

Frick Collection Guide and Assignment

Dr. Horton / ARTH102 / Spring 2023

Due: April 21st. Upload as a PDF on Blackboard.

1. **Visiting the Frick Madison is part of the assignment.** Attach some sort of “proof” that you went to the museum to your assignment, such as a selfie in front of the building, etc. (Photos aren’t allowed inside, but take one outside.) Plan on spending at least an hour (and maybe 2) in the museum.
2. **Answer TWO REQUIRED questions on the last page. Then choose TWO OPTIONAL questions to answer.** You will turn in 3-4 pages of writing altogether.

Location: 945 Madison Avenue, at 75th Street

Hours: Thursday-Sunday from 10-6; Monday-Wednesday closed.

You must reserve a ticket, but it will be free. Here’s how:

1. Go to <https://www.frick.org/tickets> and click “**Reserve Your Ticket**”. Select a date and time, and add 1-2 tickets to your cart. The ticket price will disappear after the promo code is applied.
2. Enter only your name, email, and phone number, then apply the promo code **CUNYMEMB21FM** (once the code is applied the credit card information section will disappear) and click the “Complete Order” button.
3. A ticket confirmation will be sent promptly via email. Please bring your ***CUNY ID** for verification, in addition to complying with all Health and Safety protocols.

Audioguide: There is WiFi in the galleries (connect to “Frick Public”).

Use the WiFi to access the FREE Audioguide on your phone. (QR codes in the galleries or find it on the Frick website.)

In this guide, AG = Audioguide. The guide numbers are displayed beside each painting.

Advice: It can be hard to take notes in the galleries, while standing. I like to bring a clipboard to hold my paper. Students have suggested using voice memos on your phone to save “notes.” Bring as little with you as possible.

What to expect

The Frick Collection of “Old Masters” (i.e. Renaissance-18th century paintings) is usually housed in Henry Clay Frick’s gilded-age mansion on Fifth Avenue. That building is currently under renovation and the collection has been temporarily moved to the “Breuer Building” on Madison Avenue. This is an unusual situation! Marcel Breuer designed 945 Madison Avenue around 1965 in the Brutalist style (from “*beton brut*” or “concrete”). From the outside it looks like an inverted, stepped pyramid. On the inside, the spare, irregular galleries couldn’t be more different from the lux, velvety, literally-gilded rooms where the collection is usually shown.

As you move through the collection, know that you are seeing the art work from a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ vantage. How does the Modernist space affect your perception of van Eyck, Titian, Holbein, Rembrandt, Velasquez, van Dyck...? How is Frick’s extensive collection of porcelain or bronze sculpture presented in the new space? In my opinion, Fragonard is the biggest winner with the move. His feathery Rococo paintings appear monumental against the hard angles and high ceilings at the Breuer. Who do you think looks great or sad in the Breuer?

The guide is arranged for you to move through the museum from the bottom to the top (2nd-4th floor). On each floor, start in the gallery at your right first.

*****REQUIRED questions are on the last page. Read them before you start. *****

SECOND FLOOR

GALLERY 2

In an alcove within Gallery 2, there are two portraits by **Hans Holbein** depicting two of the great rivals of 16th century England under King Henry VIII - one of *Sir Thomas More* (AG #104) and one of *Thomas Cromwell* (AG #105).

(Long story, short: Henry VIII wanted to divorce Queen Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn. Divorce meant breaking church rules – no no no - even the King couldn't break them! Henry VIII (advised by his minister, Thomas Cromwell) asserted that the crown had supremacy over the church so that he could divorce and remarry. Lots of scholars and politicians, including Thomas More, disagreed with the King's assertion of power. When More refused to swear an oath to the royal marriage --- Cromwell ordered his execution. The portraits of these two men now stare at each other in this room. Awkward.)

*Holbein would have known both of these men when he was at Henry VIII's court. Think about how he gives us clues about their personalities in the paintings. For instance:

Consider where each figure is placed in the foreground/middleground to make him seem more or less approachable.

Look at the textiles, brushwork, and color – which is “lush” / which is “sparse”

OPTIONAL

- What would you say are the major differences features of Holbein's painting, judging by these two examples?
- Then look across the room at **Jan van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with St. Barbara*** (AG #101). Are there similarities between the two artists?
- There are opportunities for direct comparisons here – look at the depiction of fur and metal for instance. What about how they paint hands or facial hair?

GALLERY 4

Find **Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait*** of 1658. AG #113

Which features stand out the most to you? Look at the painting up-close and then step as far from it as you can. How does your impression change?

Then look at Rembrandt's *Portrait of Nicolas Ruts of 1631* nearby. AG #111

- **OPTIONAL:** How did Rembrandt's approach change from 1631 to 1658? Think about pose, brushwork, and light.

THIRD FLOOR

GALLERY 7

At the third-floor landing, just as you exit the staircase or elevator, you will see three portrait busts of young women. Two are by **Francesco Laurana** (AG #130); one by **Andrea del Verocchio** (Leonardo's teacher) (AG #131, 132).

Spend a few moments looking closely at all three. Notice:

- Whose hair is the most finely carved, with individual strands visible? Which has the changing texture of hair on different parts of the head? What about eyebrows?
 - Look closely at the foreheads, noses, and necks. Which face appears to show a skull beneath the skin and muscle? (Note that different parts are stronger on each.)
 - Look at the clothes stretched across their shoulders. Which best shows texture, multiple layers, or suggests the weight of differing fabrics (light muslin or heavier wool)?
 - Notice one of my favorite parts, the small bulge of flesh under the chin. Every human has this “soft spot”! Which sculptor captured the soft skin best?
- **OPTIONAL:** Write 1-2 paragraphs making a case for one of the three busts as the “best.” (Answers will vary.) Be sure to make specific comparisons across all three and to support your choice with close looking and precise description.

GALLERY 13

Giovanni Bellini, *St. Francis in the Desert.*

This painting gets an entire room, including a bench. Sit and stay a bit. Some art critics have said this is the best painting in America. As you look, try to imagine why they might say that.

FOURTH FLOOR

GALLERY 18

Find the paintings of the seasons by **Boucher** (AG#205).

- **OPTIONAL:** Which of the four do you think is best suited to Boucher’s style? Which is most successful? Why? (Note: don’t answer this one if you choose the Whistler question below.)

GALLERY 22

Find the small gallery with four **Whistler** portraits (AG #229-232). All of the figures are standing, as if in slight variations of the same pose.

- **OPTIONAL:** Which of the four is the most successful portrait? Which the least? (Note: don’t answer this one if you choose the Boucher question above.)

GALLERY 21 and 23

Look around these two rooms. In Gallery 21 notice the works by **Gainsborough**, including his *St. James Park* (wow! Some brushstroke!). In Gallery 23, notice **Ingres’** portraits (again, wow! More great brushstroke, but completely different!).

- **OPTIONAL:** Why do you think the paintings in Galleries 21 and 23 are placed in separate galleries. Think beyond regions or dates – look at the paintings themselves. Consider factors like brushstroke, texture, subjects, overall appearance. What defining characteristics do you see here?

GALLERY 23

Find **Ingres’** portrait of *Louise, Princesse de Broglie, Later the Comtesse d’Haussonville*. AG# 236

Ingres shows us a young woman, looking directly at the viewer, even displayed for our view, with a mirror behind her. Consider the role that the mirror plays in the painting. How does it shape the composition? (Create or flatten depth; give us more information about the subject...)

- **OPTIONAL:** Imagine changing the composition so that the woman faces herself in the mirror and we see her reflection as she gazes at herself. How would this change impact everything else in the painting? Would you have a different perception of the woman? How would her body or head appear differently? How would her gaze meet ours? Would these changes impact your reaction to her?

REQUIRED QUESTIONS ON THIS PAGE

GALLERY 24

This gallery, and those around it, are filled with paintings by **Jean-Honoré Fragonard**. Find the four large paintings that show *The Progress of Love* in the room with the big trapezoidal window.

Many critics have written that these paintings are dramatically transformed by the modern space. Think about the impact of the *very modern* gallery on our perception of the Rococo paintings.

Make yourself stay in this room for at least 5 minutes (time yourself, if necessary).

REQUIRED: Write down little lists, taking note of what you notice:

- At first glance
- After 1 minute of looking
- After five minutes (truly, make yourself look “slowly” – for as long as you can)
- What do you see from the farthest point in the room? And from very close?
- How does the painting change as the light changes?
- Does it look different from the side, with raking light, than it looks from the front?
- Why do you think the curators included a marble bust among the paintings? Mostly painting and sculpture are separated in this museum. Why integrate them here?

In 1-2 paragraphs, reflect on the process of looking at Fragonard’s paintings and the questions above.

ENTIRE MUSEUM

As you move through the collection, NOTICE PORTRAITS. Some standouts include:

Anthony van Dyck’s paired portraits of *Frans Snyder and his Wife* (AG#118,119) FLOOR 2, GALLERY 5.

Van Dyck paints with black beautifully - a convenient skill for flattering Reformation patrons, who liked to dress in serious, dark colors. When you look closely at the black silk, notice how light reflects off of the brushstrokes to create texture – gorgeous. Admire the contrasting white lace. Think about how van Dyck alternates between big blended areas of color and precise details.

If I had to choose, I’d probably want to hang out with van Dyck’s patrons more than most portrait subjects – how does he make them look so approachable?

In the next little room (Gallery 6), notice his self-portrait on paper as well.

Bronzino’s *Portrait of Ludovico Capponi*. FLOOR 3, GALLERY 11, AG #143.

Note how Capponi holds a cameo, but then his hand obscures it (very “Mannerist” of Bronzino, no?). And yes, Capponi wears a codpiece – an essential accessory at the Florentine court of Duke Cosimo I.

Just across the gallery, look at **Titian’s** *Portrait of a Man in a Red Cap* (AG#142) and his *Pietro Aretino* (AG#146). Perfect pendants of youth and age, both with a thoughtful interiority.

In the same gallery, the Frick’s most recent acquisition is on display: **Moroni’s** *Portrait of a Woman*. WOW.

REQUIRED: Which artist from the Frick would you choose to paint your portrait? In a paragraph, explain your choice. Cite details (“this works...” / “this doesn’t work...”) to show how carefully you’ve looked at the work at the museum. It’s fine to say, “I like.../I don’t like” but explain what qualities you admire or not in detail.