George Washington

(1732–1799)

George Washington, first president of the United States, earned the epithet Father of His Country for his great leadership, both in the fight for independence and in unifying the new nation under a central government. Washington was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, and worked as a surveyor in his youth. In 1752 he inherited a family estate, Mount Vernon, upon the death of a half brother, Lawrence. Washington's military career began in 1753, when he accepted an appointment to carry a warning to French forces who had pushed into British territory in the Ohio valley. In subsequent military assignments, Washington distinguished himself against the French, first while aiding General Edward Braddock and later as commander-in-chief of all Virginia militia.

In 1758 Washington returned to civilian life as a gentleman-farmer at Mount Vernon and soon took a seat in the Virginia house of burgesses. As a planter, Washington had firsthand knowledge of the economic restrictions being imposed by Britain, and as a Virginia legislator, he supported political efforts to curtail British control of the colonies. Washington was selected to serve as a delegate to the first and second Continental Congresses, and in June 1775 he was chosen to command the American forces. He successfully led the Continental army through eight difficult years of war for independence.

In 1783, after the Revolution, Washington resigned his military commission to Congress at Annapolis, Maryland. Recognizing the need for a strong central government, he served as president of the federal convention charged with drafting the Constitution. Reluctantly, he accepted the will of his colleagues to become president of the new nation, and he was inaugurated in New York City on April 30, 1789. Contending with the ideological struggles within the government, and with hostilities between France and Great Britain, Washington greatly feared the growth of political

William Dunlap's pastel portrait of George Washington is remarkable as the earliest-known painting by a man better known for his invaluable publication *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834), the first attempt to chronicle the art of this country. The painting survived (despite damage by fire while it resided in San Francisco) for more than 150 years in the possession of the Van Horne family, its authenticity affirmed by Dunlap himself. In 1838, near the end of his life, Dunlap wrote a statement confirming his authorship of the Senate's Washington pastel, briefly describing the circumstances of the sitting. Equally conclusive, and more compelling, is the story of the portrait's origin included in his autobiography—already published in his *Rise and Progress*.

Having received meager training in art from the American painter William Williams, Dunlap embarked on his youthful career in 1782 by executing portraits in "crayons" (pastels) of his father, other relatives, and friends. In the autumn of 1783, he visited Rocky Hill, New Jersey, home of John Van Horne. General Washington's temporary headquarters was nearby while Congress was convening at Princeton College, and Washington was a frequent visitor to the Van Horne home, so Dunlap "was of course introduced to him."[1] The young artist had made pastel portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Van Horne, and Washington praised them ("doubtless the mere wish to encourage youth," according to Dunlap). As a result, Dunlap recalled, John Van Horne "requested him to sit to me and he complied. This was a triumphant moment for a boy of seventeen . . . but it was one of anxiety, fear and trembling."[2]

Although family tradition maintains that Dunlap's portrait of Washington was executed at the Van Horne estate, Dunlap's very specific, detailed, and charming reminiscence differs:

> My visits were now frequent to head quarters. . . . The soldiers [at headquarters] were New-England yeomen's sons, none older than twenty; their commander was Captain Howe. . . . I was astonished when the simple Yankee sentinels, deceived by my fine clothes, saluted me as I passed daily to and fro; but Captain Howe's praise of my portrait of the general appeared to me as a thing of course, though surely he was as much deceived as his soldiers. I was quite at home in every respect at head quarters . . . [to be] noticed as the young painter, was delicious. The general's portrait led to the sitting of the lady [Martha Washington]. I made what were thought likenesses, and presented them to Mr. and Mrs. Van Horne, taking copies for myself.[3]

George Washington

William Dunlap (1766–1839)

Pastel on paper, ca. 1783
25½ x 19½ inches (64.8 x 49.5 cm)
Unsigned
Gift of Anne Middleton Ellis in memory of her husband, Augustus Van Horne Ellis, 1940
Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1940
Cat. no. 31.00015

parties and the dangers of foreign involvement. These issues impelled him to serve a second term as president.

His attempts to solve foreign relations issues during his second term resulted in Jay's Treaty (1794), a vain attempt to regulate trade and settle boundary disputes with Great Britain, and the Pinckney Treaty (1795), which successfully settled such issues with Spain. Washington also acted vigorously to enforce federal authority by quashing the Whiskey Rebellion, during which liquor producers in western Pennsylvania threatened the new republic by rebelling against an unpopular excise tax on whiskey.

Washington's 1796 Farewell Address to the nation emphasized the need for a unified federal government and warned against party faction and foreign influence. Although often subjected to harsh criticism by his contemporaries, Washington succeeded in giving the new government dignity. He saw a federal financial system firmly established through the efforts of Alexander Hamilton, and he set valuable precedents in the conduct of the executive office. Washington retired to Mount Vernon, where he died on December 14, 1799.

It would be pleasant to report that the portrait was as fine as the praise bestowed on the young man's work, but, in fact, it is labored and awkward. The Continental army uniform (despite evident effort) is mostly unconvincing, from the odd abstraction of the ruffled shirtfront to the epaulets that look more like strands from an old mop. Still, to his credit, Dunlap manages to render Washington's prominent and idiosyncratic nose with success, and the eye sockets are smoothly modeled. One spatial problem—the viewer's uncertainty that a neck lies behind the neck cloth—may well be due to the fact that Dunlap had lost the sight of his right eye in a childhood accident. This loss "prevented all further regular schooling," and Dunlap also believed that "either from nature or the above accident, I did not possess a painter's eye for colour; but I was now devoted to painting as a profession, and I did not suspect any deficiency."[4] It is much more likely that his spatial perception, rather than his color perception, was altered.

But there is no need to belabor the shortcomings of a teenager's portrait of the most famous man of his day. Dunlap was his own severest critic. Early in his artistic career, Dunlap had gone to London to study with American neoclassical painter Benjamin West. On his return, he established himself as a portrait and miniature painter, while also working as a theatrical manager. He later painted large allegorical and religious pictures, similar to those of Benjamin West. Looking back from old age to his early painting career, Dunlap wrote, "I now intend to show the causes that, at the age of twenty-three, and after a long residence in London, left me ignorant of anatomy, perspective, drawing, and colouring, and returned me home a most incapable painter."[5]

In addition to painting, Dunlap spent time as a militia paymaster, was one of the founders of the National Academy of Design in New York City, and was involved in civic and cultural affairs throughout his lifetime. He remarked at one time, "The good artist who is not a good man, is a traitor to the arts, and an enemy to society."[6]

In 1926 Augustus Van Horne Ellis wrote to Charles Fairman, curator for the architect of the Capitol, about the youthful Dunlap's "crayon portrait" of General George Washington from life, which had been handed

down through his family. The two men corresponded over the next 11 years, discussing the possible gift of the portrait to the U.S. government. Not until after Ellis's death, however, was the painting accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library as a gift to the "Senate branch of the Capitol" from Anne Middleton Ellis in memory of her husband.

Artist William Dunlap executed this self-portrait around 1812.
(Yale University Art Gallery, Gift from the estate of Geraldine Woolsey Carmalt)

In 1795, at the age of 17, Rembrandt Peale painted a life portrait of George Washington during the president's second term. This rare opportunity had been arranged by Rembrandt's father, Charles Willson Peale, who had already painted Washington from life more often than any other artist. While the elder Peale painted beside him ("to calm my nerves"), Rembrandt created a rivetingly realistic head of the president.[1] For the sittings with Washington, the Peales alternated with portraitist Gilbert Stuart—the Peales painted Washington one day and Stuart, the next.

The younger Peale was never fully satisfied with his resulting life portrait, though he soon produced 10 copies from it. The intention behind the sittings had been, in fact, to supply the young artist with a model that could serve for future replicas. But unlike Stuart, who painted his "Athenaeum" head of Washington the following year and replicated it more than 70 times, Rembrandt Peale soon stopped copying his life study.

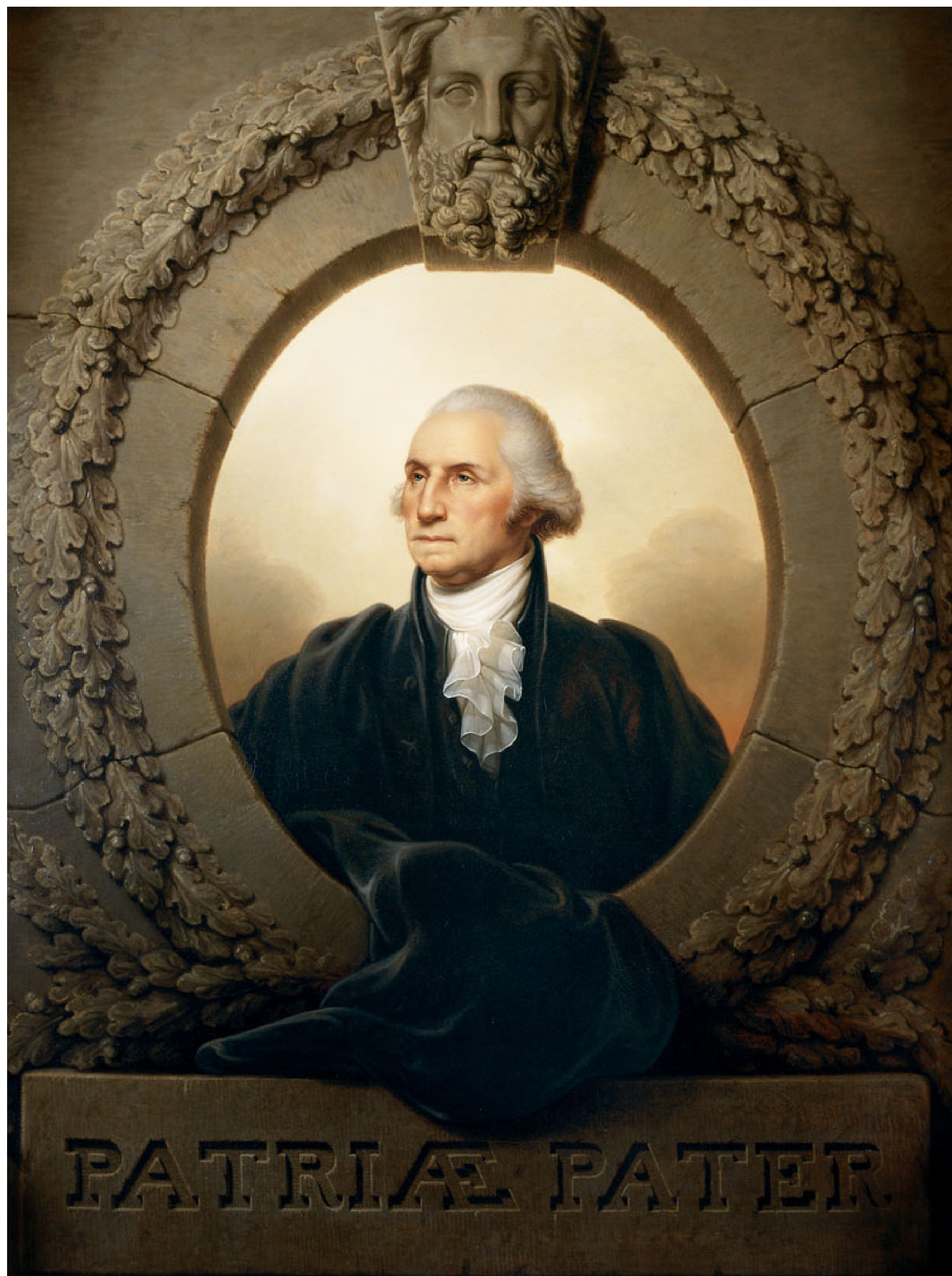
A quarter century after the 1795 effort, Peale set out to create a new portrait of Washington that would show his "mild, thoughtful & dignified, yet firm and energetic Countenance." In his privately printed essay, "Lecture on Washington and his Portraits," the artist recounted "repeated attempts to fix on Canvass the Image which was so strong in my mind, by an effort of combination, chiefly of my father's and my own studies."[2] Visits to France (1808–10) had exposed him to the neoclassical style then fashionable in Paris, and these ideals thenceforth competed with the innate realism that informed his earlier work. In 1823, following the highly successful tour of his huge allegorical painting, *The Court of Death*, Peale began contemplating a new project: an image of George Washington that would, he hoped, become the "Standard likeness" of the first president.[3] To realize this likeness—to invent it, really—he reviewed paintings of Washington by John Trumbull, by Gilbert Stuart, and, of course, by his own father, as well as the famous sculptural portrait by Jean-Antoine Houdon. This last he considered the finest of all portraits of Washington, an opinion still widely held. Peale decided that a composite of the best likenesses was most likely to result in the icon he hoped to produce.

Confining himself to his studio for three months, he painted in a "Poetic frenzy."[4] When completed, the portrait was given the blessing of the elder Peale, who, Rembrandt reported, judged it the best he had ever seen. Rembrandt Peale had invented a composition that presented the hero in a symbolic manner, blending portraiture with history painting.

George Washington (Patriæ Pater)

Rembrandt Peale (1778–1860)

Oil on canvas, 1823
71½ x 53¼ inches (181.6 x 135.3 cm)
Unsigned
Inscribed (centered on base beneath painted stone frame): PATRIÆ PATER
Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1832
Cat. no. 31.00001



He settled on a format roughly twice the size of a standard portrait, within which he painted a strikingly illusionistic stone oval window atop a stone sill engraved with the legend "PATRIÆ PATER" (Father of His Country). The window is decorated with a garland of oak leaves, and it is surmounted by the "Phydian head of Jupiter" (Peale's description) on the keystone. The oak was sacred to Jupiter, and it also had a long Christian tradition as a symbol of virtue and endurance in the face of adversity. Within this "porthole," as it was soon dubbed, Peale placed the bust-length figure of Washington with an extraterrestrial background of clouds and shadows. Not just a simple sky, it has the effect of placing Washington, if not precisely in eternity, then (in Thomas Jefferson's words) in "everlasting remembrance."[5]

Peale's extraordinarily difficult problem had been *how* to use the best sources to reinvent an image of Washington that could mediate among them. He stated publicly that he had based the new image on his 1795 portrait, his father's portraits, and Houdon's portrait. Rembrandt was flattering his father: Only the last of the elder Peale's seven different likenesses of Washington, painted beside his son in 1795, has any similarity to Rembrandt's work, and then perhaps mainly in the elegant ruffled shirt. In fact, Rembrandt scarcely consulted his own youthful effort. It was the Houdon of 1785 that prevailed, and this was the most appropriate source, because it showed a still-vigorous Washington in retirement after the War of Independence but before the rigors of the Constitutional Convention and his presidential service. This revivified heroic Washington is firmly linked to the real world by his black cloak, which tumbles out of the window onto the sill, while the hero himself remains in the ethereal space behind it.

But Peale's neoclassical idealism went further than Houdon's, and he subjected Washington's features to what one writer has called "a puffy articulation of the planes of the face," a stylization that suggests pinches of modeling clay.[6] At the same time, the idiosyncratic particulars that marked Houdon's rendering of such passages as eyebrows, the bridge of the nose, and hair are erased or superseded by regularity, and the head is bathed in a strong light that glosses the features with the sheen of perfection. Washington's nose is made still more Roman and, indeed, it invites comparison with the nose of Jupiter above, which in turn reminds viewers of Washington's godlike status in the hearts of his countrymen.

The result is an undeniably forceful presence, not Washington exactly, but the *idea* of Washington.

"Mild, yet resolute" was Chief Justice John Marshall's summation of the likeness—and it does possess immense dignity and venerable nobility.[7] It manages to belong to two realms, the reality of the fictive stone framework in front of Washington and the timeless world behind him. Finally, and very significantly, it should be recalled that the "invention" of the porthole portrait was, in fact, an inspiration borrowed from ancient Rome, for it is in Roman funerary sculpture that the portrait of the deceased is so framed. Though not the only painter to borrow this device, Peale demonstrated that it was doubly appropriate for Washington. It was fitting, first, for a posthumous portrait, and second, as an allusion to the Roman Republic, whose ideals were continually invoked by the Founding Fathers.

Peale painted the Senate picture and the first replica of it almost simultaneously, in Philadelphia during the winter of 1823–24. In late February 1824, he put the original painting on display in the U.S. Capitol. There it was viewed by members of Congress and many of Washington's friends and relatives. The porthole portrait of Washington did not become the "standard likeness," but it became second only to the image by Gilbert Stuart, which proved impossible to displace from the public imagination. Of Peale's nearly 80 replicas or variants, the version in the Senate is the masterpiece. No painting in the U.S. Capitol has greater historical or symbolic resonance.

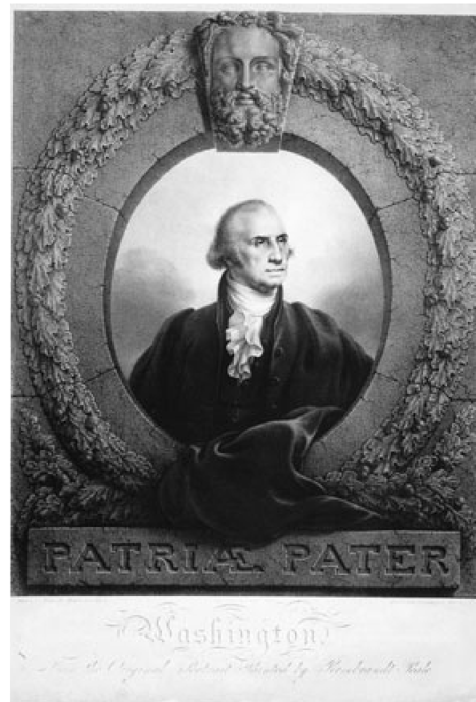
The portrait of George Washington by Rembrandt Peale—seen here in this ca. 1870 photograph—was displayed in the Vice President's Room in the Capitol from 1859 until 1976.

The artist collected testimonials from more than 20 individuals who had known Washington; he later published them in a pamphlet titled *Portrait of Washington*. The comments praised the painting and include such glowing descriptions as those of Chief Justice John Marshall: "The likeness in features is striking, and the Character of the whole face is preserved & exhibited with wonderful Accuracy. It is more *Washington himself* than any Portrait of him I have ever seen."[8] Peale used the resulting publicity to lobby Congress, unsuccessfully, for a commission to paint an equestrian portrait of General Washington.

Peale then exhibited his *Patriæ Pater* portrait in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. In the spring of 1827, he drew a lithograph based on the painting, in the Boston studio of William and John Pendleton, whose lithographic press was highly regarded. The lithograph was awarded a silver medal, the highest award, at the fall exhibition at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia. This and other images based on the painting ensured widespread recognition. Late in 1828 Peale sailed for Europe, where he remained until September 1830, taking *Patriæ Pater* with him. He reported that the painting was well received in Rome, Naples, Paris, and London. In Florence it was exhibited at the Accademia in September 1829 and praised by the press.

Congress, though reluctant to spend money on art in the early years of the nation, was prompted by the 1832 centennial of George Washington's birth to purchase *Patriæ Pater* from Rembrandt Peale for $2,000. After its purchase, the painting was hung at the gallery level in the Senate Chamber, where it remained until the Senate moved into its new north wing Chamber in 1859, and the Supreme Court moved upstairs into the Old Senate Chamber. At that time, the painting was moved to the new Vice President's Room near the Senate floor. It remained there until the restoration of the Old Senate Chamber as a museum room in 1976, allowing the return of the portrait to its original location.

The oil replicas of Peale's original porthole portrait of Washington constitute four distinct categories: those identical to the original, with the subject's face turned proper right and featuring civilian dress; those similar to the original, but with face turned to the left; those with Washington's face turned right, but featuring military dress; and those facing left, with military dress. The example at the Pennsylvania Academy is believed to be the original of the second type. The New-York Historical Society owns a late 1853 version in which Washington wears a military uniform. Peale justified the many replicas by claiming that, because he was the last living artist to have painted Washington from life, "the reduplication of . . . [my] work, by . . . [my] own hand, should be esteemed the most reliable."[9]



Rembrandt Peale used the new lithography process to promote his *Patriæ Pater* portrait of George Washington, creating this 1827 image that was printed by the Pendleton Lithography firm.
(National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of Stuart P. Feld)

Left:
Rembrandt Peale's portrait of George Washington hangs above the presiding officer's dais in the Old Senate Chamber.
(1999 photograph)

Gilbert Stuart's second and most important life portrait of George Washington was an oil painting executed in 1796. Best known as the image on the one-dollar bill, it is considered the most famous painting of the first president. The portrait, which shows the left side of Washington's face, was painted when the president was 64 years old. It came to be known as the "Athenaeum portrait" because it was acquired by the Boston Athenaeum just after the artist's death. The Athenaeum owned it for 150 years. (In this and other references in this volume, "Athenaeum head," "Athenaeum Washington," or "Athenaeum portrait" refer to this original life portrait, today owned jointly by the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Two replica portraits owned by the Senate—one shown here and one on page 400—and all other replicas of the same type are referred to as "Athenaeum type" or "copy or replica of the Athenaeum portrait.")

The Athenaeum Washington was executed through the intervention of Anne Bingham, wife of Senator William Bingham of Pennsylvania, probably in preparation for a half-length portrait commissioned by her husband. Bingham subsequently changed his mind and ordered a full-length portrait instead—and a copy for William Petty, Lord Shelburne, the first Marquis of Lansdowne. These full-length "Lansdowne-type" portraits of Washington are now, respectively, in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and the National Portrait Gallery.

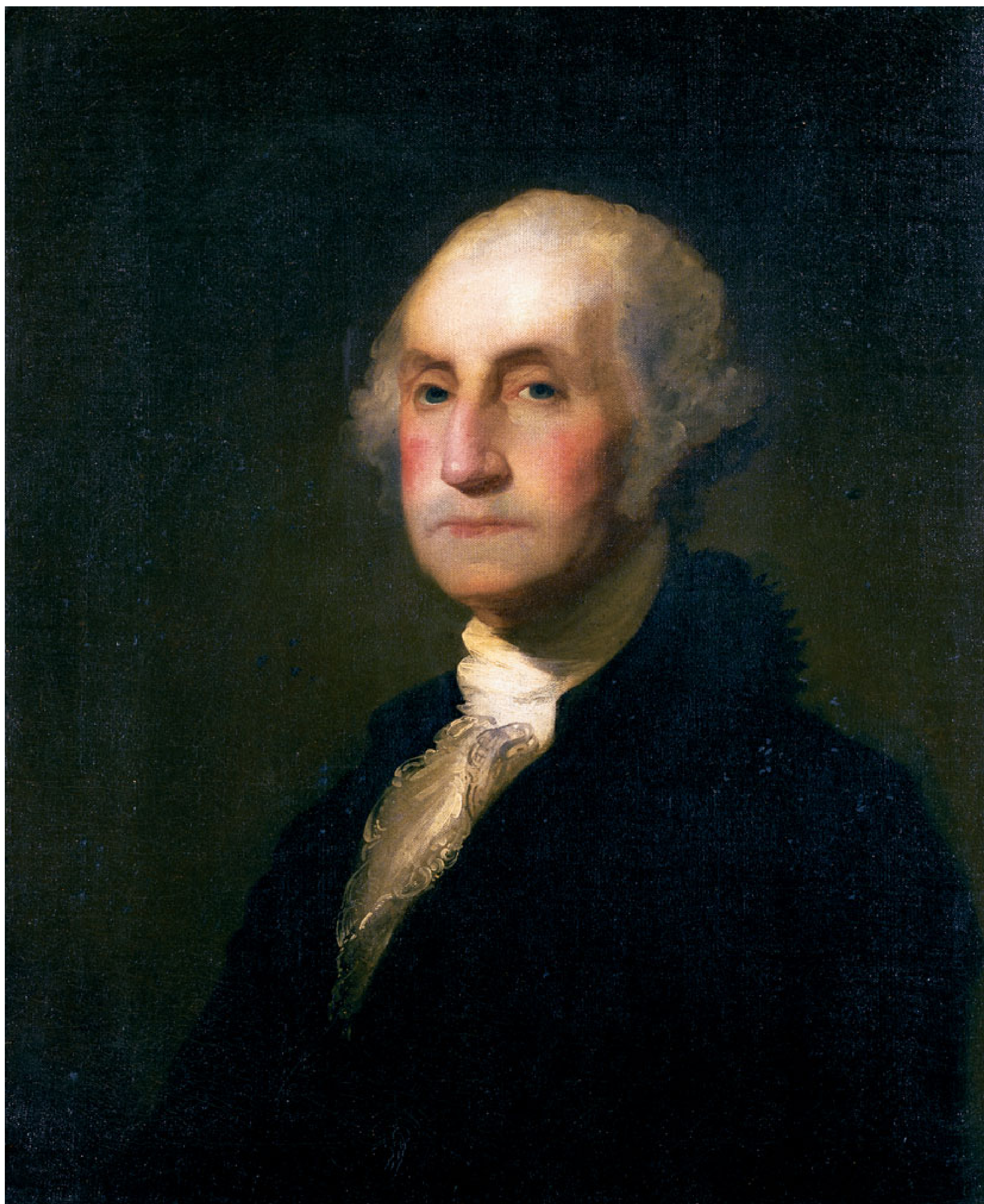
The Athenaeum head was left unfinished by Stuart, who retained it during his lifetime. He kept the portrait from life in order to make numerous replicas (some 70 in the bust-length format) from it. There were, of course, alterations in the replicas, some subtle and some more pronounced. These might have been due to haste or to other factors not now known. The costume, hardly indicated in the original life portrait, was continually reinvented by the artist.

This particular replica of the Athenaeum portrait, sometimes referred to as the "Chesnut portrait," was purchased from the artist by Colonel John Chesnut of South Carolina in the late 1790s. Chesnut had served with South Carolina regiments in the American Revolution and was a member of the South Carolina state convention to ratify the federal Constitution. Thomas Chesnut, heir to the original owner, sold the portrait in 1870 to art collector W.W. Corcoran, founder of the Corcoran Gallery

George Washington

Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828)

Oil on canvas, ca. 1796–1798
28⅝ x 23⅝ inches (72.7 x 60 cm)
Unsigned
Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1876
Cat. no. 31.00003

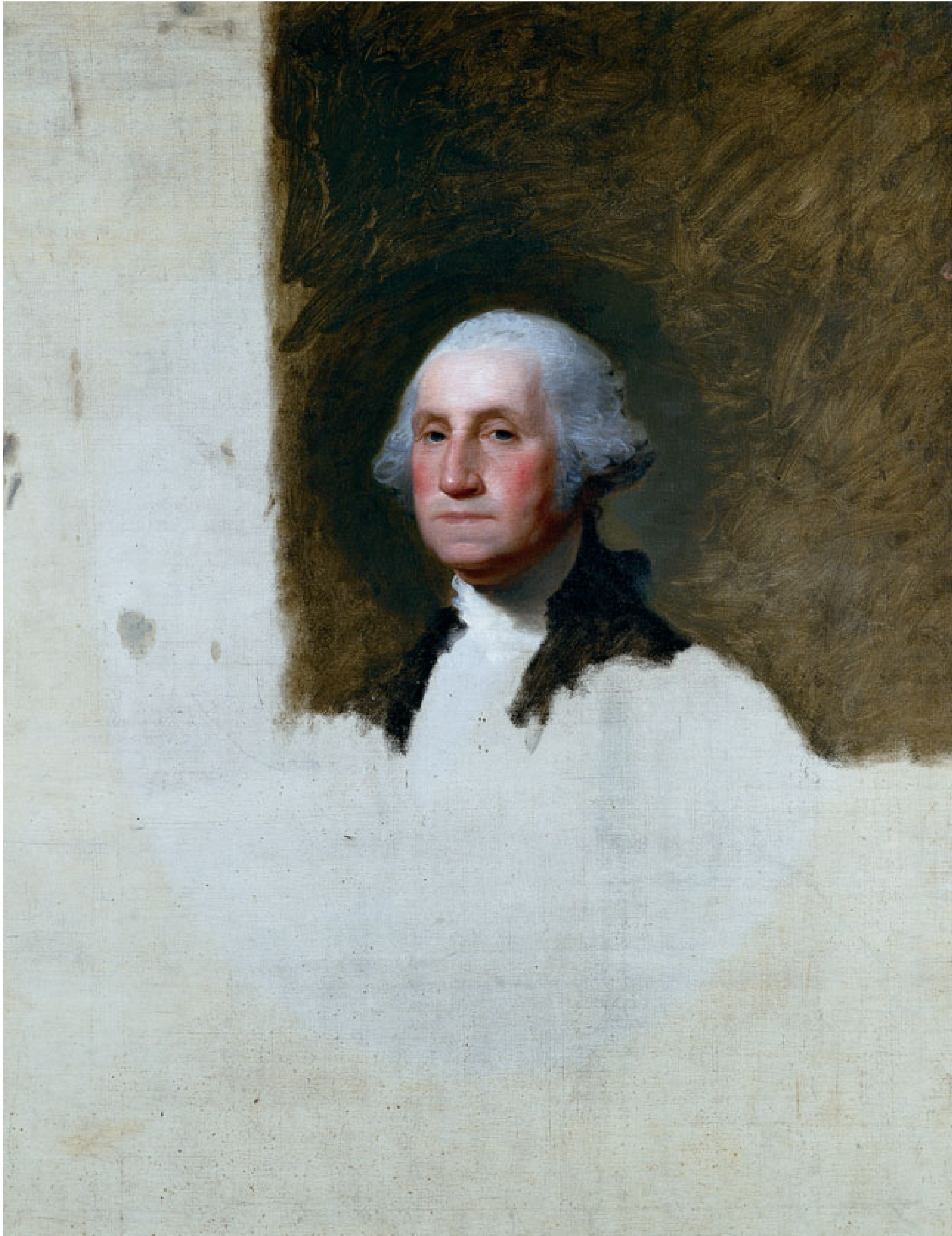


of Art in Washington, D.C. The Joint Committee on the Library, in turn, purchased the painting from Corcoran for the United States Capitol in 1876, the nation's centennial year.

The Chesnut portrait is of both documentary and aesthetic interest. Washington sat for Stuart for the Athenaeum head in April 1796, and he departed Philadelphia at the end of his second term in March 1797. It has been assumed that General Chesnut acquired this replica about the time he sat for Stuart for his own portrait, while on a visit to Philadelphia in 1797–98. Some writers maintain that the president appears older here than in the Athenaeum head. To account for this difference, it has been claimed that the political attacks endured by Washington during his second term aged him, and that Stuart was able to incorporate the change because Washington agreed to another sitting. However, this hypothesis conveniently ignores the very short time thus assumed between the two sittings. It is highly unlikely that the president would have granted a sitting to Stuart in the waning months of his administration, and Stuart did not subsequently visit him at Mt. Vernon.

The difference in appearance may more aptly be called weariness than aging, and it would have been a relatively easy matter for Stuart to alter the portrait to suggest this change, without requiring a sitting. There is a perceptible softening of the modeling, for instance. The president's eyes seem more shadowed and his face less fleshy—in short, somewhat gaunt—despite the apple-red cheeks that Stuart often favored for his sitters. For this replica, Stuart embellished the costume with a fluidly improvised shirtfront, like liquid lace.

Gilbert Stuart is undoubtedly one of America's greatest portrait painters. Having trained in Europe, he returned to this country with the prospect of greater financial gain. Known for his elegant and fashionable portrait style, he painted war heroes, socialites, and prominent families. But it was George Washington whom he most sought to paint, and it was his Washington portraits that provided him with the greatest financial reward. Other national figures that Stuart recorded on canvas included John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.



Gilbert Stuart purposely left his 1796 portrait of George Washington, also known as the "Athenaeum portrait," unfinished and used it as a model for his numerous replicas.
(National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Owned jointly with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

This skillful replica by Gilbert Stuart of his Athenaeum portrait of George Washington is commonly known as the "Pennington portrait." It takes its name from its first owner, Edward Pennington, a Philadelphian who was a founder of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. It may be assumed that Pennington acquired the Washington portrait around the time Stuart was in Bordentown, New Jersey, where Stuart left his family while he was in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, and where at least some of Pennington's family lived. (Stuart painted a portrait of Edward Pennington around 1802, and the painting is now located at the Atwater Kent Museum in Philadelphia.) The Washington portrait owned by Pennington later came into the possession of Mrs. Cicero W. Harris of Washington, D.C., who in 1886 sold it to the Joint Committee on the Library for placement in the U.S. Capitol.

In this replica, Stuart paints Washington's face and hair more boldly and summarily than he does in some other replicas. For example, he emulates the fleshy bridge of Washington's nose with a creamy swirl of paint. The flesh coloring is nicely balanced, without the strong crimson cheeks Stuart often favors, although his characteristic use of red in the shadows of the upper eyelids is apparent. The modeling of the mouth seems somewhat hesitant, as if the artist were trying to modify the puffy distortion caused by the president's notorious false teeth. The paint is applied with particular fluency in the lacy shirtfront.

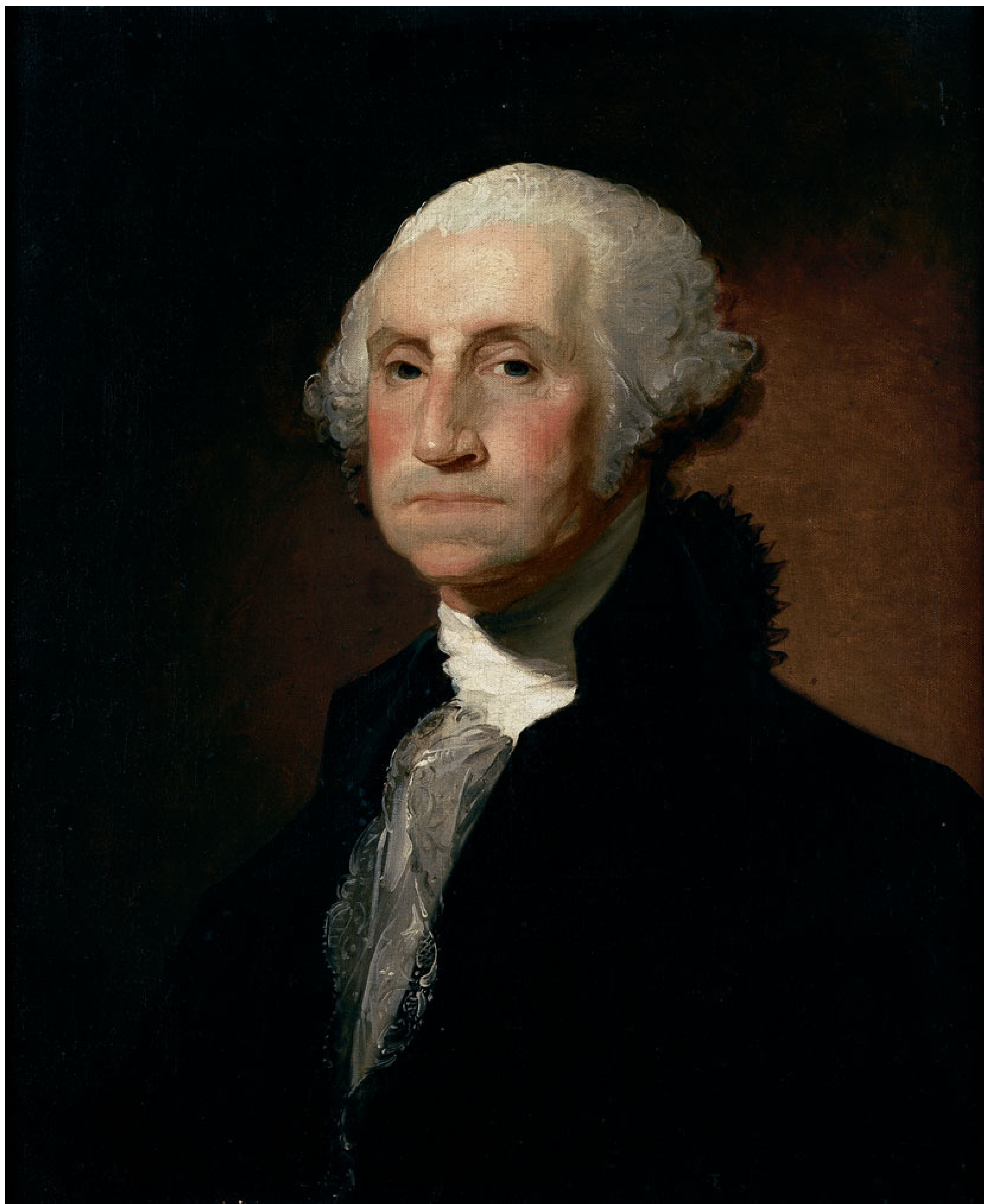
There is a compelling directness about this image that is explained, in part, by the secure placement of the head on the canvas. When compared with the Senate's other Athenaeum-type head—the Chesnut portrait (p. 396)—the Pennington head is more securely positioned on the canvas. It is firmly in the upper half of the field and more strongly centered. Washington's left eye lies precisely at the horizontal midpoint. Were the head to rotate to a frontal position, it would be more symmetrically placed than would the head in the Chesnut portrait. The white neckcloth—the strongest, brightest tone in the painting—provides a solid pedestal for the head.

Equally admirable in this version is Stuart's control of the lighting and, therefore, the coherence of forms in space. For instance, a nicely gauged, faint highlight defines the back of the high coat collar where it meets the striking bow of black ribbon. The ribbon secures the black silk bag that holds the long hair at the back. (This fashion appeared around

George Washington

Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828)

Oil on canvas, ca. 1796–1805
28¾ x 23⅝ inches (73 x 60 cm)
Unsigned
Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1886
Cat. no. 31.00004



1770; alternatively, the back hair was dressed in a queue, or pigtail.) The hair ribbon is unusually elaborate, larger than that used on a pigtail (which would not be visible from the front), and its serrated contour is visually confusing to the modern viewer. But Stuart's subtle highlighting helps differentiate the shapes within that large black area. In addition, the gradation of light across the background suggests space and gives the head still more force while enhancing the effective, persuasive design of the torso, whose proper right contour has a melodic descent.

The painting has hung in various locations in the Capitol since it was acquired, and it was also displayed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., in 1932 as part of an exhibition celebrating the bicentennial of Washington's birth.

Right:
Gilbert Stuart's portrait of the first president hangs in the Democratic leader's suite in the Senate wing of the Capitol.
(1999 photograph)

In April 1966, the Joint Committee on the Library accepted a marble bust of George Washington from Mary Frances Drinker of Jenkintown, Pennsylvania. In her initial letter to Senator Everett Jordan of North Carolina, then chairman of the committee, the donor stated that the Washington bust—in the style of noted French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon—had belonged to her father, Henry Middleton Fisher, and had been on loan to the Philadelphia Museum of Art "for some years." In recommending the acquisition of the bust to the Joint Committee, Architect of the Capitol J. George Stewart noted Washington's close association with the design of the Capitol, adding that the first president had in fact laid the cornerstone for the building.

The artist of the Senate bust is unknown. While on loan to the Philadelphia Museum of Art from 1937 until its transfer to the Capitol in 1966, the bust was classified as "French, early 19th century." The work resembles the 1785 study of Washington by Houdon. In that year, Houdon had traveled with three assistants to Washington's home, Mount Vernon. There, he modeled a bust of the Revolutionary War hero in clay and made a life mask of Washington's face. The sculptor and his assistants subsequently produced many versions of Washington, including busts, statuettes, and statues in plaster, bronze, and marble.

Gustavus Eisen, in his study *Portraits of Washington,* identifies four styles of Washington busts sculpted by Houdon. The Senate bust most closely corresponds to the version Eisen terms "chest covered with drapery in toga style."[1] The sculptor of this bust, however, departed from Houdon's classic likeness both in the drape of the toga (which is not held by a button on the right shoulder, as is the toga of Houdon's bust) and in the wavy treatment of the hair.

George Washington

Unknown artist

French School, after Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828)
Marble, date unknown
31¼ x 22½ x 14¼ inches (79.4 x 57.2 x 36.2 cm)
Unsigned
Gift of Mary Frances Drinker, 1966
Accepted by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1966
Cat. no. 21.00020

George Washington Memorial Window

This scene depicts General George Washington, Baron Friedrich von Steuben of Prussia, and the Marquis de Lafayette of France in a Revolutionary War setting at the time of the Battle of Yorktown. Lafayette and von Steuben served as division commanders during the engagement. General Washington sits astride a white horse in the center of the image, with Lafayette standing to his right and von Steuben pictured behind Lafayette. It was at Yorktown in 1781 where Washington and the Continental army defeated the British forces led by General Cornwallis.

Baron von Steuben, a former Prussian military officer, arrived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1777 to aid the war effort, without pay or rank. Through strict training, von Steuben transformed a tired, ragged army into one that would triumph at Yorktown.

Lafayette, hearing of the plight of the colonies, purchased a ship with money inherited from his grandfather and sailed to America. At the age of 19, he was appointed major general in the Continental army. Like von Steuben, Lafayette also refused payment for his services. He became both a close friend and trusted advisor to Washington. In 1779 Lafayette traveled to his homeland to solicit French support for the colonies. He returned to America to aid Washington in his defeat of Cornwallis and the British at Yorktown, the last major battle of the American Revolution.

Maria Herndl's stained glass window is seen behind Senator Barry Goldwater, center, in the Senators' Dining Room in the Capitol, ca. 1964.
(U.S. Senate Historical Office)

Artist Maria Herndl first contacted Architect of the Capitol Elliot Woods in December 1904 regarding the purchase of her stained glass window of George Washington. Woods was to receive numerous letters on the subject over the next six years from Herndl. The artist hoped to sell her window to the United States government for display in the U.S. Capitol or some other federal building in Washington, D.C. The piece had been exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition in 1904, where contemporary accounts praised the work and noted that it was awarded a medal.

Herndl's passion for her project had already caused her some embarrassment—as well as, perhaps, some welcome publicity. While President Theodore Roosevelt was in St. Louis, she was arrested by Secret Service agents for attempting to see him, with the intent of persuading him to purchase the window for the Capitol. A newspaper account recalled some years later, "Apologies were profuse when the mistake which they had made was discovered, and the plucky little woman was given a commission to paint President Roosevelt's portrait."[1]

In her frequent correspondence, Herndl fervently appealed for the purchase of her window. In November 21, 1906, she wrote to Woods, "I cannot express how anxious I am to have the matter of this Art-window come to the desired result; as it means all and everything to me my whole life." Though Herndl was reassured that the delays were not any reflection on the work's quality, but rather on the lack of space, she continued her efforts.

The government finally purchased the piece in 1910 for $1,800. Because there was still no suitable display area for the window, it was lent to the Smithsonian Institution. In 1962 the window was returned to the Capitol and placed on display in the Senators' Dining Room (S–109).

Born in Munich, Bavaria, Maria Herndl studied in her homeland before moving to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to create decorative windows for public and private buildings. She was the only woman of her time to achieve success as a stained glass artist. Herndl's *The Fairy Queen* window received a medal at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, and her *Hans Christian Andersen Window* was completed in 1896 for the Milwaukee Public Library. The artist was working on a skylight for the Capitol when she died in 1912.

George Washington Memorial Window

Maria Herndl (1860–1912)

Stained lead glass, ca. 1904
73⅝ x 37½ inches (187 x 95.3 cm)
Signed (centered at bottom): Maria Herndl.
Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1910
Cat. no. 42.00001

George Washington at Princeton

(January 3, 1777)

The Battle of Princeton, New Jersey, fought on January 3, 1777, followed George Washington's legendary victory at nearby Trenton. There, Washington braved floating ice to cross the Delaware River in the early morning hours of December 26, 1776, and defeated a brigade of Hessian mercenaries. Afterwards, he returned to his Pennsylvania camp.

On December 30, Washington re-crossed the river and took position outside Trenton, on the south bank of Assunpink Creek. Under orders to destroy the American army and avenge the defeat at Trenton, the British commander, Lord Cornwallis, marched to meet Washington, leaving three regiments behind at Princeton as a rear guard. American detachments harassed and delayed the British advance, and it was not until dusk on January 2 that the British army arrived in front of the American position. After fitful skirmishing, Cornwallis decided to encamp for the night, intending to attack the Americans the next day. Expecting this strategy, Washington broke camp, leaving a few men to keep the fires lit and the appearance that all was unchanged. Taking an unguarded back road, he and his men slipped past Cornwallis's army during the night and, at dawn on January 3, encountered British reinforcements hurrying from Princeton to join Cornwallis. Unprepared for the sudden meeting, the American advance guard was routed. However, Washington soon arrived on the field, rallied his troops, and led a charge that put the British to flight and opened the way to Princeton. After a short engagement in the town itself, the remainder of the British garrison surrendered. By the time Cornwallis arrived on the outskirts of the town with his main force, Washington had slipped away.

The Battles of Trenton and Princeton are considered among Washington's greatest victories. The success of those 10 crucial days bolstered American morale and renewed confidence in the Revolutionary War effort.

Charles Willson Peale painted George Washington more times from life than any other artist. In 1772 Peale visited Washington's home, Mount Vernon, to portray the hero as a colonel of the Virginia regiment, the only pre-Revolutionary likeness of him. In 1795 Peale and other members of his family painted the president for the last time during his second term. All told, Peale had seven opportunities to paint the great man at different times in his career, and he replicated many of the paintings.

None was as popular as the enduring image of Washington after the Battle of Princeton, which was commissioned by the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania for its council chamber in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The original, now owned by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, was completed in early 1779, when Washington sat for Peale in Philadelphia. An immediate success, it precipitated a great demand for replicas. Of the estimated 18 replicas, the superlative Senate picture is the earliest recorded one that Peale made, although there was a contemporary published notice that five replicas had been ordered as early as February 1779. The Senate picture was purchased from the artist by the French Ambassador Conrad-Alexandre Gérard, probably on behalf of Louis XVI, and paid for with a bill of exchange on July 15, 1779. The ambassador, who sat for Peale for his own portrait in September, took the painting of Washington home to France shortly thereafter and presented it to the king. This scenario is confirmed in a letter from Peale, dated October 15, 1779, to Edmund Jenings in Brussels. Peale sent Jenings a miniature portrait of Washington, with the remark that "The Likeness is something different from that which his Excellency Sieur Gerard Carries for the King."[1]

Henry Tuckerman, in his 1867 *Book of the Artists*, wrote that "the misfortunes of the royal family occasioned its [the portrait's] sale, and it became the property of Count de Menou, who brought it again to this country."[2] It is not clear when that occurred, but the count is reported to have sold the painting in October 1841 to Charles B. Calvert of Prince George's County, Maryland, for $200. Calvert, in turn, deposited it with The National Institution for the Promotion of Science (incorporated in 1842 as simply the National Institute). In 1858 the art objects owned by the institute were transferred to the Smithsonian Institution. Explorer-naturalist Titian Ramsey Peale II, a son of the artist, petitioned the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents in 1870, claiming ownership

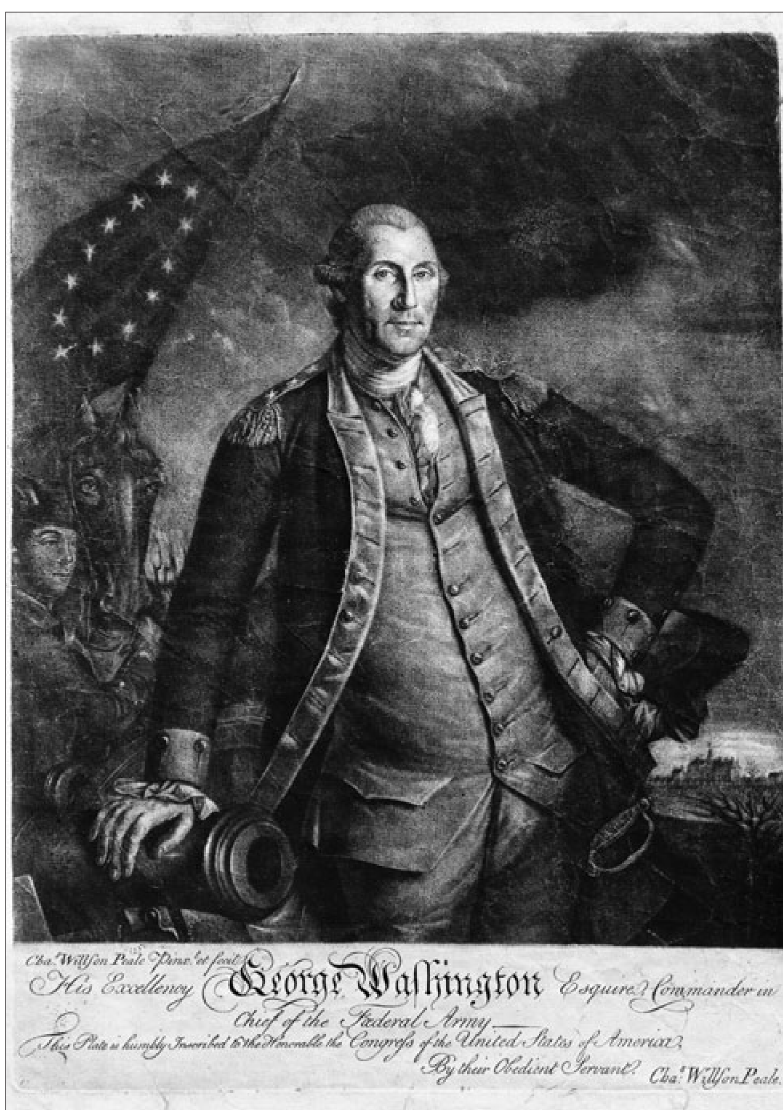
George Washington at Princeton

Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827)

Oil on canvas, 1779
91⅝ x 58⅜ inches (232.7 x 148.3 cm)
Signed and dated (lower left corner): C: W: Peale pinx^{t}: / Philadelphia 1779
Purchased by the Joint Committee on the Library, 1882
Cat. no. 31.00002

of the painting on behalf of his father's heirs. The claim was rejected because of insufficient evidence, but in February 1882 the U.S. Senate passed a resolution instructing the Joint Committee on the Library to "inquire into the expediency of purchasing the picture . . . now alleged to be the property of Titian R. Peale."[3] On April 10, 1882, the committee paid $5,000 to Titian Peale to acquire the portrait.

The portrait, with its specific reference to a battle, was a complicated undertaking. Of course, Peale invented the composition. Washington, wearing a blue and buff uniform with the blue sash of the commander-in-chief, leans lightly on the barrel of a captured cannon. Two Hessian flags captured at Trenton are beside him and at his feet. A British ensign lies on the ground to the left. Behind him, an officer holds his commander's horse, while above them flies the blue battle flag with a circle of 13 stars. A second horse is glimpsed at the right. On a shadowed rise in the left middle distance, beside a barren, wintry tree, are two mounted soldiers with rifles. One of them gestures toward a procession of 16 red-coated prisoners under guard farther back. Beyond is a group of six or seven buildings, including Nassau Hall, the principal building of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University). The hall was included for its significance in the battle—the engagement actually ended within its walls.



Charles Willson Peale published this mezzotint in 1780 based on his popular portrait of General George Washington.
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Charles Allen Munn, 1924)

It was a landscape Peale knew well. The artist had served in the Continental army for three years, commanding a company of Philadelphia militia. He saw action at the Battles of Trenton, Princeton, and Germantown. At Princeton, he found himself in the front line at the battle's climax, with Washington in command. It is rare, indeed, for a painter of military history to have participated in the engagement being depicted. Peale wrote in his diary that they "stood the Fire without regarding [the] Balls which whistled their thousand different notes around our heads, and what is very astonishing did little or no harm."[4] Peale

visited both Trenton and Princeton to observe and sketch the landscape in preparation for the painting, and he obviously had vivid memories of the Battle at Princeton.

To modern viewers, Washington's cross-legged pose—a complex play of angles and curves around the central vertical axis of the upper left leg, torso, and head—may seem awkward. The curves of the coat's edges, sash, and left arm are played against the abrupt angles of Washington's right elbow, his left knee, and his heels. Peale effectively repeats the shapes of the elbow and the brim of the hat, held inverted in Washington's right hand. Asymmetries animate the portrait: Washington leans slightly, which pulls his head just to the right of center, with the angle balanced by the inward angle of the battle flag.

Peale likely modeled this pose after one of Thomas Gainsborough's masterpieces, *Augustus Hervey, 3rd Earl of Bristol*, located at the National Trust's Ickworth House in England. Although the stance (derived from ancient Roman sculptural sources) was quite prevalent in English portraiture of the period, this Gainsborough painting of a naval captain offers the closest parallel to Peale's portrait, including a captured battle flag at the feet.

With two years of study and practice in London (1767–69) behind him, Peale had a solid knowledge of contemporary English portraiture. In the 1768 Society of Artists Exhibition in London, in which Peale himself exhibited, he had seen the Gainsborough painting. The most significant difference between the two subjects arises from Peale's literal directness: Where Gainsborough's Hervey is positioned on a diagonal within the picture space and looks away from the viewer, Peale's Washington is nearly frontal and looks directly at the viewer with a candid, affable expression. This is, in fact, a defining characteristic of Peale's portraiture. Avoiding any classical symbolism (he had earlier

The portrait *Augustus Hervey, 3rd Earl of Bristol* by Thomas Gainsborough shares close stylistic similarities with the Senate's painting of George Washington.
(Ickworth, The Bristol Collection [The National Trust] John Hammond)

One of many replicas Charles Willson Peale painted of his 1779 Washington portrait, this 1780 image varies from the Senate's version by depicting Washington after the Battle of Trenton and wearing his state sword.
(The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Collis P. Huntington, 1897)

pictured William Pitt in a Roman toga), Peale produced a realistic, accurate portrait of the general. At six foot two, Washington stood a full head above the average soldier in his army. He had narrow shoulders, wide hips, long arms and legs, and very large hands and feet. His head was small in relation to the length of his body.

Although Peale's likeness of Washington did not match the ideal canon of proportions espoused by the art academies, it was nonetheless accurate. Peale knew the general better than any other artist did, and his artistic abilities are not in doubt. In addition, the full-length portraits of Washington by John Trumbull and Jean-Antoine Houdon second the evidence of Peale's likeness. Only Gilbert Stuart's several full-length portraits seem closer to ideal proportions, and their greater public fame has given them an authority they do not deserve. Stuart idealized his sitters more than Peale did, and when he was painting the general's body, he used a visitor to his studio as a surrogate model. Apart from the face, Stuart's Washington fails as an accurate record of the hero's physical appearance.

In Peale's painting, Washington is strongly silhouetted against a pinkish-blue sky, with the horizon line at the mid-level of the canvas. It is dawn, the hour when the battle commenced. It might, at the same time, be the symbolic dawn of eventual success in the War for Independence. Optimism is embodied in the general's glowing face: Confident and self-possessed, this is the definitive image of George Washington at the apogee of his vigorous manhood and military career.

The popular success of *George Washington at Princeton* led to orders for as many replicas as Peale could produce. In August 1779 the artist wrote: "I have on hand a number of portraits of Gen. Washington. One the ambassador had for the Court of France, another is done for the Spanish Court, one other has been sent to the island of Cuba, and sundry others, which I have on hand are for private gentlemen."[5] Versions vary in size and composition—with the background and the treatment of the figure of Washington altered by Peale. Changes included replacing the soldiers and horses with a bleak winter landscape, updating the general's insignia according to the most recently issued orders, and giving greater prominence to the colonial flag. Other full-length versions by

Charles Willson Peale are found at Princeton University in New Jersey, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Colonial Williamsburg, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

The original *George Washington at Princeton* by Charles Willson Peale was commissioned for Independence Hall in Philadelphia and completed in 1779.

(Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Maria McKean Allen and Phebe Warren Downes through the bequest of their mother, Elizabeth Wharton McKean)