

DIRECTOR'S CHOICE



Ian Wardropper

**THE FRICK
COLLECTION**





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SCALA

INTRODUCTION



THE FRICK COLLECTION is an art museum of the highest quality set in the distinguished house for which its collection was intended. Amid the clamor of New York City, the Frick offers an intimate and contemplative oasis in which to experience great works of art. These works reflect the interests and choices of the house's original owner, Henry Clay Frick, and are organized not by period or country but rather in relation to the scale and the nature of the rooms. The Living Hall still pairs Holbein's *Sir Thomas More* with his portrait of More's great enemy, Thomas Cromwell—just as Henry Clay Frick left them. No doubt, the most exhilarat-

ing moment for the visitor remains the first view of the magnificent West Gallery, once the largest private art gallery in the city.

Henry Clay Frick was born in western Pennsylvania. As a young man, he astutely understood the importance of coke, establishing the ovens necessary to produce it near some of the best coal fields in the area. When in 1882 Andrew Carnegie brought him into the Carnegie Brothers Steel Company to secure a steady supply of this essential ingredient, he also recognized Frick's organizational genius. For nearly two decades, the two men ran a highly profitable enterprise until they quarreled. Having won a lawsuit against his former partner, Frick moved from Pittsburgh to New York. Already a collector in his twenties, he changed his focus from contemporary art to old masters. As he carefully selected masterpieces of painting, he bought land and eventually hired the firm Carrère and Hastings to design a house for his small family that would also suit his art collection. Recognizing the need for furnishings



to match his paintings, he acquired Renaissance and Rococo furniture, as well as Italian bronzes, Limoges enamels, and porcelain, among other things. He died in 1919, and his will left his collection to the public. Following his wife's death in 1951, the trustees and family engaged the architect John Russell Pope to enlarge the public space of the institution, which opened in 1955. The Frick has continued to add to its holdings, notably through the advocacy of Frick's daughter Helen Clay Frick, who was responsible for acquiring many early Italian paintings, as well as for establishing the important Frick Art Reference Library.

While this is a personal selection, I have tried to reflect the range and quality of the collection. Narrowing the field to fit this publication was the most difficult task. My hope is that this small book will inspire people to visit The Frick Collection and discover the works of art that most inspire them.

DUCCIO DI BUONINSEGNA
(Italian, ca. 1255–ca. 1319)

The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain, 1308–11

Tempera on poplar panel (cradled), 17 x 18¼ in. (43.2 x 46 cm)

Purchased by The Frick Collection, 1927 (1927.1.35)

DUCCIO'S LARGE TWO-SIDED ALTARPIECE *Maestà*, for the main altar of Siena's cathedral, is a high point of early Renaissance painting. Surrounding an image of the enthroned Madonna and Child are panels depicting saints, angels, and apostles; on the back are paintings of the life and passion of Christ. Over the years, some of the panels, such as this one, were dispersed, and the altarpiece itself moved to the museum adjacent to the cathedral. While originally part of a series, *The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain* is a striking example of Duccio's skill in painting and composing a single scene. Having been offered "all the kingdoms of the world" if he will worship the devil, Christ rejects him. Symbolically larger than the mountains and scattered cities, the central protagonists dominate the space. Christ's elegant pose and the simple authority of his gesture contrast with the dark and hideous figure of the devil. The minutely detailed crenellations of the walled cities and the striations of the mountains are depicted against the abstraction of the gold ground behind. Recent study has revealed that the two angels to the right were added by an assistant of Duccio at some point after the panel was completed. Its glowing colors and brilliant design make this a compelling example of the early achievement of Italian painting.



