

Fund an Acquisition

Museum Associates is asking your help in funding an acquisition for the Museum of Art and Archaeology. During the evening, you will be asked to complete a donor card helping to fund this artwork. We hope you will pledge generously so that the Museum can add this wonderful and significant addition to the Museum's collection of works on paper. A total of **\$6,500** is needed to purchase this mezzotint print.



Thomas Frye (Irish, 1710–1762)

Maria Gunning, Countess of Coventry

From the series *Six Ladies, in Picturesque Attitudes, and in Different Dresses of the Present Mode*, 1761

Mezzotint on laid paper

505 x 354 mm (approx. 19 7/8 x 14 in.); sheet: 532 x 381 mm (approx. 21 x 15 in.)

(Over)

History of Mezzotint

Mezzotint is a printmaking process that was the first to enable half-tones in a drypoint method, creating thousands of little dots on a metal plate. The mezzotint method gives a depth and richness to printmaking not seen in prints before this process. This method was highly used in England in the eighteenth century, especially between 1750–1820, the great period of the British portrait. This places Frye's print toward the beginning of this period of portraiture prints.

About the Artist

Thomas Frye was born in Ireland (ca. 1710) and probably trained in Dublin, perhaps with portraitist James Latham (ca. 1696–1747). Due to limited patronage in Ireland, he moved in 1735 to London, where he remained until his death in 1762. A successful painter, printmaker, and porcelain manufacturer, Frye's greatest contributions to the history of art are his insightful painted and printed portraits and his superbly executed mezzotints. He also held patents for porcelain production from his time as director of Bow Porcelain Factory in London.

The Significance of the Print

Frye's portraits are distinctive in the history of printmaking, not only because of their life-size scale, which is unusual, and their dramatic use of light and shade, but also because they are original portraits created specifically for the mezzotint medium. They were not based on paintings, like so many other prints of this period. His influence on later generations of artists surpassed the graphic arts; for example, Joseph Wright of Derby imitated the richly atmospheric effects of Frye's mezzotints in his painted portraits.

He issued his first set of twelve life-size mezzotint portraits in 1760, from designs in the manner of the Italian Giovanni Battista Piazzetta (1682–1754). A year later Frye produced a second set of mezzotints representing six fashionable ladies, including this portrayal of the famed beauty Maria Gunning, Countess of Coventry (1733–60). Maria had then just recently died at the age of twenty-seven; we now know the cause of her death was very likely lead poisoning from her cosmetics.

This mezzotint by Frye would be an excellent addition to the Museum's collection, not only for its exquisite craftsmanship and large size, but also because the Museum has fewer examples of works on paper from the British Isles. "The Frye is a stunning example of the art of the mezzotint, truly among one of the best examples of the medium," according to Carolyn Bullard, an expert in museum-quality European and American prints.

In addition, curator Alisa McCusker is currently preparing a focus exhibition about the techniques of both mezzotint and aquatint. If we succeed in supporting this acquisition, then Frye's portrait would certainly be featured in this upcoming exhibition.

Thank you for your contribution!