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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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MEDIA ALERT

Parmigianino's Iconic Painting is Newly Interpreted and Comes to the U.S. for the First Time

THE POETRY OF PARMIGIANINO'S "SCHIAVA TURCA"

The Frick Collection, New York

May 13 through July 20, 2014

Legion of Honor, San Francisco

July 26 through October 5, 2014



Parmigianino, *Schiava Turca*, c. 1531–34, oil on panel, 26.4 x 20.9 inches, Galleria Nazionale di Parma; photo: Scala / Art Resource, NY

Born in Parma and known as Parmigianino after his native city, Francesco Mazzola (1503–1540) lived only thirty-seven years, yet his eloquent, innovative art inspired his contemporaries to name him a “Raphael reborn” and praise him as one of the greatest painters of his age. During his brief lifetime, Parmigianino was especially esteemed for his portraits. Today his *Schiava Turca*, an exquisite depiction of a young woman, is an icon in the city of Parma and admired as an expression of ideal female beauty that exemplifies a tradition established by Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa*. Rarely seen outside its home institution, the Galleria Nazionale di Parma, this masterpiece crosses the Atlantic for the first time for its presentation in 2014 at New York’s Frick Collection and the Legion of Honor, part of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The showing at the Frick

marks the museum’s third collaboration with the Foundation for Italian Art & Culture, a series of loans focused on the female portrait in the Renaissance. The collaboration previously featured Raphael’s *La Fornarina* (Rome, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica) and Parmigianino’s *Antea* (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte). *The Poetry of Parmigianino’s “Schiava Turca”* will be accompanied by a catalogue and

numerous public programs, and is organized by The Frick Collection with the Foundation for Italian Art & Culture. The guest curator is Aimee Ng, Research Associate at The Frick Collection and Lecturer in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. The New York presentation is made possible by Gabelli Funds, Aso O. Tavitian, The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Hubert L. Goldschmidt, Hester Diamond, and the Foundation for Italian Art & Culture. The presentation in San Francisco is supported by the Frances K. and Charles D. Field Foundation.

AN ENIGMATIC SITTER

The *Schiava Turca* was painted in the early 1530s when Parmigianino was at the height of his artistic maturity. The identity of the portrait's beautiful sitter is unknown. She wears an elaborate, almost theatrical costume of a ball-shaped headdress, big, drooping slashed sleeves of blue satin, and a gold and white striped garment with a plunging neckline; she holds a puffy white ostrich-feather fan. Her costume inspired an eighteenth-century cataloguer to invent the fantastical name by which the portrait is known. He called the unknown woman a "Schiava Turca," or "Turkish slave," having mistaken her headdress for a turban, associated her fan with the exotic east, and noticed a gold chain wrapped around her right arm, which he interpreted as a sign of captivity. But the sitter is neither Turkish nor a slave. Most of the *Schiava Turca*'s costume is perfectly conventional for a woman of the Northern Italian courts, including the ornate headdress, which is called a *balzo*. Scholars have suggested that the portrait does not depict an actual woman at all, but that it is Parmigianino's imaginative invention of ideal feminine beauty. Others have attempted to identify the sitter. Proposed identities include Giulia Gonzaga, who was once actually threatened with abduction by a Turkish invader—that is, threatened to become a "Turkish slave." Less romantic suggestions include the proposal that she is a member of the Baiardo family or the Cavalli family. Both families' heraldic emblems feature a horse or a horse's head, and the *Schiava Turca* wears an ornament of a horse—albeit a winged horse—on her headdress. So far, however, no identification has been entirely convincing.

NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE SITTER AS A POET

Renaissance portraits of women were often viewed in a poetic context. In the Petrarchan tradition, male poets and painters competed over who could better capture and convey a woman's beauty. The *Schiava Turca*'s ornament of a winged horse connects her to a poetic context, for in Renaissance Italy the winged horse Pegasus was the quintessential emblem of poetic inspiration. But the *Schiava Turca* is unlike Renaissance portraits of women in several ways. Her active pose, with her body facing right and with her head turned to the left, was common for portraits of men, not for women. Stillness was a virtue in portraits of women, in which the sitter's body usually faces in the same direction as her face. The *Schiava Turca*'s direct and

engaging expression also distinguishes her from other female portraits. The look on her face more closely resembles that of Parmigianino's *Cupid Sharpening His Bow* than that of any of the artist's other portraits of women. Her expression, in other words, is closer to that of the god of love than to that of a decorous noblewoman. Finally, the Pegasus ornament that the *Schiava Turca* wears appears to be an *enseigne*, or hat badge, an accessory customarily worn by men that derives from military badges and bears the emblems of the men who wear them. The *Schiava Turca* appropriates a pose, expression, and an accessory usually reserved for men. What might these inversions of portrait conventions reveal about the mysterious woman? Rather than a passive recipient of male poetic admiration, could she, herself, be a poet? This interpretation has never been proposed. But after all, the *Schiava Turca* wears upon her head (the seat of creativity) a Pegasus, the very symbol of poetic inspiration.

The possibilities and implications of this interpretation will be explored by Aimee Ng in the accompanying exhibition catalogue. Therein, she will present the portrait in its artistic and cultural context as a masterpiece that epitomizes the contribution of Parmigianino to portraiture as a genre of dynamic experimentation and invention. Educational programs will include seminars and lectures by experts in the field of Italian Renaissance art. The natural light of the museum's Oval Room will provide visitors with an optimal viewing experience of Parmigianino's celebrated portrait and an ideal setting for gallery conversations.

ABOUT THE FRICK COLLECTION AND THE FRICK ART REFERENCE LIBRARY

Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919), the coke and steel industrialist, philanthropist, and art collector, left his New York residence and his remarkable collection of Western paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts to the public “for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a gallery of art, [and] of encouraging and developing the study of fine arts and of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects.” Designed and built for Mr. Frick in 1913 and 1914 by Thomas Hastings of Carrère and Hastings, the mansion provides a grand domestic setting reminiscent of the noble houses of Europe for the masterworks from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century that it contains. Of special note are paintings by Bellini, Constable, Claude, Corot, Fragonard, Gainsborough, Goya, El Greco, Holbein, Ingres, Manet, Monet, Rembrandt, Renoir, Titian, Turner, Velázquez, Vermeer, Veronese, Whistler, and other masters. Mr. Frick's superb examples of French eighteenth-century furniture, Italian Renaissance bronzes, and Limoges enamels bring a special ambiance to the galleries, while the interior and exterior gardens and the amenities created since the founder's time in the 1930s and 1970s contribute to the serenity of the visitor's experience.

Renowned for its small, focused exhibitions and its highly regarded concert series and lectures, The Frick Collection also operates the Frick Art Reference Library, founded by Henry Clay Frick's daughter, Helen Clay Frick, located in an adjoining building at 10 East 71st Street. Both a research library and a photo archive, the Frick Art Reference Library is one of the world's great repositories of documents for the study of Western art. It has served the international art world for more than seventy-five years.

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day (special hours for the run of the Fall/Winter Mauritshuis exhibition, specific to those galleries, are posted online)

Admission: \$20; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.
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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 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 Admission for the Permanent Collection: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is published regularly and all content is available online.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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