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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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ON VIEW IN THE PORTICO GALLERY

***PRECISION AND SPLENDOR: CLOCKS AND WATCHES  
AT THE FRICK COLLECTION***

January 23, 2013, through March 9, 2014 (extended, note new end date)



*Mantel Clock with Study and Philosophy*, movement by Renacle-Nicolas Sotiau (1749–1791), figures after Simon-Louis Boizot (1743–1809), c. 1785–90, patinated and gilt bronze, marble, enameled metal, and glass, H.: 22 inches, private collection

Today the question “What time is it?” is quickly answered by looking at any number of devices around us, from watches to phones to computers. For millennia, however, determining the correct time was not so simple. In fact, it was not until the late thirteenth century that the first mechanical clocks were made, slowly replacing sundials and water clocks. It would take several hundred years before mechanical timekeepers became reliable and accurate. This exhibition explores the discoveries and innovations made in the field of horology from the early sixteenth to the nineteenth century. The exhibition, to be shown in the new Portico Gallery, features eleven clocks and fourteen watches from the Winthrop Kellogg Edey bequest, along with five clocks lent by a private collector, works that have never before been seen in New York City. Together, these objects chronicle the evolution over the centuries of

more accurate and complex timekeepers and illustrate the aesthetic developments that reflected Europe’s latest styles. *Precision and Splendor: Clocks and Watches at The Frick Collection* was organized by Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, The Frick Collection. **Major funding for the exhibition is provided by Breguet.** Additional support is generously provided by The Selz Foundation, Peter and Gail Goltra, and the David Berg Foundation.

## TIMEKEEPING DURING THE RENAISSANCE

It is not known when, where, or by whom the first mechanical clock was invented, but by the mid-fifteenth century several European towns had a monumental timekeeper, powered by falling weights, incorporated into the architecture of a church or public hall. Smaller versions of weight-driven clocks could also be found in the homes of a few wealthy individuals. The existence of mechanical clocks was made possible by an invention known as an escapement. Falling weights (and later springs) provided the energy to power the clock's mechanism, while the escapement regulated the rate at which that energy was delivered to the oscillator (at first a simple balance and later a pendulum). The introduction of the escapement gradually caused the shift away from time-finding devices (sundials) and time-measuring devices (water clocks) to timekeepers (clocks and later watches) as advances in science and technology were made.

In the fifteenth century progress in metallurgy made possible the production of springs, which ultimately led to the development of portable clocks powered by a coiled spring rather than a weight. The origins of the spring-driven clock are almost as obscure as the invention of the weight-driven clock. Evidence suggests that the idea came from Italy. In the early 1400s Filippo Brunelleschi and others made drawings of spring-driven devices that made the invention of the portable timekeeper possible. One of these devices was the fusee, a cone-shaped spindle that equalizes the diminishing force of a coiled spring as it unwinds. Ornate and prohibitively expensive, clocks at this time were regarded as objects of curiosity; their principal function was to display the wealth and erudition of their owners and to entertain guests at banquets.

The earliest example in the exhibition that incorporates an escapement, a coiled spring, and a fusee is a gilt-brass table clock made in Aix-en-Provence about 1530 by Pierre de Fobis. One of the most famous French clockmakers of his time, Fobis is still recognized today for his durable and highly refined movements. The Frick's clock is among Fobis's rare surviving works and is one of the earliest extant spring-driven timekeepers. Its complex movement is set into a typical sixteenth-century French clock case, inspired by classical architecture and ornament rediscovered during the Renaissance. Except for the small dial in blue enamel, the hexagonal gilt-brass case is covered entirely with acanthus scrolls, urns, winged heads, and tiny figures whose limbs morph into elegant, intertwining foliage. The initials "IM" found on each face may refer to the original owner, perhaps Jean Martin, who was instrumental in bringing Renaissance architecture to France.



Pierre de Fobis (1506–1575), *Gilt-Brass Table Clock*, c. 1530, H.: 5 inches. The Frick Collection, New York, bequest of Winthrop Kellogg Edey; photo: Michael Bodycomb



David Weber (active 1623/24–1704), Gilt-Brass and Silver Table Clock with Astronomical and Calendrical Dials, probably 1653, H.: 23 3/8 inches, The Frick Collection, New York, bequest of Winthrop Kellogg Edey; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Germany was a leading producer of clocks during the Renaissance, and, by the late sixteenth century, Augsburg was an important center of their manufacture. The gilt-brass and silver table clock made by David Weber around 1653, most likely for his admission to the Augsburg clockmakers' guild, exemplifies his expertise. Although Weber chose a popular form for the clock's case, he demonstrated his imagination and hand skills in its finely worked surfaces. The tower, composed of two tiers, rises to the formidable height of nearly two feet. Balancing precariously atop a winged sphere, a female figure represents the Roman goddess Fortuna and serves as a reminder of the capriciousness of life. Because of this association, Fortuna was often used to adorn timekeepers, even as their orderly mechanisms worked to undermine her. Floral motifs decorating the clock elaborate on its symbolic message: carnations, like Fortuna, allude

to capriciousness; tulips symbolize luck and plentitude; and narcissi remind us of fleeting youth and rebirth. The base depicts the four elements—air, water, fire, and earth—symbolizing cosmic order and harmony. The complex mechanism includes seven dials that provide astronomical, calendrical, and horary information. The prominent central dial is an astrolabe with twenty-one star pointers and two concentric hands, which relate to the sun and moon. The smaller dial beneath it is an alarm.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WATCH

Watches were introduced in the middle of the sixteenth century following the refinement of spring-driven clocks. Like the early clocks, the first watches were inaccurate, valued primarily as luxury items and fashion accessories by men and women of distinction. Just as clocks were unreliable until the pendulum clock was invented in 1653, watches became more accurate only after 1675 when the balance spring was introduced. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the most sought-after watches were decorated with enamels to resemble miniature paintings on paper, parchment, or ivory. A stunning example is an early balance-spring watch made in Switzerland about 1685. The movement by Henry Arlaud is set into a lavish enamel case by Pierre Huaud II. Both men were the sons of French Protestants who had fled France and established themselves in Geneva in the early seventeenth century. The Huaud family popularized the practice of decorating

watchcases with miniature paintings created with opaque colored enamels over a ground of pure white enamel. A painting or a print usually inspired the scenes. In this case, Huaud based his composition after *The Toilet of Venus*, a large canvas of around 1640 by the French artist Simon Vouet. It is unlikely that Huaud ever saw the painting (now at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh), copying instead the engraving of 1651 made by Vouet's son-in-law, Michel Dorigny. Indeed, the scene on the watch is oriented like the engraving, which is a reverse image of the



Henry Arlaud (1631–1689), enameling by Pierre Huaud II (1647–c. 1698), *Gold and Enamel Pendant Watch*, c. 1685, D.: 2 5/16 inches, The Frick Collection, New York, bequest of Winthrop Kellogg Edey; photo: Michael Bodycomb

original painting. Huaud chose to execute the composition using the rich and vivid colors that were his family's trademark.

## EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SPLENDOR: REMARKABLE LOANS FEATURED



*Garniture of One Clock and Two Vases*, c. 1764, clock movement by Jean Martin (active 1737–1786), Chinese hard-paste porcelain garniture, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, with French gilt-bronze mounts, clock 21 x 8 inches, vases 14 x 9 inches, private collection

The precision and splendor of the art of clockmaking in France during the eighteenth century is extremely well represented by several clocks from a private collection. Although by this point their mechanisms had become both reliable and accurate, clocks continued to be valued as objects of distinction used to display their owners' wealth and refinement. A perfect example is the lavish clock with its two matching vases. Made of a rare type of Chinese porcelain known as *celadon bleu fleuri*, the already costly vases were embellished with a movement by Jean Martin and gilt-bronze mounts shortly after their importation to France, in an attempt to satisfy

French collectors' perpetual quest for increasingly more elaborate and novel luxury items. The mounts reflect the latest style, the *goût grec* (Greek taste), which developed in the 1760s and 1770s as a reaction to the rococo style favored by Louis XV and his court. Here the beautifully chased mounts include crowns of laurel, acanthus leaves, pilasters, lion's masks, and other motifs inspired by classical Greek and Roman architecture. A gilded snake indicates the time.

Cases for clocks reached new heights of elaborateness in France during the late eighteenth century, often incorporating sculptures in bronze made by or after renowned artists. One such example is the stunning mantel clock of about 1785 to 1790 representing Study and Philosophy after a sculpture by Simon-Louis Boizot, shown on page 1. A classical symmetry is achieved by placing within an imaginary equilateral triangle the figure of Study on the left, Philosophy on the right, and a column topped by a globe in the center. This composition is completed by the harmonious contrast between the dark patinated figures, the clock's white marble column and dial, and its gilt-bronze ornamentation.

## BREGUET: INNOVATIVE HOROLOGISTS

The exhibition concludes with important watches and clocks by the innovative horologist Abraham-Louis Breguet and his son, Antoine-Louis Breguet, who, at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, created highly accurate movements set in sober and elegant cases. Writing in 1982 Winthrop Edey—who bequeathed his collection of clocks to the Frick in 1999—described the elder Breguet as “a phenomenon without parallel. He was the genius of his age, perhaps the most outstanding horologist of all time.” Indeed, Breguet's combination of technical skill, refined design, and exquisite craftsmanship gave him an unrivaled reputation. His patrons included Louis XVI, Napoleon, and most of the civil and political leaders of his day.

A modern looking watch by the Breguets is one of the very few watches or clocks to include both traditional and decimal dials. The decimal system, introduced during the French Revolution, affected not only weights and measures, but also time. (Decimal time divided the day into ten hours and the year into ten months.) This new division of time, however, proved impossible to enforce: the Republican calendar, introduced on the autumnal equinox in 1792, remained in use for only thirteen years; the decimalization of the day, issued by a 1793 decree, was abandoned in less than eighteen months. The Breguet watch was probably made shortly before or after Abraham-Louis returned to Paris from Switzerland in April 1795. The traditional twelve-hour dial was made after 1807, when his son joined the business. The provenance of the watch is notable as well: it belonged to the influential politician and art collector Antoine-César Praslin, duc de Choiseul.



Abraham-Louis Breguet (1747–1823) and Antoine-Louis Breguet (1776–1858), *Gold and Silver Double-Dial Desk Watch Showing Decimal and Traditional Time*, c. 1795–after 1807, D.: 2 7/8 inches, The Frick Collection, bequest of Winthrop Kellogg Edey; photo: Michael Bodycomb

## **RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND EVENTS** (more to be added through the run of the exhibition; please consult our Web site for more listings)

### **Alex Gordon Lecture on the History of Art**

*This lecture is free. No reservations are necessary, and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. This program will be webcast live and thereafter can be viewed on our Web site or The Frick Collection's channel on FORA.tv.*

**Date** Wednesday, April 17, 6:00 p.m.  
**Speaker** William J. H. Andrewes, Museum Consultant and Sundial Maker  
**Title** *The Tapestry of Time*

Time is woven throughout the fabric of our civilization. Although its impact on our society today is greater than ever before, most people know very little about its history or the origins of the intervals that control our lives. Through images of major works of the art and science of horology, this talk will describe the evolution of time measurement from around 1600 to the present.

### **Seminar**

*Seminars provide unparalleled access to works of art and encourage thought-provoking discussion with experts in their fields. Sessions, held when the galleries are closed to the public, are limited to twenty participants. Advance registration is required; register online or by calling 212.547.0704. \$100 (\$90 for Members).*

**Date** Thursday, March 14, 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.  
**Speaker** Joseph Godla, Chief Conservator, and Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, The Frick Collection  
**Title** *What Time Is It?*

For centuries, “What time is it?” was a difficult, almost impossible, question to answer. This seminar examines several clocks and watches from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth century that attempted—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—to measure time.



## Course: The Frick Connection

*The Frick is pleased to offer courses for college students and recent graduates under the age of 35. Space is limited to twenty participants, and advance registration is required; please visit our Web site or e-mail students@frick.org. A \$25 annual fee is payable upon acceptance and includes student membership to the Frick.*

**Date** Thursday, February 7, 5:30 to 7:00 p.m.  
**Speaker** Joseph Godla, Chief Conservator, and Charlotte Vignon, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts,  
The Frick Collection  
**Title** *The Art and Science of Horology*

Curious about clocks and watches? It's about time you joined us for this after-hours session for undergraduates and recent graduates. Participants will learn about stylistic and technical advances in European timepieces made between 1500 and 1830 and study examples from the Frick's special exhibition up close.

## Free Public Evening: Spring Night

*No reservations are accepted; visitors will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis.*

**Date:** Friday, May 17, 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a night of free programs and activities at the Frick, as we open our doors to the public and celebrate our special exhibitions. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet curators, hear lectures and talks, sketch in the Garden Court, and enjoy live music.

## 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; 11am to 5pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11 a.m. to 5 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

**Admission:** \$18; senior citizens \$15; students \$10; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.**

**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 or Alexis Light, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

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