

The Frick Collection: Detail Report



St. Francis in the Desert

Giovanni Bellini (Italian, ca. 1424/35–1516)

Date ca. 1475–80

Medium Oil on panel

Dimensions Panel: 49 1/16 x 55 7/8 in. (124.6 x 142 cm) Image: 48 7/8 x 55 5/16 in. (124.1 x 140.5 cm)

Credit Line Henry Clay Frick Bequest

Accession Number 1915.1.03

Currently On View

First Floor, Room 10, Living Hall

Commentary The painting was commissioned by the Venetian nobleman Giovanni Michiel, probably as a devotional piece for his collection. By 1525, it had entered the collection of the prominent aristocrat Taddeo Contarini. The panel most likely depicts one of the key scenes from the iconography of St. Francis of Assisi (ca. 1181–1226), the moment when he received the wounds of the Crucifixion (stigmata) inflicted on Christ during the Passion. This is said to have occurred in the summer of 1224, while the saint was at La Verna, a site in the Apennine Mountains of Italy. Bellini shows St. Francis in contemplation, standing in a large and beautiful landscape. The palms of his hands display the wounds, while the landscape and animals around him highlight his close relationship with the natural world.

Collection History Painted on the commission of Giovanni Michiel, Venice. Taddeo Contarini, Venice (1525). Palazzo Corner, Venice (?). Purchased in Italy about 1845 by W. Buchanan. Sir John Murray and others sale, June 19, 1852, Christie's, Lot 48, sold for £735 to J. Dingwall, Tittenhurst, Sunninghill, Berkshire. Thomas Holloway, apparently acquired with the estate of Tittenhurst. Bequeathed by him to his sister-in-law, Miss Mary Ann Driver (Lady Martin-Holloway). Bought in 1912 from the trustees of Miss Driver by Colnaghi and Obach. Knoedler. Frick, 1915. Source: Paintings in The Frick Collection: French, Italian and Spanish. Volume II. New York: The Frick Collection, 1968.