Summer Exhibition, *The Unfinished Print*, Asks the Question, "When Is a Work of Art Complete?"

Prints by Rembrandt, Piranesi, Degas, Munch, and Others

June 2 through August 15, 2004

For the first time in its history, The Frick Collection will host a major special exhibition this summer that is devoted solely to prints and the process of printmaking. This special presentation poses questions that have preoccupied artists, critics, and collectors for centuries: “When is a work of art complete?” and “When do further additions detract from the desired result?” These issues have a particular history in the graphic arts, where images are developed in stages and often distributed at various points in their making. This exhibition will address the complex issue of “finish” in art through the presentation of more than sixty print impressions in varying degrees of completion. Featured artists, European masters from the fifteenth to the early twentieth century, include Albrecht Dürer, Hendrik Goltzius, Parmigianino, Anthony van Dyck, Rembrandt van Rijn, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, August Rodin, Félix Bracquemond, Paul Gauguin, Edvard Munch, and Jacques Villon. In the process of printmaking, an artist will normally take proof impressions as he makes changes to his plate. These proof states, as will be apparent through many groupings in the exhibition, can establish an exact record of the image in the process of its development. The exhibition is organized by Peter Parshall, Curator of Old Master Prints for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., for the National Lending Service of that institution, where a version was on view in 2001. The majority of the prints come from the National Gallery of Art, with additional sheets from the Frick as well as several from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Epstein Family Collection. Presentation of the exhibition in New York is coordinated by the Galassi and is made possible, in part, by Angelo, Gordon & Co., L.P.; the Fellows of
The Frick Collection; and anonymous donors. *The Unfinished Print* travels to the Städelisches Kunstinstitut und Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main (October 7, 2004, through January 2, 2005).

Comments Guest Curator Peter Parshall, “Although the interpretive problem posed by the incomplete work of art is familiar to art historians, it is a topic very little treated in the history of prints.” Susan Grace Galassi adds, “The Frick Collection is very pleased to present this fascinating ensemble of extremely rare proof states to a New York audience. The exhibition invites the viewer to look over the artist’s shoulder as an image develops through various states, and to sample the richness and variety of the European printmaking tradition. This show will appeal to printmakers, connoisseurs, and students alike.”

**Rare Survivals Begin to Tell the History**

*The Unfinished Print* will begin downstairs in the Special Exhibition Galleries with several landmark examples from the Renaissance, a period from which very few genuine working proofs survive. Among them is a print from the workshop of Andrea Mantegna, *Virgin and Child in a Grotto*, which is one of several known impressions made from a plate that was never completed. Its early printing and distribution may have been inspired by the great value placed on any trace of invention left by this artist. We require a very different explanation for the many surviving impressions of Albrecht Dürer’s trial etching *The Desperate Man*, a work that seems in every respect a wild experiment with a newly acquired technique. Although Dürer may well have preserved some impressions for instruction in the workshop, it was most likely his evolving cult status as an artist that resulted in the continued circulation of such unconventional designs.

Around 1600, the more complex history of the unfinished print begins to unfold, most notably in the work of Hendrik Goltzius. A case in point is his *Massacre of the Innocents*—probably the remaining half of a composition envisioned at twice the scale. Perhaps the other plate was severely damaged, deterring further investment of time, or perhaps Goltzius felt the composition too eccentric and bewildering to complete. Nevertheless, impressions from the abandoned plate were taken and distributed within a generation of his death. Visitors will see, with Anthony van Dyck’s *Self-Portrait* of 1629/30, an example of the likely first case of an unfinished print being intentionally distributed under the authorization of the artist himself. The spare image of this magnificent head positioned high
on the plate was probably etched by van Dyck shortly before his departure for England to initiate his portrait series of famous men known as the *Iconography*. The exhibition contains an impression of this early state, in the holdings of the Frick, which will be juxtaposed with a later version reworked substantially c. 1645 by Jacob Neeffs for the title page of the *Iconography*. Neeffs completed the original plate by creating the backdrop of cloud-filled sky, transforming the previously disembodied head into a sculptural bust. Despite Neeffs’s radical alteration of the work, a certain reverence for the artist’s hand preserved even the trace of an accident, apparent in the presence in both states of an unintentional mark made by van Dyck across the mustache.

**Rembrandt as Printmaking Innovator**

With fourteen sheets in the exhibition that span several decades of his work—including several seldom-shown sheets from the Frick’s own holdings—Rembrandt is particularly well represented. The process of artistic creation obsessed him, and he explored it extensively through etchings that seem no more than random sketches, through often radically differing states, and through a range of printmaking techniques. Evidence suggests that most of the sheets included in the exhibition were printed during his own lifetime, implying that Rembrandt regarded them as worthy of distribution and serious consideration. Among the examples on view is the early unsigned work, *Old Man Shading His Eyes with His Hand*. The summary indications of pose and background make clear that the artist foresaw a more complete image. However, the intense focus of the figure suggests that he stopped short because he had accomplished the essential in what he set out to do. In *The Artist Drawing from the Model*, Rembrandt presents himself in the workshop drawing his muse, a classical Venus. In essence, the image is an allegory of art, both celebrating and questioning the act of rendering. Also on view is a revealing pairing of the second and last states from one of the most prized series in Rembrandt’s graphic output, *Christ Presented to the People*. In the second state, an elaborate architectural superstructure frames a motley crowd that constitutes one of the finest passages of draftsmanship in Rembrandt’s art. Over time the artist substantially reworked the plate, excising this entire section, and through seven documented changes created a strange and shocking image that has yet to be satisfactorily explained. For Rembrandt, a sequence of states was a way of developing an idea, and sometimes it was also a means of generating a series of independent resolutions.
Occasionally, this development seems coherent and organic and at other times dramatic and revolutionary.

**EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY EXPLORATIONS**

In the eighteenth century, such attention to the traces of artistic process fell out of favor in the academies of art. At the same time, prints gained wider acceptance as objects for display in domestic settings and for collecting in albums. While printmaking in France was predominantly seen as a medium of reproduction, the question of finish still entered in, for example, as it pertains to an ambitious enterprise known as the *Recueil Jullienne*. This compendium of prints was commissioned by Jean de Jullienne after drawings and paintings by Watteau, and it consisted of plates created in three stages: first etched fully across the plate, then greatly enhanced in detail with an obliquely pointed engraver’s tool called a burin, and finally completed with text below the image. Featured in the exhibition is a pair of impressions by Charles-Nicolas Cochin I, both taken from plates for *La Mariée de Village (The Village Bride)*, but showing considerable differences from one state to another. Collectors at the time placed special value on the vaporous qualities of the etched state, which would have been distributed in limited number for refined connoisseurs. The deepening and darkening effects contributed by the burin transform the final image into one that quite closely reproduces the original painting on which it was based. In contrast to the refined rococo sensibility expressed in these works is the later melancholic oeuvre of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, whose *capricci* and architectural fantasies can be seen in certain respects as harbingers of romanticism. Comparisons between early and late states from the famous *Carceri* (prisons) series show the effects of his rethinking through added architectural elements, deepened lines, burnished out areas, and variable inking. Visitors will be able to evaluate these changes as they affect the rationality and stability of Piranesi’s compositions.

The revitalization of etching in the nineteenth century took its cue from Rembrandt and sometimes drew the medium into the deepest realms of the personal. This is demonstrated in a remarkable sequence of states from Charles Meryon’s etching *Le Pont-au-Change, Paris*, three of which are featured. This view of the Palais du Justice and the adjacent bridge occupied the artist between 1854 and 1861, during which time he began to show
evidence of psychosis. Meryon’s cryptic reworkings of the plate became an intimate and increasingly unsettled record of his own tortured state of mind. Elsewhere we see Rembrandt’s influence on nineteenth-century portraiture (for example, Rodin’s Victor Hugo, De Face). Meanwhile, the invention of new techniques such as lithography and photography renewed the printmakers’ infatuation with technical process and initiated a highly innovative period of experimentation.

With the development of modernism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on process, fascination with technical experimentation, and openness to accidental effects came to the fore in printmaking, and increased value was placed upon transformation and variation on a theme. Edgar Degas was among the greatest innovators of the period, and he is represented by five impressions in the exhibition. In 1879 he embarked on a complex etching based on an earlier pastel, Mary Cassatt at the Louvre: The Etruscan Gallery. In a process that ran through at least nine states, he recycled the original figures and manipulated them by folding and tracing in order to create new variations. Degas also participated in the revival of the monotype, a technique dating back at least two hundred years that involves inking a flat surface and using various means to rub away the wet oily pigment to realize an image. Two rare examples of monotypes by Degas are shown, including Woman Reading (Liseuse) of c. 1885. In focusing on the immediate effects he could achieve in monotype, Degas came to embrace the aesthetic of the unfinished and the pictorial fragment, essential constituents of his modernity. Paul Gauguin also developed the monotype in very original ways that furthered his investigation of a “primitive” aesthetic. Featured in the exhibition is a major work of about 1902, Two Marquesans, made at the culmination of Gauguin’s career. This sheet includes an exquisite drawing of two Polynesian women and on the reverse the monotype he made from it.

Four impressions of Madonna by the Norwegian Symbolist Edvard Munch will be featured in the Cabinet Gallery. These large and powerful prints are among the artist’s most enigmatic interpretations of the femme fatale, the ubiquitous fin-de-siècle figure that was so central to his art (see illustration on page one). Between 1895 and 1902, Munch made subtle alterations to the drawing on Madonna’s original stone and added additional stones for color, resulting in six different states. As Munch’s absorption with the image intensified, he experimented with a wide range of visual, iconographic, and emotional
effects, adding color and texture, and at one point masking out the border to alter the composition’s focus. With these and other examples in this final exhibition gallery, visitors will see how, by the turn of the twentieth century, the issue of resolution in printmaking had been taken to its farthest reaches—the work of art in a perpetual state of “becoming.”

ILLUSTRATED PUBLICATION

An illustrated publication is available for $35.00 (softcover) and $65.00 (hardcover). It contains three essays by Peter Parshall, Stacey Sell, and Judith Brodie examining the unfinished work of art in the context of printmaking over the course of four centuries. This catalogue (100 pages) is available through the Museum Shop of The Frick Collection, the institution’s website (www.frick.org), or by calling (212) 288-0700.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 2004, 6 PM

Guest curator Peter Parshall delivers a lecture titled Revisions and Resolutions in the History of Printmaking in which he will examine the evolving phenomenon of the unfinished print and its general significance for the aesthetics of the medium. There is no charge for this lecture, and seating is limited.

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 am to 6 pm on Tuesdays through Saturday (open until 9pm every Friday through June 25, 2004); and 1 pm to 6 pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Limited hours (1 to 6 pm) on Lincoln’s Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.  
Admission: $12 for the general public; $8 for seniors, and $5 for students

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 Stephanie Ruggiero, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

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