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from

THE FRICK COLLECTION

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CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED GALLERY RENOVATIONS CONTINUE WITH TWO MAJOR FALL PROJECTS

BOUCHER ROOM REOPENS FULLY REFURBISHED WEST GALLERY—HOME TO MASTERPIECES BY REMBRANDT, HALS, TURNER, VERMEER—SUBSTANTIALLY RELIT WITH A CUSTOM SYSTEM



Paintings throughout the West Gallery of The Frick Collection were relit in the fall of 2010 as part of a major initiative; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Over the past four years, The Frick Collection has renovated its galleries and public spaces through a succession of critically acclaimed initiatives. Availing itself of advances in lighting technology, the Frick has improved dramatically the illumination of its paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts. Following a three-month closure, the Boucher Room recently reopened to the public, having been refurbished and relit, the first such extensive treatment of this jewelbox of a gallery in almost thirty years. The long West Gallery—home to masterpieces by Rembrandt, Hals, Turner, and Vermeer, as well as Renaissance bronzes and furniture and considered by many to be the centerpiece of the museum—is undergoing the first substantial relighting since the Frick opened to the public seventy-five years ago. While an upgrade of existing auxiliary lights occurred more than twenty years ago in this gallery, the 2010 project relies on a new custom system and represents a major rethinking of the illumination of the room and the collections shown there. The first stage of the West Gallery relighting was implemented over the past four weeks. It focused on the paintings around the room and was presented to guests on the night of the annual Autumn Dinner on October 18. The second stage—the lighting of sculpture and other objects in the room—will be completed in late November. Funded by Trustee Stephen A. Schwarzman, the project was coordinated by Conservator Joseph Godla, whose team included members of the curatorial and engineering departments of the Frick and lighting designer Anita



The refurbished and relit Boucher Room at The Frick Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Jorgensen.

Comments Director Anne L. Poulet, “The experience of looking at art at The Frick Collection is intimately tied to the quality of the setting. In some sense, this remarkable mansion is the largest object in our care. We have sought to maintain and improve the landmarked structure through a program of gallery renovations, with attention to painted and marble surfaces, wall coverings, windows, and floors, while also keeping abreast of advances in lighting technology. With each initiative we have had the opportunity to rethink our presentation in subtle but important ways. We have gained fresh perspectives on the Collection and are pleased to share the latest results with our visitors.” Adds Conservator Joseph Godla, “This has been an exciting process. With each completed room, we’ve encountered different challenges and have gained over time a rich body of insights about how to approach subsequent projects. We’ve undertaken the refurbishments only after selecting techniques that allow us to achieve our goals unobtrusively. If the public is unaware of these major changes but is now able enjoying the Collection more, then we will have succeeded.”

GALLERY BY GALLERY IMPROVEMENTS

When The Frick Collection opened in 1935, several galleries and public spaces were added to the mansion, and a general scheme of lighting was put in place by John Russell Pope, the architect in charge of the building’s conversion into a public museum. In the 1980s overhead lighting was added to the ceilings of the Boucher and Fragonard Rooms, but not until the mid-1990s was another full-scale effort to relight the works of art in the museum undertaken. Customized and updated picture lights over individually framed paintings were installed throughout most rooms of the Collection. The positive results of this project, underwritten by Irene Roosevelt Aitken, were immediate and made clear that certain galleries needed ambient lighting upgrades as well, most particularly those where illumination depends on skylights and overhead fixtures. In conjunction with a series of multifaceted refurbishments begun under Director Anne L. Poulet in 2007—projects that in many cases involved the replacement of worn wall treatments and carpeting, the refinishing of floors, and the addition of seating—the Frick began to look at further lighting solutions. The first initiative was the overall renovation of the Fragonard Room. Work included repainting the 1916 room paneling according to an artisanal technique, refinishing the floors, and replacing the windows. An award-winning relighting initiative was undertaken by Richard Renfro and Associates, who were able to cast lighting flexibly on a broader array of objects in the room than ever before while also illuminating the full vertical length of Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s celebrated panels.

In 2008, in the central Living Hall—the setting for a very important group of paintings by Bellini, Titian, El Greco, and Holbein, as well as Renaissance bronzes and Boulle and Boulle-inspired furniture—was refurbished. In 2009 the marble and limestone surfaces of the Garden Court and Entrance Hall were treated for the first time since the museum opened. A new cleaning technique was used to bring back the crisp contours of this beloved public space designed in 1935 by John Russell Pope. In the fall of 2009 the East Gallery, also designed by Pope, was substantially renovated. The lighting was updated for the first time, and, with the support of Margot and Jeremiah Bogert, the walls were covered with a textile similar in color to an archival sample selected by Pope nearly seventy-

five years earlier. The paintings and objects in the room were also strikingly reinstalled, which, in turn, resulted in a series of well-received changes in display throughout the museum. Plans were soon established for a multi-faceted upgrade to the Boucher Room.

THE BOUCHER ROOM CREATED SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO



The refurbished and relit Boucher Room at The Frick Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

When the family resided in the mansion, Mrs. Frick's study, located on the second floor (where the Director's office is today), contained the Arts and Sciences series painted by the studio of François Boucher (1703–1770). This room also housed eighteenth-century decorative arts objects, among them fine examples of Sèvres porcelain and a writing table by the French royal cabinetmaker Jean-Henri Riesener (1734–1806). After Mrs. Frick's death in 1931, the institution's first Board of Trustees began to envision how the mansion would be converted into a museum and decided that the contents of

that room should be on public view. Much of the furniture and porcelain as well as the series of paintings—along with the decorative wood paneling created in Paris in 1916 for the room's interior—were moved to the ground floor gallery level, and the Boucher Room as we know it today was completed in 1935. Over the ensuing decades, the woodwork and ceiling were repainted and the floor was refinished; the lighting system was upgraded in the early 1980s. Almost thirty years later, in the summer and fall of 2010, the Frick undertook another substantial renovation of this intimate gallery.

In July, the Paris-trained artisan Pierre Finkelstein (who worked on the Fragonard Room's paneling in 2007) began to refresh the 1916 wood paneling in the Boucher Room. He employed a technique inspired by the eighteenth-century use of glue-based paints. A similar treatment was probably used by André Carlhian (1887–1963), the Paris decorator commissioned by the art dealer Joseph Duveen to create the paneling for the Frick mansion. The result is luminous and delicate, and by recreating original polychrome details and gilded areas, the three-dimensional qualities of the charming paneled interior have been enhanced. Next, a new lighting system was installed in the ceiling to replace one that was decades old. Richard Renfro and Associates, who undertook the Fragonard Room relighting in 2007, created a custom system fitted within the room's existing ceiling structure. Taking advantage of an updated understanding of proper light levels for the paintings in this room, the system reveals the full beauty of these works. Furthermore, as it runs on two circuits, the system allows the decorative arts objects to be lit for the first time as well. The refurbished Boucher Room quietly reopened to the public in October 2010.

PAINTINGS IN THE WEST GALLERY ARE RELIT AND SCULPTURES AND DECORATIVE ARTS ARE ILLUMINATED FOR THE FIRST TIME

The Frick has also just completed the first phase of the relighting of its centerpiece, the long West Gallery. This majestic room—by far the institution’s largest display space—was once Henry Clay Frick’s private picture gallery. For more than ninety years it has been home to masterpieces such as Vermeer’s *Mistress and Maid*, Rembrandt’s *Self-Portrait* and *Polish Rider*, and Turner’s scenes of Dieppe, Cologne, and Antwerp, as well as Renaissance bronzes by Riccio and Antico, and ornately carved



Paintings throughout the West Gallery of The Frick Collection were relit in the fall of 2010 as part of a major initiative; photo: Michael Bodycomb

furniture. When the Frick family moved into the house in 1914, this room was lit by a wide skylight, offering a moderate degree of ambient daylight. Movable canvas louvers, adjusted by hand with a system of ropes, allowed some flexibility. However, this equipment has not functioned as intended for decades, and the louvers were eventually locked into position. As a result, the natural light coming through them has been uneven and varied considerably depending on the time of day or year. Interestingly, during the family’s period of residence, which ended in 1931, the West Gallery paintings were illuminated at night with individual spotlights inset in the ceiling. Very little is known about this system, which, according to correspondence in the 1920s, appears to have created a dramatic, but perhaps harsh, effect. These spotlights do not appear to have been in use after the museum opened to the public in 1935, and no signs of them are visible in the ceiling today. Instead, in the early years of the institution’s life, fluorescent lights were added to the ceiling, fixtures that were again upgraded in 1989. This form of auxiliary lighting also operated in an inflexible manner since its components were not movable or individually operable, an unfortunate circumstance because the arrangement of paintings changes in this gallery from time to time. Nor did these lights provide illumination for individual paintings, sculptures, or decorative arts.

In 2010 the Frick staff embarked on its project to relight this gallery, having learned from earlier experiences, and waited for suitable technology to be available. In order to install the fixtures without obscuring the decorative plasterwork on the ceiling, the tracks were suspended slightly so as to clear the various elements without being visually distracting. To achieve this, special fittings were designed for the mounting and wiring, and all hardware and fixtures were painted to blend in with the surrounding gilded plasterwork. The new scheme employs tungsten-halogen bulbs attached to two tracks running the entire length of the ceiling, each with two circuits: one for lighting the artwork and another to allow for adjustments during evening programs and special events. All the paintings in the gallery are now subtly and individually illuminated in a custom manner. With the second phase of this project, planned for late November, lighting in the West Gallery will enhance the presentation of sculpture and decorative arts for the first time in the museum’s history. The quality of illumination now achievable with this system is

gentle enough to be experienced, but perhaps not noticed by visitors. It suggests a warm ambient daylight very much in keeping with recent relighting projects elsewhere in the museum, all of which beautifully respect Henry Clay Frick's original request to his architects for a "house with plenty of light and air."

BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: (212) 288-0700

Web site: 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: \$18; senior citizens \$12; 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.
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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 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, Head of Media Relations & Marketing

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