



ARCHIVED PRESS RELEASE

from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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

THE FRICK ANNOUNCES TWO IMPORTANT ACQUISITIONS

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SCULPTURES GIVEN BY EUGENE V. THAW AND THE QUENTIN FOUNDATION



Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), *Madame His*, marble, 34 1/8 x 18 x 18 in. (86.68 x 45.72 x 45.72 cm), The Frick Collection, New York, gift of Eugene V. Thaw

The Frick Collection has accepted into its celebrated holdings two important gifts of art. Collector **Eugene V. Thaw** has given the Frick a marble bust by **Jean-Antoine Houdon** (1741–1828), a portrait of Madame His. Comments Director Anne L. Poulet, who, in 2003, organized the acclaimed retrospective touring exhibition, *Jean-Antoine Houdon: Sculptor of the Enlightenment*, “It is a great pleasure to see this sculpture find a permanent home at The Frick Collection, an institution celebrated for its holdings in French eighteenth-century painting, sculpture, and decorative arts. I know this portrait well, and it is a work of exquisite beauty and refinement, as well as a rare surviving example that preserves Houdon’s original luminous surface treatment. *Madame His* is currently on view in the North Hall, where the bust will remain through the end of the year. It is one of the only known examples in the

world that remain in this remarkable state of preservation. The fact that the provenance of *Madame His* is known from the time it was carved by Houdon is also of significance. This acquisition is, indeed, a superb addition to the Frick, and we thank Eugene Thaw for his generosity.”

A beautiful terracotta Pietà (c. 1715) by **Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi** (1656–1740) was also accepted as a gift from The Quentin Foundation. The sculpture is currently on view in the South Hall. Adds Anne Poulet, “When the *Pietà* was originally presented in a 2004 Frick exhibition, it was truly a highlight. Now we are fortunate to place this breathtaking sculpture in the context of our own holdings, which, while strong in French terracottas of the period, did not until now include any Italian examples. This gift admirably



Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656-1740), *Pietà with Two Putti Angels*, terracotta, 20.5 x 47 x 20.5 cm, The Frick Collection, New York, gift of The Quentin Foundation

fills a gap in our collection. It is an intimately moving rendition of the Pietà, a subject of great significance to both Henry Clay Frick and his daughter Helen, who acquired examples in painting and bronze relief. On many levels, then, this generous gift from The Quentin Foundation is deeply enriching and appreciated.”

MADAME HIS: A MASTERPIECE OF MARBLE PORTRAITURE BY HOUDON

This sculpture is both a vivid portrayal of an attractive woman and a demonstration of the artist’s brilliant carving technique. The luminous surface of the marble and its palpable forms result in a compelling representation. The eyes lend great animation to the subject’s face. Carving deep circles to render the pupils and more shallow rings to represent irises, Houdon achieves the effect of a pale eye color. Small marble posts attached to the eyelids capture the light, creating the illusion of wet, sparkling eyes.



Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), *Madame His* (detail), marble, 34 1/8 x 18 x 18 in. (86.68 x 45.72 x 45.72 cm), The Frick Collection, New York, gift of Eugene V. Thaw

We know little about the life of Madame His, née Marie-Anne Damaris Dumoustier de Vastre. She married Pierre-François His, a German banker, who, by 1774, had succeeded his father, François-Pierre, as head of the house of His and representative of the State of Hamburg in Denmark. Their home in Paris was not far from Houdon’s home and studio, and they are known to have been family friends who served as witnesses at Houdon’s Paris wedding in 1786. It has even been suggested that Madame His introduced Houdon to his wife, Marie-Ange-Cécile Langlois.

Houdon exhibited this bust at the Paris Salon of 1775. Anne Poulet notes in the catalogue of the 2003 exhibition mentioned above that although he had participated in the salons of 1771 and 1773, it was in 1775, that at thirty-four years of age and a candidate for full membership in the Académie royale, he first showed a large number of portraits of important figures and established himself as one of the most accomplished portrait sculptors in Europe. At this important moment in Houdon’s career, Madame His, a member of the financial bourgeoisie, would have been a desirable subject for the ambitious sculptor. Guilhem Scherf, Chief Curator of Sculpture at the Musée du Louvre, notes in that catalogue that the format of an elongated, draped bust, ending at the waistline, atop a pedestal—relatively uncommon in the 1770s—was adopted from Jean-Baptiste II Lemoyne’s earlier portrait busts. Another prototype may be Augustin Pajou’s bust of Madame du Barry, which Houdon would have seen at the 1773 Salon exhibition. This work, now in the Louvre, features a similarly draped torso with exposed shoulders and upper chest, loose tendrils of hair, and a slightly upward gaze. The costumes of du Barry and His are certainly inspired by classical garb and specifically recall depictions of Diana the Huntress, a popular figure in eighteenth-century art. Houdon’s own bust of Diana of 1778 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) features a similar band extending over the shoulder and across the torso. However, the loose hair and revealing attire worn by Madame His lend her portrait a more sensual quality.

In 1916 Henry Clay Frick purchased his first work by Houdon: the 1777 portrait of the Comtesse du Cayla. In subsequent decades, his daughter Helen Clay Frick and the Board of Trustees continued his pursuit of Houdon sculptures with the purchases of *Armand-Thomas Hue, Marquis de Miromesnil* (1777), and *Diana the Huntress* (1776–95). Earlier this year, Frederick R. Koch gave the institution a small-scale tinted plaster version of the *Diana*.

RARE TERRACOTTA BY SOLDANI-BENZI

When he fashioned the *Pietà*, Massimiliano Soldani had been a master medalist to the Florentine grand dukes for almost thirty years and was an internationally renowned creator of statuettes in bronze and precious metal. An



Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656–1740), *Pietà with Two Putti Angels* (detail), terracotta, 20.5 x 47 x 20.5 cm, The Frick Collection, New York, gift of The Quentin Foundation

artist working at the height of his powers, Soldani may have submitted this masterpiece to the exhibition at the Academia del Disegno in Florence in 1715. The Christ with mourning angels is a *compianto*, a work intended for use during the Catholic devotions that aroused compassionate empathy for the Savior's passion and death. Christ's body is gently elevated toward the viewer, exposing the bloody lance wound at his side. The crown of thorns and nails lie on the stony ground below. Beside them, closest to the viewer's gaze, Christ's hand opens upward in lifeless supplication. The sorrowful angels, who lovingly stare at his face and kiss his wounds, serve as exemplars for the emotions experienced by the devotee who would have knelt before this image in private contemplation.

Soldani was one of the most gifted modelers of his age, and the loosely flowing, masterful freedom with which he fashioned the wet clay tempers the harrowing subject and endows the sculpture with a hushed, graceful lyricism that inspires meditation. In Soldani's hands, the *Pietà with Two Putti* is rendered compellingly beautiful. Soldani produced many larger, more complex versions (which include the Virgin accompanied by numerous angels) in terracotta (fired clay) and in bronze, while porcelain examples were created after his death. This *Pietà*, however, is the only surviving version of this composition by Soldani in any medium.



Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi (1656–1740), *Pietà with Two Putti Angels* (detail), terracotta, 20.5 x 47 x 20.5 cm, The Frick Collection, New York, gift of The Quentin Foundation

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; 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. 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.

#113, October 24, 2006

For further press information on The Frick Collection, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

Media Relations Phone: (212) 547-6866

Fax: (212) 628-4417

E-mail address: mediarelation@frick.org