

# The Frick Collection: Detail Report

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Élisabeth-Suzanne de Jaucourt, Comtesse du Cayla

Jean-Antoine Houdon (French, 1741–1828)

**Date** 1777

**Medium** Marble

**Dimensions** H.: 21 1/4 in. (54 cm)

**Credit Line** Henry Clay Frick Bequest

**Accession Number** 1916.2.77

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 9, Fragonard Room

**Commentary** In 1772 Élisabeth-Suzanne de Jaucourt (1755–1816) married her cousin François-Hercule-Philippe-Étienne de Baschi, Comte du Cayla. Five years later Houdon portrayed her as a carefree nymph with grape leaves circling her breast and windswept hair. The guise of a bacchante may make playful reference to her husband's last name, Baschi, which was linked by creative etymology to Bacchus; Bacchus and a bacchante supported the family coat of arms. A plaster version of Houdon's portrait was shown in the Salon of 1775; the present bust, exhibited two years later, is signed and dated 1777 on the back of the stand. Through long tradition from ancient times, portraits, especially those carved in marble, were intended to confer upon the subject an approximation of immortality. Hence it was important to convey a notion of permanence and durability, in addition to the sitter's high character. Houdon's portrait of the Comtesse du Cayla seems deliberately to seek for opposites of these traditional desiderata. Lightness and movement, the fragility of time and substance are captured here in lacy stone. The frothy hair pinned with leaves and roses and the vine leaves worn over the shoulder are deeply undercut, emphasizing the brittleness and translucent qualities of marble. The young woman turns, a fleeting come-hither expression on her still demure, slightly smiling face. Her eyes appear to sparkle; the irises are dark holes above which a sliver of marble gives the illusion of bright reflection. Houdon obviously had studied Bernini during his years in Rome, but his consummate technique, refined imagination, and subtle interpretation of personality seem specifically products of eighteenth-century France. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

**Collection History** Jaucourt family (until after 1884). Jacques Seligmann. Joseph Bardac. Wildenstein and Gimpel. Frick, 1916. Source: *Sculpture in The Frick Collection: German, Netherlandish, French and British. Volume IV*. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.