



# PRESS RELEASE

from

## THE FRICK COLLECTION

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### RARE AND RECENTLY CONSERVED MUGHAL CARPETS ON VIEW AT THE FRICK COLLECTION

May 10 through August 14, 2005

This spring and summer, visitors to The Frick Collection will have an opportunity to see two of the finest surviving examples of the carpet weaver's art. These recently conserved Mughal carpets, one of which has never before been



Northern India, reign of Shah Jahan, c. 1650, *Carpet with Tree Pattern*, The Frick Collection, New York, photo: Michael Bodvcomb

shown by the museum, are extremely rare and important fragments of larger works, and their exhibition has been keenly anticipated by enthusiasts and scholars in the field. Their treatment was undertaken by pre-eminent textile conservator Nobuko Kajitani, who has painstakingly returned the rugs to their original splendor over a period of four years. She first removed later embroidery and fringe. Then—bearing in mind the appearance of the original larger carpets from which they derive as well as their present state—she correctly rearranged the fragments in keeping with the original mid-seventeenth-century compositions. Thanks to this successful conservation project, it is now possible to admire the dazzling array of trees and flowers portrayed on the carpets' surface. Presented as works of art in their own right, the carpets will be installed in the Frick's Oval Room from May 10 through

August 14, 2005. They will return to view on a rotating basis, the next occasion being in 2006, when the museum anticipates publishing an illustrated booklet with separate essays by Dr. Steven Cohen and Nobuko Kajitani. The conservation and presentation of *Gardens of Eternal Spring: Two Newly Conserved Mughal Carpets* has been generously supported by The Ahmanson Foundation, The Helen Clay Frick Foundation, and the Fellows of The Frick Collection. Andrew W. Mellon Fellow Xavier F. Salomon is coordinating the upcoming display.

## MUGHAL CARPETS REFLECTIVE OF A STRONG CULTURAL LIFE

India was the heart of a great Islamic empire under the Mughals, who reigned from 1526 to 1858. This remarkable dynasty and its court supported a vigorous cultural life comparable to those flourishing in Isfahan under the Safavid shahs and under the Ottoman sultans in Istanbul. The patronage of the Mughal emperors had a significant impact on the development of architecture, painting, and a variety of other arts.

Carpet production began in India under the reign of the emperor Akbar (1556–1605) and reached its climax under Shah Jahan (1628–1658), who was responsible for building the Taj Mahal. A distinctive style of carpets depicting trees and flowers in naturalistic forms has become particularly associated with his reign. Few of these incredibly luxurious objects have survived, and it is rare to find them in pristine condition; at present only about five hundred carpets can be linked to Mughal imperial patronage. The Frick Collection is therefore extremely fortunate in owning two of these rugs (purchased from Duveen in 1916 by Henry Clay Frick as household furnishings for the mansion that now houses the museum).

Mughal carpets present astonishingly high standards of quality in terms of technique and materials used. Both rugs in the Frick's holdings, like most Indian carpets, were woven on upright looms using silk threads for the warp and weft. The pile was made from the precious wool of Himalayan mountain goats, collected from the animals' underbelly or—for even better quality—from wool that the goats had shed by rubbing against thorny bushes. This type of material was produced in Tibet and imported to India through Kashmir. It was generally known in the West as *cashmere* and, more recently, as *pashmina*. The rich crimson dye used for Indian carpets (which makes them instantly recognizable) was also a rare and costly product.



Northern India, reign of Shah Jahan, c. 1650, *Carpet with Floral Pattern*, The Frick Collection, New York, photo: Michael Bodycomb

The two Frick carpets represent the height of luxury in terms of imperial Indian rugs. The smaller of the two—decorated with depictions of long-stemmed flowers of different varieties and featured on page 1—was bought by Duveen from Baron Maurice de Rothschild. (It is hoped that current research will reveal more about its earlier history.) The larger rug (above) is decorated with rows of trees. It was probably produced during the first half of the seventeenth century at the royal factory at Lahore (one of India's main cities for carpet production) and sent as a gift to the tomb mosque of Sheikh Safi in Ardabil in Persia by Shah Jahan himself.

Both carpets are in a fragmentary state and are only a fraction of what were originally much larger objects. One of the dealers from Robinson & Co., the London firm that imported the larger rug from India, recorded that when the

“consignment reached the warehouse ...this piece was little more than a collection of tatters, from which, possibly upon its departure from the mosque, or upon the route, predatory but worshipful Mussulmans had cut scraps for their own edification and spiritual benefit.” During a nineteenth-century restoration, damaged areas of both carpets were filled with embroidery imitating the original pattern of the rug, and a fringe was added around the edges. Smaller fragments from the Ardabil carpet—from which the larger Frick carpet was assembled—still survive in various museums, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Textile Museum in Washington, D.C. The Frick’s portion appears to be the largest existing fragment of the original carpet.

It is apparent that the design of both rugs is the work of extremely accomplished artists. Against a crimson background, different plants emerge to create the impression of a lavish garden. On the larger carpet, tall cypresses alternate with trees in blossom. Red and white lilies, poppies, primroses, lotus flowers, tulips, carnations, and roses are depicted on both carpets with the precision of a botanical treatise, while other plants appear more fanciful and decorative, making the carpets not only the representations of an imaginary garden but also a simulation of a floor scattered with flowers. The representation of the Indian flora on these carpets can be compared to images of flowers in other great masterworks such as Japanese screens and Chinese vases, medieval *mille-fleurs* tapestries, the Renaissance meadows of Fra Angelico and Leonardo, or even the pulsating creations of Post-Impressionist painters like van Gogh. Both carpets were intended to provide a sumptuous visual display and to communicate through art the beauties of the natural world. As the carpet expert John Kimberly Mumford wrote in 1910 when referring to the larger Frick rug, “the motive and suggestion of the carpet is life—vigorous, beautiful, sacred, and perpetual.”

## **About The Frick Collection**

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, Corot, Fragonard, Gainsborough, Goya, El Greco, Holbein, Ingres, Manet, Monet, Rembrandt, Renoir, Titian, Turner, Velázquez, Vermeer, 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 for its highly regarded concert series and lectures, The Frick Collection also operates the Frick Art Reference Library, founded by Henry Clay Frick’s daughter, Miss 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](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; 1pm to 6pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (1 to 6 pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

**Admission:** \$12; senior citizens \$8; students \$5

**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.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Manager of Media Relations & Marketing

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