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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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**ANNE VALLAYER-COSTER:
PAINTER TO THE COURT OF MARIE-ANTOINETTE**

**MAJOR TOURING EXHIBITION COMES TO
NEW YORK'S FRICK COLLECTION**

January 22, 2003 through March 23, 2003

This winter, New York audiences will have the opportunity to view the first retrospective of one of the foremost still-life painters in eighteenth-century France, **Anne Vallayer-Coster** (1744–1818), whose works were celebrated by the critics and collected by her contemporaries, including Marie-Antoinette and courtiers in her circle. As was the case with many eighteenth-century artists whose reputations declined following the French Revolution, the art of Vallayer-Coster has, until quite recently, been something of a well-kept secret, admired by specialists of the period but largely unknown to the general public.

Organized by the Dallas Museum of Art, *Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie-Antoinette* features some thirty-five paintings from museums and private collections in the United States and Europe. The exhibition was developed and curated by **Eik Kahng**, formerly with the Dallas Museum of Art and currently the Associate Curator of 18th- and 19th-Century Art at The Walters Art Museum.

The exhibition comes to The Frick Collection, the third and final North American venue on the tour, in January 2003, following its presentation at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and the Dallas Museum of Art (the exhibition's last venue is the Centre de La Vieille Charité in Marseille, France).

Anne Vallayer-Coster: Painter to the Court of Marie Antoinette is made possible through the support of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman and the Fellows of The Frick Collection.

Presentation of the exhibition in New York is coordinated by the Frick's Chief Curator, **Colin B. Bailey**, who selected the works on view at this venue (a slightly smaller version of the exhibition than has appeared elsewhere). He also contributed an essay, *A Still-Life Painter and Her Patrons: Collecting Vallayer-Coster, 1770–1789*, to the exhibition catalogue (full publication details below). Dr. Bailey comments, “With the example of Chardin to inspire her, Vallayer-Coster emerged as the most gifted and venerable still-life painter of Louis XVI’s reign. This exhibition allows us to follow the development of the genre in the final two decades of the *ancien régime* and to become better acquainted with an artist known largely to specialists and art historians.”

ACCEPTANCE AT THE ROYAL ACADEMY

One of four daughters born to a Parisian goldsmith and jewelry dealer, Anne Vallayer-Coster seems not to have entered the studio of a professional painter, but instead received her training from a variety of sources: her father, the botanical specialist Madeleine Basseport, and the celebrated marine painter Joseph Vernet. Something of a prodigy, she achieved recognition very early in her career with admittance, in a single stroke on July 28, 1770, as both an associate and full member of the Royal Academy (Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture). At age twenty-six, she was, in fact, one of only four women accepted before the French Revolution. Of the paintings submitted for review on this occasion, two were retained for the Academy’s collection, *The Attributes of Music* and *The Attributes of Painting*, and are now in the holdings of the Louvre. The former is among the early career highlights presented in the exhibition at the Frick, revealing her skill at capturing illumination and at rendering a variety of textures—such as the hammered metal of a horn, luxurious embroidery and textile surfaces, and the sheen of polished wood on a violin.

EXPLORATIONS IN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the still-life genre had been dominated by Jean-Baptiste Oudry (1686–1755) and Jean-Siméon Chardin (1699–1779). This category was ranked at the bottom of the Academy’s hierarchy of subject matter, whereas painting the human figure in religious, historical, and mythological narratives stood at the top. Accepted into the Academy as a genre painter, Vallayer was permitted to participate in the biennial Salon, which she did regularly until the Revolution, showing a range of works, from Chardinesque overdoors and baskets of fruit, to trophies of the hunt, to grand

displays of household objects in the manner of Dutch and Flemish painters of the Golden Age.

Curiously, it is as a painter of floral still-lives that she is best known today, even though it was years later, in the Salon of 1775, that she first presented such works.

Among her most ambitious floral paintings are the imposing *Bouquet of Flowers in a Blue Porcelain Vase* and its pendant, *Bouquet of Flowers in a Terracotta Vase*, both of which are included in the exhibition. Also on view is a stunning work that reflects the Enlightenment's fascination for conchology, *Still Life with Seashells and Coral*, which entered the collection of Louis-François-Joseph de Bourbon, prince de Conti, the libertine first cousin of Louis XV. Among the aquatic curiosities that fill this dramatic canvas, on loan to the exhibition from the Louvre, are more than seventeen different types of mollusks, gorgonia, and sponges.

As her output of flowers and fruits, hunt trophies, and tables filled with victuals (such as *Still Life with Hams, Bottles, and Radishes*) will make clear to visitors of the exhibition, Vallayer-Coster maintained a varied production of immaculately crafted still-life painting for more than half a century. Her last canvas, the monumental *Still Life with Lobster*, exhibited at the Salon of 1817 and offered in homage to the restored Bourbon monarch, Louis XVIII, represents a grand summation of the themes she addressed throughout her lengthy career. While certain elements, such as the velvety grapes and suspended game owe much to Chardin, the robust coloring, imposing compositions, and meticulously described surfaces are elements of a more personal and original style.

CAPTURING THE ATTENTION OF MARIE-ANTOINETTE

Although it is not known how Vallayer insinuated herself into Marie-Antoinette's good graces, by 1779 the monarch owned at least one canvas by her, the *Bust of a Young Vestal* (now in a private collection), which was exhibited at the Salon that year as "belonging to the Queen." Marie-Antoinette also intervened to ensure that Vallayer was given an apartment and studio in the Louvre, into which she eventually moved in 1781. That year, the Queen (along with the Minister of Fine Arts and several notable collectors) was present at Versailles to witness Vallayer's marriage to Jean-Pierre Silvestre Coster, a lawyer and office holder from a prosperous banking dynasty from Lorraine. Although Vallayer-Coster (as she now signed her pictures) would soon be replaced in Marie-Antoinette's esteem by the brilliant portraitist Elizabeth-

Louise Vigée-Lebrun (1755–1842), she remained close to the Queen’s entourage. Indeed, her patronage led to commissions by other members of the court and great collectors, including the prince de Conti, the abbé Terray, the financiers Beaujon and Montullé, and the comte de Merle. It was this association with the *ancien régime* that brought her great success, but also

ultimately caused her reputation to fall following the French Revolution, as was the case with many eighteenth-century artists close to the court.

COMPREHENSIVE CATALOGUE ACCOMPANIES EXHIBITION

Accompanying the exhibition is the first catalogue to present the majority of Vallayer-Coster’s known oeuvre in full color, published by the Dallas Museum of Art in association with Yale University Press. A biographical overview of the artist by Marianne Roland Michel is included, along with essays by Eik Kahng; Melissa Hyde, Assistant Professor of Art and Art History, University of Florida; Colin B. Bailey, Chief Curator, The Frick Collection; and Claire Barry, Chief Conservator, Kimbell Art Museum. The publication will be available in hardcover for \$60.00 through the Museum Shop of The Frick Collection or by ordering online through the museum’s website, www.frick.org. For further information on the Museum Shop, or to place an order by phone, please call (212) 288-0700.

FREE PUBLIC LECTURE

Date: February 5, 2003, 5:30pm

Speaker: Marianne Roland Michel, independent scholar and specialist in eighteenth-century French art

Title: *Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744–1818): Forerunners and Contemporaries*

In 1770, Anne Vallayer—a 26-year-old newcomer to the Parisian artistic circle—applied to become a member of the male-dominated *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* and soon won the recognition and support of the Queen. Although little is known about her artistic training, the technical mastery seen in her early work indicates that she was not a self-taught painter. This lecture will reexamine the relationship of her art to Dutch and French artistic traditions and contemporary models. Speaker Marianne Roland Michel wrote the first major publication on Anne Vallayer-Coster in 1970. There is no charge for this lecture, and seating is limited.

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

Website: www.frick.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

Where: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

Hours: open six days a week, with recently expanded hours: 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Thursdays and on Saturdays; 10am to 9pm on Fridays; and 1pm to 6pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year’s Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, December 24, and December 25. Limited hours (1 to 6pm) on Lincoln’s Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

Admission: \$12 for the general public; \$8 for seniors, and \$5 for students

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, provided by Acoustiguide. 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, or Stephanie Ruggiero, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

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