



# ARCHIVED PRESS RELEASE

from

# THE FRICK COLLECTION

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## ***DOMENICO TIEPOLO (1727–1804): A NEW TESTAMENT***

*October 24, 2006, through January 7, 2007*

For the past ten years, Dr. Adelheid M. Gealt, Director, Indiana University Art Museum, and Dr. George Knox, Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia, have been reconstructing the largest-known New Testament cycle produced by a single artist: 313 large, finished drawings in ink and wash executed by Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804), one of the foremost Venetian artists active during the second half of the eighteenth century. Combining erudition and sophistication, these virtuoso drawings are moving expressions of personal piety and grand achievements of artistic creativity. Sold and scattered soon after his death in 1804, Domenico's narrative has never before been published or exhibited. This fall, nearly sixty of the finest drawings in the series will be gathered from collections throughout the United States and Europe for display at the Frick. Dr.



Domenico Tiepolo, *Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: The Second Prayer*, 1786–1790, Pen and wash on paper, 18 1/4 x 14 3/8 in. (46.5 x 36.4 cm), Private collection, Indiana, on loan to the Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington

Gealt is guest curator of the exhibition, which will be organized for the Frick by Curator Susan Grace Galassi. The presentation coincides with the publication of the entire cycle in a fully illustrated annotated catalogue by Adelheid Gealt and George Knox.

Comments Frick Collection Curator Susan Grace Galassi, "Domenico's New Testament cycle, carried out with obsessive focus over five or more years, is an intense affirmation of his faith and his culminating achievement as a draftsman. The series reveals his erudition and deep familiarity with a wide array of visual and literary sources, while his ability to sustain interest through varied structure and emotional tone in a long sequence, much as a composer would in a suite of music, attests to his fertile imagination and powers of invention."

Principal funding for *Domenico Tiepolo (1727–1804): A New Testament* has been provided by The Peter Jay Sharp Foundation, with major support from the Homeland Foundation. Additional generous support has been provided by Lawrence and Julie Salander, the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, the Arthur Ross Foundation, The Helen Clay Frick Foundation, and the Fellows of The Frick Collection. The project is also supported, in part, by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.



## A LOST MASTERPIECE

The eighteenth-century Venetian painter and draftsman Domenico Tiepolo is best known for his drawn narrative cycles of the *commedia dell'arte* character Punchinello and engaging scenes of everyday life in the Veneto. He reserved his greatest passion, however, for sacred subjects. This exhibition presents key examples from his most extensive and least-known series of finished drawings, which illustrate the events of early Christianity through the foundation of the Church. Shortly after the artist's death in 1804, the drawings, which were executed roughly between 1786 and 1790, were divided into two groups. The first group stayed together in an album (now in the Musée du Louvre) while the sheets from the second group were widely dispersed. The works were not recorded in Domenico's lifetime, nor did the artist leave any clues as to their order, or even provide titles for them. So far, no patron for this vast undertaking has been discovered, nor has any motive other than the artist's personal interest and deep piety emerged. The Frick exhibition is the first to present these works to the public.

Domenico Tiepolo, born in 1727, was the eldest son and primary assistant of the celebrated master Giambattista Tiepolo (1696–1770), whose virtuosic frescoes adorn the ceilings of many of the great villas and churches of Europe. After retiring from painting in 1786, Domenico lived in relative seclusion on the family property outside Venice and devoted himself to his primary interest, his serial narratives composed of large finished drawings.

Domenico's New Testament cycle is executed in pen, brush, and ink on handmade paper. The individual drawings are approximately the same size (18 by 15 inches), and all are vertical in format. Domenico first lightly sketched out the composition in black chalk then went back over the lines in delicate, expressive strokes of the pen, adding layers of wash to give depth. Each sheet has a sense of completeness as well as connection with adjacent works. He made use of a wide array of compositional devices, gestures, and settings, and mined existing art—from early Christian to the works of his contemporaries—for inspiration. His most constant visual source was close at hand: the shimmering twelfth- to seventeenth-century mosaics of San Marco. Not only did they serve as starting points for many of his compositions, but the tesserae's golden glow inspired him to tint many of his drawings a similar shade of sepia. The cycle as a whole bears the strong imprint of Domenico's time and locale through references to familiar Venetian monuments and everyday life, as well as motifs from works by his father, Titian, Veronese, and other masters of the region.



Tiepolo, *The Presentation of Mary in the Temple*, 1786–1790, Pen and wash on paper, 18 3/4 x 14 3/8 in. (47.5 x 36.5 cm), Private collection, Indiana, on loan to the Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington

cradling her newborn baby in her arms, make their way across a rugged landscape, accompanied by the sheep they brought with them from Judea. In this sheet, Domenico borrows a composition directly from a near contemporary, investing it with his own characteristic sense of humanity in a scene of great tenderness.



Tiepolo, *The Flight into Egypt, after Castiglione*, 1786–1790, Pen and brown ink with brown wash over black chalk on paper, 18 1/4 x 14 1/4 in. (46.4 x 36.1 cm), The Morgan Library & Museum, New York. Acc. no. IV, 147, Copyright 2006 by The Morgan Library & Museum



Tiepolo, *The Calling of Matthew*, 1786–1790, The British Museum, London, National Art Collections Fund gift in honour of Sir Brinsley Ford, 2002. © The Trustees of The British Museum

In numerous drawings, including *The Calling of Matthew*, Domenico sets his story in contemporary Venice. Domenico depicts Matthew ensconced at his desk in a banker's office typical of the day, his ledgers open and a large safe to the side. Clients in fashionable Venetian dress stand before him as he counts out money. Only Matthew and the dog are aware of the entry of the disciples and Jesus, in incongruous biblical garb, who summons the future evangelist to follow him.

While *The Calling of Matthew* displays Domenico's gifts as a storyteller and chronicler of his time, other sheets reveal his profound piety and depth of emotional connection with the suffering Christ. In one of the exhibition's most moving drawings, *Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: The Second Prayer*, taken from the story of Christ's Passion, Domenico omits the usual accessory figures, choosing instead to concentrate on the anguish of a kneeling Jesus, arms upraised in fervent prayer as he confronts his imminent death (see front of press release).

Domenico approached his project as an interpreter and biblical scholar, drawing his own conclusions about the events he illustrated from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the Acts of the Apostles—the standard sources for Christian imagery in Western art. Possibly beginning in Domenico's time and culminating in the early nineteenth century, a shift in theological thinking took place, in which the Gospel of Mark began to be favored as the ur-text of Christianity over the Gospel of Matthew. Gealt and Knox's analysis of the series brings to

light Domenico's particular reliance on the Gospel of Mark, Venice's patron saint. Whether the artist was aware of these new currents of thought—possibly through his brother, a priest in the order of the Somaschi—or reached similar conclusions on his own is not known.

One of the ways in which Domenico demonstrates his adherence to Mark's Gospel is through the frequent appearance of the Apostle Peter throughout the series.

Peter, founder of the Christian Church, participated in and witnessed many of the events of Christ's ministry and is said to have dictated the Gospel to Mark. In one of many scenes illustrating the saint's life, *The Apostles Delivered from Prison*, an older, frail Peter, preceded by John, is assisted by an angel over the threshold of a cavernous stone enclosure worthy of Piranesi. Two dogs, symbols of faithfulness and companionship, await them.



Tiepolo, *The Apostles Delivered from Prison*, 1786–1790, Pen and brush and brown ink and brown wash over black chalk on paper, 19 1/8 x 15 in. (48.7 x 38.2 cm), Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA



Tiepolo, *The Exaltation of the Sacrament*, 1786–1790, Pen and wash over black chalk on paper, 19 3/8 x 15 1/8 in. (49 x 38.4 cm), Bibliothèque municipale de Rouen

In addition to the Gospels, Domenico also turned to the more obscure apocryphal medieval devotional texts disavowed by the Catholic Church, such as the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*, to infuse his cycle with a more complete and complex rendering of the Christian epic. These texts inspired some of Domenico's most visionary works. In the *Exaltation of the Sacrament*, probably a description of the feast of the Eucharist from *The Golden Legend*, a crucifix rising from an altar is transformed into a vision of the Trinity. Here, a youthful Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns and holding aloft the chalice and wafer of the Sacrament, kneels before God, while the Holy Spirit and a chorus of angels hover above.

## CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ OF THE CYCLE PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY

This exhibition coincides with the publication by Dr. Gealt and George Knox of the catalogue raisonné of Domenico's New Testament cycle—a monumental feat of art historical and biblical scholarship that brings together, for the first time, all 313 known sheets. Over the course of a decade, Gealt and Knox tracked down far-flung drawings, traced the scenes to their textual and visual sources, and assigned each sheet to its place in the series, which is the largest-known sacred cycle created by a single artist. Together, the exhibition and publication restore Domenico's lost masterpiece to its original context. *Domenico Tiepolo: A New Testament* (888 pages, 339 color illus., 301 b&w illus.) is available in hardcover (\$75) in the Museum Shop of the Frick, on the institution's Web site ([www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)), and by phone (212) 288-0700. It is also available through the publisher, Indiana University Press ([www.iupress.indiana.edu](http://www.iupress.indiana.edu)).

## **FREE PUBLIC LECTURE** (*SEATING FOR LECTURES IS LIMITED AND UNRESERVED*)

**Date:** Wednesday, October 25, 2006, 6 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Adelheid M. Gealt, Director, Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington  
**Title:** *The Tiepolo Code*

This lecture places the drawings currently on exhibit in the broader context of Domenico Tiepolo's New Testament cycle. Dr. Gealt also will examine the ways in which the artist links more than three hundred drawings while also referencing, in unique ways, his textual sources.

Presentation of this lecture has been made possible by the Italian Cultural Institute of New York.

### **BASIC INFORMATION**

**General Information Phone:** (212) 288-0700

**Website:** [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 (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

**Admission:** \$15; senior citizens \$10; 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, 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 Geetha Natarajan, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator

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