

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



Zephyrus and Flora

Clodion (Claude Michel) (French, 1738-1814)

Date 1799

Medium Terracotta

Dimensions 23 x 10 1/4 x 11 1/2 in. (58.4 x 26 x 29.2 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1915.2.76

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 9, Fragonard Room

Commentary Winged Zephyrus, god of the west wind, embraces his bride Flora, crowning her with a wreath of roses. Three cupids nudge them together and scatter roses from a basket. More blossoms garland the breast of Flora, whose "lips breathed vernal roses"; this tenderly embracing couple, wrapped in a light breeze, realizes the Arcadian imagery of Ovid's *Fasti*, which describes the perpetual spring and gentle winds of the garden the lovers inhabited. By the final year of the eighteenth century, when Clodion signed and dated this work, the freestanding sculpture group had developed into a work of art that differed greatly from the sixteenth-century pioneering examples of Michelangelo and Giovanni Bologna. Space itself becomes a major element in this piece, as the forms seem to rise and turn around openings that spread within the frame of slender figures and fluttering silhouettes. The lightness of terracotta, in both substance and color, and the extraordinary refinement of details, surfaces, and textures contribute to the airy delicacy of the statuette. Clodion, like Houdon, referred to antiquity and other early sources. His terracotta is a remote descendant of the marble Cupid and Psyche taken from Rome by Napoleon and paraded triumphantly with other booty through Paris in 1798. Raphael's *Psyche Borne by Cupids* painted in the Villa Farnesina, Rome, also contributed to Clodion's Flora, as did Houdon, whose popular, much replicated bust of kissing lovers must have been known to him. The buoyant, long-limbed figure of Flora may even reveal a debt to Houdon's *Diana*. But despite the classical allusions and the hints of neoclassicism, Clodion's *Zephyrus and Flora* represents above all a last joyous chord closing the eighteenth century and, with it, a period of exceptional brilliance in French art. Source: *Art in The Frick Collection: Paintings, Sculpture, Decorative Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996.

Collection History J. Pierpont Morgan, London and New York. Frick, 1915. Source: *Sculpture in The Frick Collection: German, Netherlandish, French and British*. Volume IV. New York: The Frick Collection, 1970.