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## ART REVIEW

# The Frick Collection: Relocated, Reshuffled and Revitalized

The New York museum temporarily trades its Gilded Age mansion for Marcel Breuer's Brutalist icon and makes us see its masterpieces with fresh eyes.



Bronze statue by Francesco da Sangallo placed atop a replica of its original base and paintings by Veronese on the back right wall

PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION

*By Karen Wilkin*

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*New York*

The Frick Collection's first announcement, in 2018, that it would move temporarily into the Marcel Breuer building, the former Whitney Museum, on Madison Avenue at 75th Street, while its original home at 70th Street on Fifth Avenue was upgraded and improved, triggered endless questions. Would the Brutalist icon be domesticated? Would the mansion's robber-baron opulence be

re-created? We'd had a preview of how traditional art lived in the tough modernist building when the Metropolitan Museum installed the wide-ranging "Unfinished" to inaugurate its four-year tenure at "Met Breuer." Then, seeing a 19th-century portrait beside a signature trapezoidal window was startling. But since "Unfinished" included only a small number of older works and since the exhibitions that followed emphasized the recent past and present, no firm conclusions were possible. Anxious speculation about what the Frick's temporary move would bring continued.

We can stop wondering. Starting March 18, and for approximately the next two years, we can savor a splendid installation of impeccably selected works on three floors of "Frick Madison." It's a delight: intelligent, informative, elegantly lean and visually rich. There is no attempt to echo the Gilded Age character of the 70th Street mansion or to disguise the power of Breuer's spaces. Each floor has been minimally reconfigured to create zones scaled for small groups of works, punctuated by generous spaces as crescendos, in a rhythm of contract and release. The second floor, devoted to Early Netherlandish, Dutch Golden Age, Flemish and Northern art, for example, includes both a modest "chapel" with the collection's three Johannes Vermeers and a grand gallery devoted to Anthony van Dyck. Similarly, on the third floor, an alcove of small Venetian paintings (and two newly acquired pastels by the 18th-century Italian portraitist Rosalba Carriera ) opens onto a large space sparsely furnished with Paolo Veronese's lush, moralizing allegories and bronze busts. Everywhere, warm gray walls—darker behind gold-ground early Italian Renaissance paintings, cooler and paler behind Renaissance bronzes—harmonize with Breuer's aggressively coffered ceiling and provide a luxurious, restrained background that makes the colors in the paintings sing.

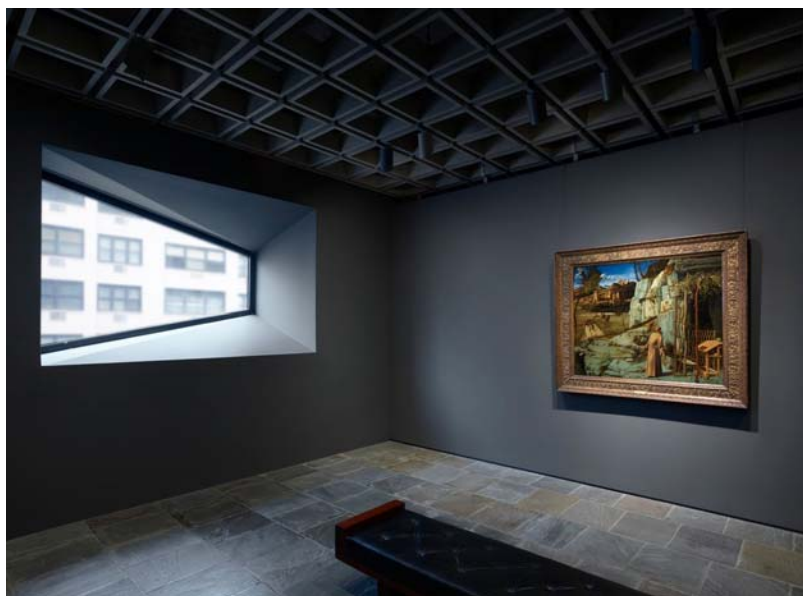


The British galleries

PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION

High points from the collection are presented in ways that make us see them and think about them in fresh ways. The sense of being a privileged visitor at 70th Street is replaced by physical intimacy. No furniture comes between us and the paintings and, absent the mansion's wainscoting, everything is at eye level, with better lighting. Instead of keeping our distance, we can lose ourselves in the voluptuous red velvet of a sleeve by Hans Holbein or revel in the bravura brushwork of Francisco de Goya's portrait of the Duke of Osuna. There are virtually no vitrines, no barriers, and no paintings are under glass. We enter into new relationships with beloved works that we grew up with and pay attention to others that we never properly focused on before.

Each floor is introduced by a sculpture. Jean Barbet's slim 15th-century bronze angel welcomes us to Northern Europe on Floor 2, while a trio of fetching young women in marble, two by Francesco Laurana, one by Andrea del Verrocchio, greets us on Floor 3, with its wealth of Italian and Spanish masterworks. Two portraits by Jean-Antoine Houdon and a magnificent clock with a base by Clodion usher us onto Floor 4, dedicated to French and British art. Throughout, portrait busts and small bronzes come into their own; the gallery of Renaissance bronzes is nothing short of sumptuous. Fabulous 18th-century furniture made for Marie Antoinette by Jean-Henri Riesener, usually part of the décor, becomes sculpture. Magnificent Mughal rugs, fantastic clocks, and elaborate porcelain objects are treated as significant works of art, not as incidentals.



Giovanni Bellini's 'St. Francis in the Desert' (c. 1476-78), paired with one of the iconic trapezoidal windows Marcel Breuer conceived for the building

PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION

Everything enters into new relationships, grouped by geography and chronology, so that related paintings that are usually separated hold conversations. Holbein's portraits of Sir Thomas More and Thomas Cromwell face each other, no longer divided by an El Greco. Giovanni Bellini's "St. Francis in the Desert" has been isolated for private delectation or devotion, with light from a window coming from the same direction as the mystical illumination on the saint. Rembrandt's searching 1658 self-portrait calls to us from a wall of his own, accompanied at a respectful distance by his portrait of Nicolaes Ruts and "The Polish Rider"—all miraculously accessible. John Constable's "The White Horse" shares a space with two enormous J.M.W. Turners in a capsule demonstration of 19th-century polarities of naturalism and romanticism. The four initial panels of Jean-Honoré Fragonard's delicious "Progress of Love" are installed as they were originally in Mme. du Barry's pavilion at Louveciennes, with the painter's later additions to the cycle in an adjacent space, allowing us to relish their loose, spontaneous

brushwork.

Not everything usually on view on 70th Street is at Frick Madison. The selection is very generous, but we'll all find something we miss. No matter. Seeing the collection in the Breuer building is like being given a new set of eyes. First-time visitors and Frick regulars alike will share the thrill of discovery.

—*Ms. Wilkin is an independent curator and critic.*





Bronze Room, Giambologna's *Nessus and Deianira* (foreground) PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION



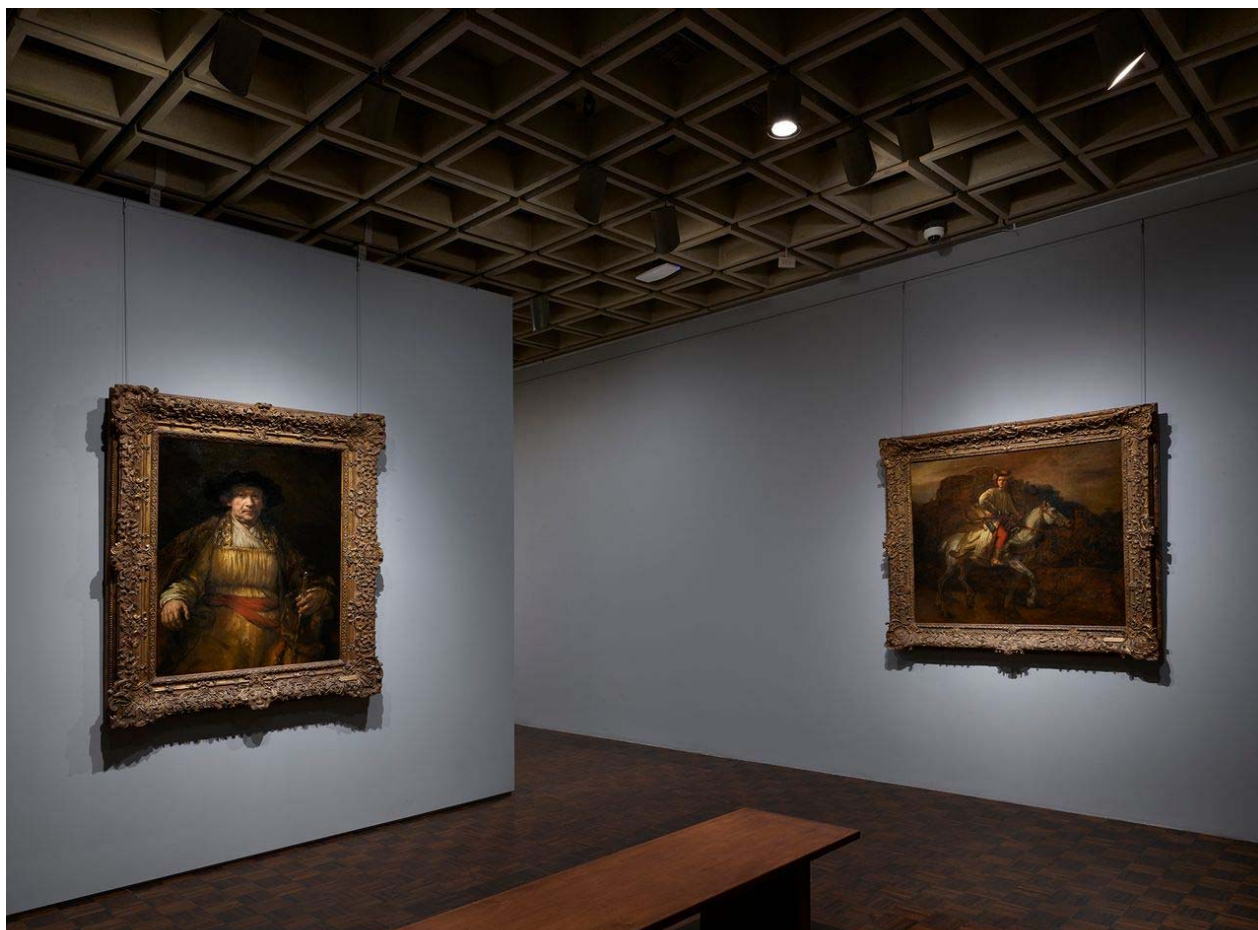
Porcelain Room PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION



Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *The Progress of Love: Love Letters*, 1771-72 PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION



Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of a Man in Pilgrim's Costume*, ca. 1730-50 PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION





Rembrandt's Self-Portrait (left), 1658, and The Polish Rider (right), ca. 1655, PHOTO: JOE COSCIA/THE FRICK COLLECTION



Hans Holbein the Younger, Sir Thomas More, 1527 PHOTO: MICHAEL BODYCOMB/THE FRICK COLLECTION



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, La Promenade, 1875-76 PHOTO: MICHAEL BODYCOMB/THE FRICK COLLECTION

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