

# Axel Rüger Appointed as Next Director of The Frick Collection

Esteemed Museum Leader with Extensive Experience in Operations, Fundraising, and Audience Engagement in Two International Capitals to Join in Spring 2025



**New York (September 19, 2024)** – The Board of Trustees of The Frick Collection today announced the appointment of leading museum director Axel Rüger as the museum’s next Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Director. He will start in the position in the spring of 2025.

Rüger will join the Frick after successful tenures guiding the acclaimed Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. Throughout his career as a two-time museum director, he has been recognized as an accomplished arts leader and visionary, with distinct expertise in developing audiences, engaging stakeholders, fundraising, building institutional brands, and producing critically acclaimed exhibitions. Previous curatorial positions have included London’s National Gallery, where he was responsible for the collection of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Dutch paintings.

“On behalf of the Board, I am thrilled to welcome Axel to The Frick Collection,” said Board Chair Elizabeth M. Eveillard. “Axel is a rare museum director who embodies a complex set of skills, all of which are of great importance, particularly at this pivotal moment for cultural organizations. As an established museum director, he brings steady, strategic insight, as well as a proven ability to inspire and guide dynamic teams to great achievement. A brilliant mind in the field, he also holds a highly relevant curatorial background. As we prepare to embark on a new era for the Frick, I am confident in his ability to steer us well. I extend my deepest gratitude to Ian Wardropper for his steady leadership of our organization. Ian’s vision and tireless work serve as our

foundation as we move forward. I also thank the Search Committee for their support and assistance in this process.”

“The Frick is a uniquely special place, and there is not another museum in the world quite like it,” said R ger. “Since the early 1990s, I have always made a point to visit and admire the museum any time I was in New York City. Leading the Frick—with its spectacular collection of stunning masterpieces, rich history of exhibitions, intimate residential setting, library, and location in such an exciting city—is an irresistible proposition, particularly at this milestone moment. Following the largest renovation in the institution’s history, it’s an exciting time to re-open, develop exciting programs for loyal visitors, and welcome new audiences who have not yet discovered this treasure trove of a museum.”

R ger’s appointment concludes an extensive, global search for the Frick’s next director, which began in spring 2024 after the announced retirement of Ian Wardropper. During fourteen impactful years at the Frick, Wardropper led the museum and research library through a period of strategic planning and growth, which included the first comprehensive renovation and upgrade of the Frick’s historic buildings in nearly ninety years, an acclaimed series of exhibitions, and a focused acquisitions program that enhanced the institution’s art and library collections. After a temporary relocation to the widely admired Frick Madison, the Frick will reopen its historic buildings at 1 East 70th Street in early 2025.

R ger currently serves as Secretary and Chief Executive of the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Founded more than 250 years ago, it is the world’s most prominent artist-led institution with a membership of 120 prominent artists and architects, and a collection that includes work by Joshua Reynolds, Angelica Kauffman, John Constable, J.M.W. Turner, and contemporary artists such as David Hockney, Tracey Emin, and Antony Gormley. Appointed in May 2019, he steered the organization through the Covid-19 pandemic, including a significant restructuring that steadied the institution. An accomplished fundraiser, he surpassed fundraising goals during his five-year tenure. He also oversaw the £23 million re-development of the Royal Academy Schools and curated two acclaimed exhibitions, including *Souls Grown Deep Like the Rivers, Black Artists from the American South* in 2023, and a retrospective of the work of British artist Sir Michael Craig-Martin RA, which opened this week. He also oversaw the realization of two *Summer Exhibitions*, the world’s oldest open-submission show that combines works by Royal Academicians and emerging talents in art and architecture.

Prior to his time at the Royal Academy, R ger served as Director of Amsterdam’s Van Gogh Museum and sister institution, The Mesdag Collection, in The Hague, which showcases the art assembled by the nineteenth-century seascape painter Hendrik Willem Mesdag and his wife. In these joint capacities, from April 2006 through April 2019, R ger supervised a staff of 400 and oversaw the two venues, which together attracted more than 2.1 million visitors

annually. During his tenure, his many achievements included growing the audience by a third, implementing three strategic plans, realizing a rich program of exhibitions, notable acquisitions and the completion of two major research projects: the new edition of Van Gogh's letters in 2009 and the *Van Gogh Studio Practice Project* methods in 2013. He also expanded the capacity of the building by adding a spectacular new entrance hall and a new conservation studio.

From May 1999 to March 2006, Rüger served as Curator of Dutch Paintings 1600–1800 at the National Gallery, London. In this role, he was a member of the senior curatorial team responsible for the display, interpretation, and research of one of the largest collections within the National Gallery, as well as its exhibitions. His specific activities include the reinstallation of the Dutch paintings collection, three major exhibitions (*Vermeer and the Delft School*, with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001; *Aelbert Cuyp*, with the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, and the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2002; and *The Dutch Portrait*, with the Mauritshuis, The Hague, 2006–2007). During this time in London, Rüger was also part of the first cohort of the then newly established prestigious Clore Leadership Programme for leaders in the cultural sector.

Rüger is a Trustee of the Art Fund (U.K.) and serves on the Advisory Board of Van Lanschot Kempen Bankiers (The Netherlands). He previously served on the Commissie Collectie Nederland (a Dutch government commission), TEFAF Showcase, Apeldoorn Conference series, and the Stitching Praemium Erasmianum. He studied Art History at the Freie Universität in Berlin (Germany), the University of Cambridge (United Kingdom), and Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario (Canada). Rüger is fluent in German, English, and Dutch.

## **ABOUT THE FRICK COLLECTION**

Housed in one of New York City's last great Gilded Age homes, The Frick Collection provides intimate encounters with one of the world's foremost collections of fine and decorative arts. Open since 1935, the institution originated with Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919), who bequeathed his Fifth Avenue residence and collection of European paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts for the enjoyment of the public. The museum's holdings, which encompass masterworks from the Renaissance through the early twentieth century, have grown over the decades, more than doubling in size since the opening of the museum. The Collection's Frick Art Research Library (recently renamed from the Frick Art Reference Library) was founded more than one hundred years ago by Henry Clay Frick's daughter Helen Clay Frick. It is today a leading art history research center that serves students, scholars, and the public.

The Frick looks ahead to the early 2025 reopening of its Fifth Avenue home, following the completion of a comprehensive renovation and enhancement designed by Selldorf Architects in conjunction with the preservation firm Beyer Blinder Belle.

For more information, please visit [frick.org](https://frick.org).

**IMAGE**

Axel Rüger.  
Photo: Cat Garcia

**INTERACT**

Facebook, X, Instagram  
[@FrickCollection](#)

**BASIC INFORMATION**

**Website:** [frick.org](https://frick.org)

**Email:** [info@frick.org](mailto:info@frick.org)

**Bloomberg Connects app:** [frick.org/app](https://frick.org/app)

**Programs:** [frick.org/programs](https://frick.org/programs)

**Explore:** [frick.org/explore](https://frick.org/explore)

**#406**

For further press information,  
contact [rosenau@frick.org](mailto:rosenau@frick.org)  
or [communications@frick.org](mailto:communications@frick.org).