks—as well as Renaissance paintings by Barna da Siena, Cimabue, Duccio, Gentile da Fabriano, Piero della Francesca, and Paolo and Giovanni Veneziano. For the first time, the public also will be able to view a remarkable gift to the museum, a mid-sixteenth-century maiolica charger from the Fontana workshop. This object, which was once part of the important collection formed by Adolphe de Rothschild, fills a significant gap in the Frick's holdings. Comments Director Anne Poulet, "We are grateful to Dianne Modestini, who has made this generous gift in memory of her late husband Mario Modestini. While many collectors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were enthusiasts of maiolica, Henry Clay Frick never purchased any examples. Yet this charger fits in beautifully with our holdings. Mr. Frick was deeply interested in decorative arts from the Renaissance, such as Limoges enamels, the French counterpart to maiolica. He was also fond of the ceramic arts, collecting fine and rare examples of eighteenth-century Sèvres and Chinese porcelain. We know that our visitors will enjoy returning to the



Maiolica dish with *The Judgment of Paris* after Raphael, Fontana workshop, c. 1565, tin-glazed earthenware, The Frick Collection, gift of Dianne Modestini in memory of her late husband, Mario Modestini

Enamels Room and will find this addition to the display stunning. We are also pleased to announce that Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow **Charlotte Vignon** is presently doing research on this object as well as the topic of collecting maiolica in America; the result will be a publication and focus-exhibition at The Frick Collection presented in 2010.”

## **MAIOLICA: LUXURY ITEMS ACROSS THE CENTURIES**

Considered luxury items during the Renaissance by the “wellborn” connoisseurs and later by American Gilded Age collectors, maiolica today refers to tin-glazed earthenware produced in Italy during the Renaissance; before the sixteenth century, however, the term referred to similar wares produced in Spain and the Islamic world. The word itself is traditionally associated with the Balearic island of Mallorca (*Isola di Majolica* in Italian), a marketplace of Hispano-Moresque tin-glazed earthenware frequented by Italian traders during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The word also may derive from the Spanish name for these wares, *obra de Mallequa* (literally, “ware from Malaga”), Malaga being one of the first centers for this type of pottery in Spain. By the late Middle Ages, Italian potters were producing their own version of tin-glazed earthenware; by the fifteenth century, major maiolica centers flourished in Florence, Faenza, Castel Durante, Gubbio, and Urbino, where the Frick’s dish was made. The production of maiolica continued into the seventeenth century but died out in the eighteenth century owing to the rise in popularity of European porcelain, which was first produced in 1708.

Maiolica pieces were shaped either on a foot-powered wheel or by using a mold. (It is not clear which technique was used to create the Frick’s plate.) After firing, objects were dipped in a glaze called *bianco*, a mixture of lead and tin oxides. Once dried, the glaze provided a white, opaque surface on which to paint decoration. It was, however, an unforgiving ground, as the unfired glaze absorbed colors as fresco does, making it impossible to change or repaint a mistake. The difficulty was increased by the nature of the metallic oxide colors used. Because metallic oxides are gray or beige before being fired, the maiolica painter had a rather poor idea of the coloration of the final product as he worked. Only on firing did the oxides fuse to the white ground, turning into brilliant colors that never fade.

## **VIRTUOSITY OF DECORATION**

Maiolica wares were prized by collectors not because of the materials from which they were made but because of the originality and virtuosity of their decoration—two qualities highly valued in Renaissance Italy. The *istoriato*, a narrative scene such as the one painted on The Frick Collection’s dish, demonstrates better than any other decoration the skill of the master maiolica painters. Developed around

1520 in the region of Urbino, these narrative scenes were the most fashionable for maiolica wares (and also the most expensive) until 1560 or so, when the Fontana workshop of Urbino invented a new kind of decoration, *a raffaellesca*, which included fanciful figures derived from the grotesques painted in the Vatican loggias by Raphael around 1520, shortly before his death. Grotesques were first used by maiolica artists to encircle an *istoriato*, but with their growing popularity, the narrative scenes were gradually scaled down until they were finally supplanted by satyrs, winged horses, and other imaginary creatures.

The Frick's dish is a wonderful early example of the white-ground grotesques produced by the Fontana workshop. The high quality of its execution suggests that it was made by or under the direction of Orazio Fontana (1510–1571), the most talented painter of the Fontana family. Orazio was responsible for the celebrated “Spanish Service” given by Duke Guidobaldo II of Urbino to Philip II of Spain in the early 1560s, generally believed to be the finest example of maiolica made during the Renaissance. The front of the Frick's platter is painted with an *istoriato* inspired by Marcantonio Raimondi's print of *The Judgment of Paris* after Raphael. The story begins in the upper-right-hand corner of the composition, where Zeus is depicted on Mount Olympus with Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. The scene represents the banquet held by Zeus at which the uninvited Eris, goddess of discord, arrived with a golden apple inscribed “for the fairest.” Zeus, reluctant to declare a winner himself, commanded Paris, a young shepherd, to decide which of the three goddesses was the most beautiful. According to legend, Hera promised to make Paris king of Europe and Asia if he named her the fairest, Athena offered him wisdom and skill in war, and Aphrodite bribed him with the love of the world's most beautiful woman, Helen of Troy. The group of figures in the center of the dish depicts the moment when Paris presents the golden apple to Aphrodite, an action that was to set off a disastrous chain of events leading to the Trojan War and, ultimately, to the founding of Rome. The dramatic scene is observed from above by Apollo (in his horse-drawn chariot) and by two bearded river gods, at the right.

The dish's central episode replicates Raimondi's print almost exactly in its incorporation of the Olympian deities, the placement of the characters in the scene, and even the gestures of particular gods. The most obvious change in the composition is the figure of Athena, who faces the viewer in the maiolica version but, as seen in the engraving, turns toward winged Victory, who has arrived to crown “the fairest one.” In addition, Paris—shown reclining with his animals—has been added at the top left of the plate, while the three goddesses bathing at the left-hand edge of Raimondi's print have been omitted. Mercury also has been repositioned, probably because his original placement behind Paris proved too technically difficult to replicate in the dish.

## DE ROTHSCHILD PROVENANCE AND THE FASHION FOR MAIOLICA

Little is known about the history of the dish before it entered the collection of Adolphe de Rothschild (1823–1900). Like other members of his family, Baron Adolphe formed an important collection of paintings and rare works of art, including maiolica, which was inherited by his grand-nephew Maurice de Rothschild (1881–1957). At the outbreak of the First World War, Baron Maurice sold seventy-one pieces of Adolphe’s maiolica to the British art dealer Joseph Duveen. Maiolica had been prized by American Gilded Age collectors, who associated it with European connoisseurs from the Medicis to the Rothschilds. Senator William A. Clark, P. A. B. Widener and his son Joseph, Henry Walters, Robert Lehman, William Randolph Hearst, and J. P. Morgan all formed significant maiolica collections that now belong to public institutions including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Walters Art Museum. By the end of the First World War, however, maiolica had fallen out of fashion, and Duveen was unable to sell the majority of the Rothschild pieces. This dish was acquired by Norton Simon in 1964 along with the remaining stock of Duveen Brothers; it was then sold at auction at Sotheby’s, New York, in May 1971 to Mario Modestini, the future husband of Dianne. In conjunction with the placement of this acquisition on public view, the education department will present a fall gallery talk by Andrew W. Mellon Fellow Charlotte Vignon.

### 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 Audio Tour of the permanent collection. 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 Alexis Light, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

Media Relations Phone: (212) 547-6844

General Phone: (212) 288-0700

Fax: (212) 628-4417

E-mail address: [mediarelations@frick.org](mailto:mediarelations@frick.org)