

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Wisdom and Strength

Paolo Veronese (Paolo Caliari) (Italian, 1528–1588)

Date ca. 1565

Medium Oil on canvas

Dimensions 84 1/2 x 65 3/4 in. (214.6 x 167 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1912.1.128

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 13, West Gallery

Commentary All the splendor of Venetian color and light, of the Venetians' pleasure in beautiful landscapes, skies, and people, in lustrous silks and jewels, are brought together in the Frick's two large canvases by Veronese, *Allegory of Wisdom and Strength* and *Allegory of Virtue and Vice (The Choice of Hercules)*. Yet in spite of their fame and the series of prominent collectors who owned them, many uncertainties persist about their dates, provenance, and subject matter. Few of Veronese's works are firmly dated, and the evolution of his style is not easily traceable. The Frick paintings appear to be fairly late works, but probably not much later than 1580. It has been proposed that the two were commissioned by the Emperor Rudolph II, but although the paintings certainly belonged to the Emperor, there is no firm evidence that Rudolph, an avid collector, actually commissioned them. It is also customarily assumed that the two pictures are pendants — chiefly because they have been together throughout their recorded history, not because of any close compositional or iconographic ties; the differences in the scale of the figures and in the types of canvas employed suggest that they may in fact not have been pendants, and the moralizing subjects of the pair are in no way interdependent. Veronese expressed the moralizing theme of *Wisdom and Strength* in sumptuous fashion. The female figure gazing heavenward seems intended to represent Divine Wisdom. Hercules, his gaze turned instead downward, to the riches strewn over the ground, would appear here to symbolize worldly or physical power. The inscription OMNIA VANITAS (All is Vanity) at lower left is the keynote of the Book of Ecclesiastes, which stresses the supremacy of divine wisdom over worldly things and the labors that produce them. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History Emperor Rudolph II. Queen Christina of Sweden, Stockholm and Rome. Bequeathed by her in 1689 to Cardinal Decio Azzolini, Rome. Marchese Pompeo Azzolini, Rome. Sold by him in 1696 to Prince Livio Odescalchi. Marchese Baldassare Odescalchi and Cardinal Erba Odescalchi (1713). Sold by them in 1721 to the Duc d'Orléans. Orléans family. Sold to Walkeurs in 1792. Sold by him in 1792 to Laborde-Méréville. Duke of Bridgewater and Lords Gower and Carlisle. Thomas Hope (1799–1800). The Hope family. Sold by the trustees of the Hope family to Agnew. Knoedler (1910). Frick, 1912. Source: *Paintings in The Frick Collection: French, Italian and Spanish. Volume II*. New York: The Frick Collection, 1968.