The Peale Family

Creation of a Legacy
1770–1870

Lillian B. Miller
Editor

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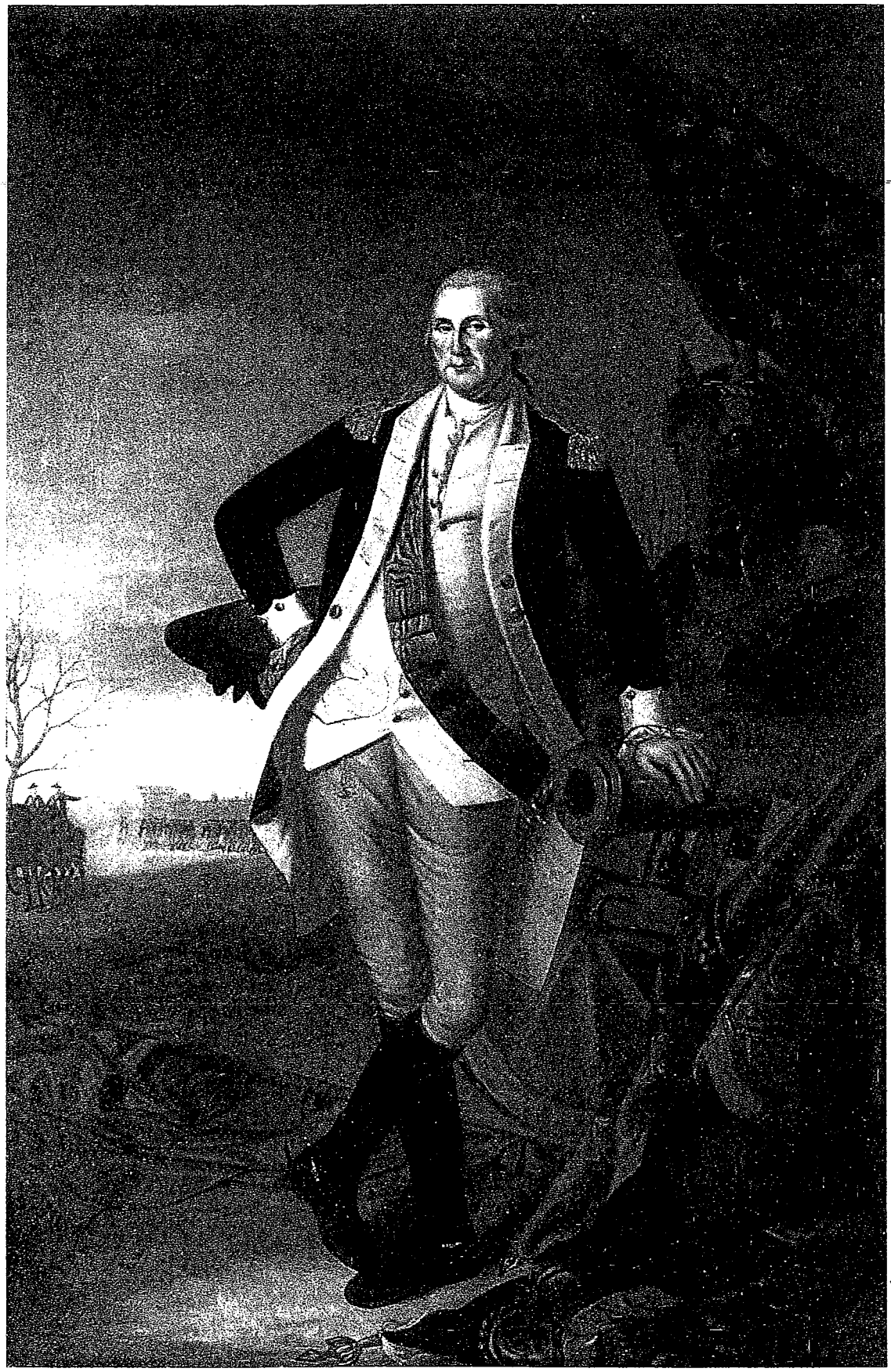


Two

Charles Willson Peale Portrays the Body Politic

David Steinberg

Charles Willson Peale explicitly pursued politics for only a few years following his move to Philadelphia in 1776, but his beliefs about the proper way to construct the social order affected his art over the course of some six decades of painting. Making portraits that emphasized expressive physical features, personal traits, and biographical facts, Peale shaped over a thousand likenesses to the curve of various ideals of citizenship. These paintings proposed to viewers what they ought to think about general categories of people as well as individual sitters.[1] Whether portraying highborn or lowborn, men or women, whites or blacks, each of Peale's pictures of the human body intervened in the ongoing debate over how to organize the body politic that dominated the era's public discourse.

Because this debate shifted its structure over the course of Peale's lifetime, it threw into relief different aspects of his rather stable system of values. Early on, his challenges to the standard connection between wealth and status represented what has come to be seen as progressive thinking for the 1760s and 1770s. In the nineteenth century, the hierarchical ideals that he endorsed put him at odds with new democratic ideals that rejected the traditional basis for organizing white society into ranks. Proceeding in chronological order through Peale's career, this essay aims to illuminate how his portraits aligned sitters with some contemporary categories of social order while distancing them from others.

At the outset of his career, seeking to please a wide variety of patrons and sitters who followed their own political convictions, Peale could not always depict his model citizenry. Indeed, in *Richard Bennett Lloyd,* made soon after he returned to his native Maryland from two years of study in London, he painted a portrait that promoted the very model of rank that he contested (see figure 2.1). The canvas embeds the features of one of the colony's wealthiest men within a sign system that claims how ease with vast property qualifies a white man for the highest of social positions. Looking off toward a landscape vista that suggests the enormous Lloyd holdings on Maryland's Eastern Shore, the image of the sitter denotes Lloyd's status as gentry. Its nonchalant relaxation signals a mastery of the body-management skills associated with high station.[2] With his arm leaning against a festooned plinth (a synecdoche for a grand domestic building), the painted figure acts out the

PLATE 67
Charles Willson Peale
Washington After the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777, 1779–1782
Oil on canvas, 96 ½ x 61 ½ in. (245.1 x 156.2 cm)
Princeton University Art Gallery, Princeton, New Jersey; Bequest of Charles A. Munn

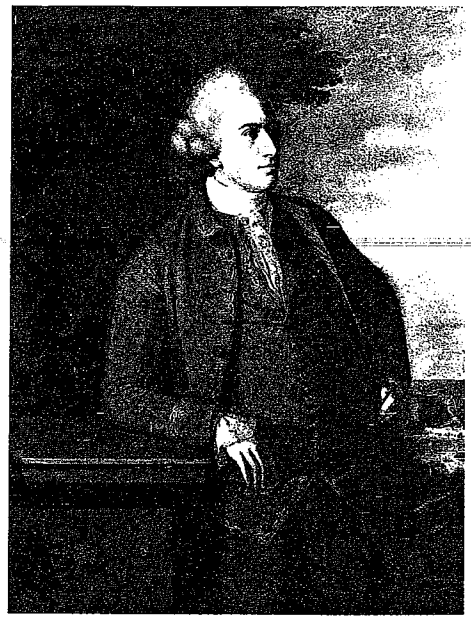


FIGURE 2.1
Charles Willson Peale
Richard Bennett Lloyd, 1771
Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. (116.8 x 91.4 cm)
The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Delaware, Gift of H. F. du Pont

FIGURE 2.2
John Hesselius
Thomas Sprigg, 1764
Oil on canvas
North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles V. Cheney

idea that property is a stable basis for rank. Moreover, by imitating the format, pose, and setting of *Thomas Sprigg,* a portrait by John Hesselius of another of Maryland's wealthiest men, the painting declares both a conservative social agenda for its sitter and his solidarity with other members of his class (figure 2.2).[3] Yet some fifty years later, Peale recalled with scorn Lloyd's reputation as a miser who saved rusty nails,[4] a piece of gossip that demonstrates the painter's distance from his act of accommodating sitter to social role when composing his portrait.

Peale's own ideal for white men found expression in another pictorial borrowing from the early 1770s. When depicting the gesture of a rule pen raised toward the head to signal creative inspiration in the portrait of the architect William Buckland (figure 2.3), Peale drew upon a portrait of himself with *porte-crayon* that Benjamin West had painted and presented to his occasional pupil in London (figure 2.4). The personal nature of this source shows Peale identifying with his sitter's capacity for ingenious design. Both men would also have recognized the similarity between their rise from low social origins to a respectable middling position in the local prestige order, a rise proclaimed if not propelled by their possessing portraits of themselves.[5]

The incommensurate models of social identity represented by *Lloyd* and *Buckland*—one that valued a man for what he inherited and one that emphasized what he did—generated a tension that fueled dramatic changes in the social structure of Annapolis and other cities during the late colonial period. The unquestioned attribution of the highest rank to men of wealth collapsed along with the traditional belief that such men always acted with disinterest on behalf of the common good. Simultaneously, men who lacked genteel social connections sought to fill the vacuum of credibility created by the withdrawal of faith from the old elite. They ran for political office and, in Philadelphia, organized extralegal committees and militia.[6]

As a former apprentice who possessed little property, Peale recognized the contribution of all ranks of society to the public welfare. But unlike many other men trained as artisans, he did not take his humble origins to mean that he could not participate in society at higher levels. His occupation as a painter of easel pictures, with its connection to the lofty tradition of the Fine Arts, provided him entrée to elevated circles such as the Homony Club of Annapolis. Entering into politics upon arriving in Philadelphia, he served on several committees representing middling and lower-labor-class interests. He also availed himself of newly created opportunities for men with little property to hold public office, and occupied a seat in the Pennsylvania legislature for the 1779–1780 session.[7] Not only in the realm of portrait painting, but in the political arena as well, Peale took on the estimable and challenging task of representing his contemporaries.

On the basis of his experiences as a painter in the social crucible of Annapolis during the 1760s and early 1770s, Peale came to prize the personal qualities that enabled him to advance his social rank above that of saddler, a trade already relatively high in the hierarchy of manual trades due to its complexity. What he learned during those years also informed his goals for his portraiture and spurred him on to master the formal means to fulfill them. It was not until 1818, however, that Peale finally jotted down a principle that

had guided much of his portrait production. On the occasion of his failure to get a meritorious but unattractive man to sit for him, he proclaimed his indifference to superficial appearances: "It is the mind I would wish to represent through the features of the man, and he that does not possess a good mind, I do not desire to Portray his features."[8] In its invocation of individual capacity, this statement complemented Peale's politics. This is not to say that he dismissed the values of a social hierarchy that accorded top rank to well-off, well-educated, well-bred, and well-connected white men. He simply added another criterion.

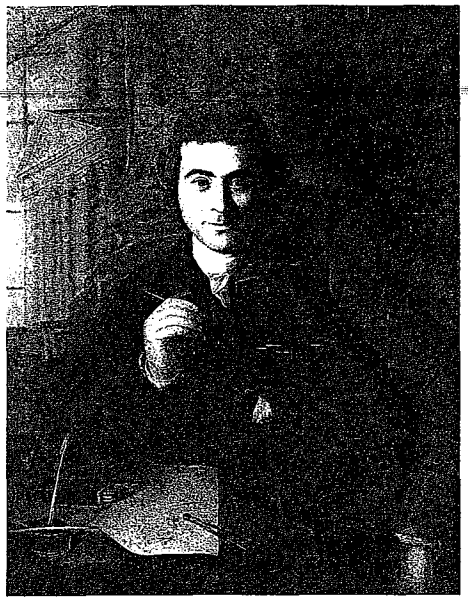
When considering what made a mind "good," Peale made no distinction between intellect and morality. Almost every element in his 1804 list of the highest mental faculties relates to the advancement of the public welfare:

> The Supreme Creator in his goodness has indowed man with a reflecting mind, he can compare the present with the past, he knows from the combination of certain things the results, he can calculate the revolution of the Planets, he can produce by labor of the hands various and wonderful works of art, and with knowledge of the various powers, of the lever, the screw & the wedge, he can make machines to lessen labour, and multiply the conveniences & comforts of Life, he can analize & know the componant parts of every kind of Substance by acutal [actual] experiments, so that nature are subjects of his researchs to acquire knowledge.[9]

Not surprisingly, these capacities gloss many of Peale's portraits. *William Buckland,* for example, fulfills the claim that man "can produce by labor of the hands various and wonderful works of art," although that painting emphasizes the mind that designs what the hands of others will build.

Peale's desire to represent good minds stemmed from a vision of the social functions of portraiture, according to which the genre could both honor minds that were worth commemorating and supply viewers with role models. By providing prescriptive images of ideal mental qualities, he in effect reconceived the contemporary history painter's ideal of an *exemplum virtutis* as an *exemplum ingenium.*[10] Classical republican thought posited a direct correlation between intellect and virtue, identifying the possession of the former as necessary to the exercise of the latter. As Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1779, only those few "whom nature has endowed with genius and virtue" could "be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred rights and liberties of their fellow citizens."[11] Not only would the possession of a good mind put a man in a class above other men, but in a successful republic it was an essential attribute of such a man's capacity for leadership.

Answering the question why Peale sought to portray good minds is less problematic than accounting for the way he attempted to portray them. Although he asserted that "It is the mind I would wish to represent through the features of the man," it is unclear what a man with a good mind would look like. At least some contemporary viewers had no difficulty determining when the appearance of a good mind was absent from a portrait head.[12] As the British painter Thomas Gainsborough lamented about a seventeenth-century portrait of Shakespeare, "Damn the original picture of him, *with your*



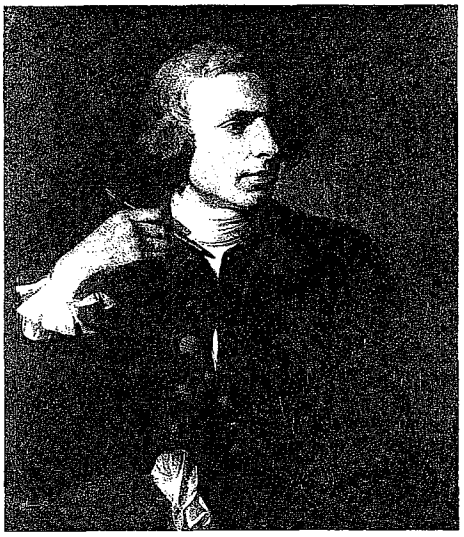


FIGURE 2.3
Charles Willson Peale
William Buckland, 1774 and 1787
Oil on canvas, 27 ½ x 36 5/16 in. (69.9 x 93 cm)
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; Mabel Brady Garvan Collection

FIGURE 2.4
Benjamin West
Charles Willson Peale, c. 1768
Oil on canvas
Collection of The New-York Historical Society

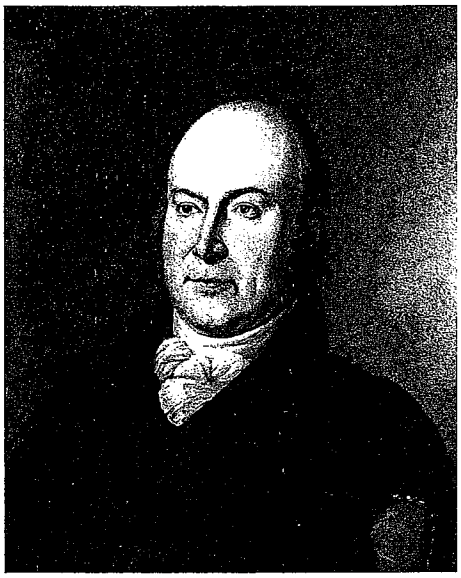


FIGURE 2.5
Martin Droeshout
William Shakespeare, c. 1623
Engraving
By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.

FIGURE 2.6
Charles Willson Peale
John Quincy Adams, 1818
Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in. (61 x 50.8 cm)
Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

leave; for I think a stupider face I never beheld . . . it is impossible that such a mind and ray of heaven could shine with such a face and pair of eyes as that picture has" (figure 2.5).[13] When depicting Secretary of State John Quincy Adams with an enormous, illuminated pate similar to the one Martin Droeshout engraved almost two centuries earlier, Peale stumbled upon the same unappealing solution to the challenge of representing a powerful mind (figure 2.6). Perhaps the declaration of his "good mind" agenda to his diary on the same day that he had the first of three sittings with Adams made him overly self-conscious about his goal. In this instance, the sitter himself registered irritation, declaring how Peale "has made a Caricature of my Portrait."[14]

Despite such occasional failures, from the outset of his career Peale had been captivated by the possibility of rendering intelligence. In 1763, during his first trip to Philadelphia to buy art supplies, he saw a self-portrait (unlocated) by the recent English émigré Christopher Steele. As Peale described the picture in his autobiography, it was "a half-length portrait of himself an entire front face, very like . . . good drawing and very expressive in a countenance of penetrating earnestness, with great force and relief." Unfortunately, apart from general references to good drawing and relief, Peale did not note the means by which this painting worked its spell. None of Steele's colonial work has been identified, but his English oeuvre includes faces whose penetrating earnestness compare with mature works by Peale.[15]

Peale's encounter with a representation of a good mind preceded his ability to paint one himself. Before his London trip, he produced faces with innocent, sweet expressions like those found in the contemporary work of his teacher John Hesselius.[16] Only after he went to London was he able to depict convincing signs of intelligent life, and probably first in the medium of watercolor on ivory (see plate 68).[17] The superb head of Matthias Bordley—turned in three-quarters view, inclined slightly, and gazing directly at the viewer from the center of the composition—is nearly spherical at the top. By providing the viewer with a stable point of mental contact in a busy composition, it not only represents an intelligence but functions as a locus of order radiating outward. Since the days that Peale first walked the streets of Annapolis as a boy he had been familiar with the use of geometric forms as organizing hubs (see plate 3); his double-portrait miniature is the earliest extant example of his employing this principle in portraiture.[18]

The head of Matthias Bordley, augmented at the right side of the painting by the sharply narrowing oval head of his brother Thomas—an unlikely seat of thought—employs a representational strategy similar to the one set forth in Robert Dodsley's popular *The Preceptor* (1748). This encyclopedic primer advised aspiring gentlemen-amateur draftsmen to "procure a Piece of Box, or other smooth even-coloured Wood, and get it turned in the Shape of an Egg, which is pretty nearly the shape of an human Head."[19] The accompanying plate illustrated how to articulate this shape with vertical and horizontal lines, rotate it left or right, and tilt it forward or back. The idea that the head can be defined in terms of geometric components was part of the broad contemporary concern with essential forms that affected fields of endeavor as diverse as architectural practice and mass production[20] (recall Peale's remark that man "can analize & know the componant parts of every

PLATE 68
Charles Willson Peale
Matthias and Thomas Bordley, 1767
Watercolor on ivory, 3 5/8 x 4 1/8 in. (9.2 x 10.5 cm)
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Museum purchase and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Lloyd Goldsborough, Jr.

FIGURE 2.7
Charles Willson Peale
David Rittenhouse, 1772
Oil on canvas
American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia

kind of Substance by acutal experiments"). To identify the oval as the basic schema for a portrait institutes a systematic approach to the genre. As dramatized by the cut-off face in the lower left of Dodsley's plate (no. 11), geometry provided an armature onto which could be grafted whatever distinctive marks approximated the sitter's appearance.

The visual rhyme between face and drawing in *David Rittenhouse* makes that painting a key text for explaining how Peale understood the oval head's capacity to characterize a male sitter (figure 2.7). Cradling a geometer's stylus in hand, the astronomer gestures with outstretched index finger toward a drawing that shows a comet at his fingertip, the earth's orbit as a circle, and that orbit traversed at two points by the comet's orbit. The ostensible action is a lesson about scientific principles applied and information gained in 1770 when Rittenhouse discovered a comet and plotted its trajectory (recall Peale's remark that man "can calculate the revolution of the Planets").[21] Using a convention of astronomical drawing that represents a point of view beyond the limits of earth, the diagram attests to the regular, oval motions of a macrocosm whose rhythms Rittenhouse's mind—housed within a regular, oval microcosm—discovered through observation and extrapolation. The portrait as a whole not only invites viewers to understand the nature of rational movements of the universe, but advances rationality as an ideal for the motions of the mind.

The abstract sign of the oval head appears with some frequency in Peale's work; yet, whether he used it or more naturalistic contours in a given portrait, he also painted facial surfaces that, due to psychological processes still incompletely understood, invite viewers to project onto them vivacity and sensibility.[22] The telling phrase with which he first described the contents of his Revolutionary-War portrait series evidences his intent to depict bodily forms as if they naturally coincided with mental qualities. In 1779, he conceived a plan "to Etch a Set of Heads of the Principal Charactors Who has distinguished themselves during this Contest."[23] He did not make such a series of prints until 1787 (see plates 7,9), but he was well under way with a set of paintings on this theme by 1783 when he reflected "I have between 30 or 40 portraits of Principal Charactors, this Collection has cost me much time & labour."[24]

While "Principal Charactors" can be synonymous with "important people," the phrase denotes "leading personal characteristics" in a widely disseminated usage from the article "The principal Characters and Virtues of the Romans, with respect to War" in Charles Rollin's popular *The Method of Teaching and Studying the Belles Lettres.*[25] Under this rubric Rollin considered such traits as "Perseverance and Constancy in a Resolution once taken and decreed" and "The Habit of inuring themselves to painful Labours and military Exercises." His attention to qualities especially esteemed among military men fits neatly with Peale's concerns, given the exclusive attention to army personnel in his first idea for a portrait print series and the centrality of men of war in his earliest paintings for his museum. The passages quoted above, then, are simultaneously literal and figurative, announcing that he sought to etch heads—and had painted portraits—of characteristics. It is as if his depicted bodies of specific people were also allegories of personal traits.

At least one museum visitor responded to the paintings in such terms. Upon seeing *John Paul Jones* (figure 2.8), the British commodore Sir Edmund Affleck (d. 1788) declared, "I know not who this portrait is intended to represent; but, however great the merits of others may be, I see no expression of countenance in the collection, that gives to me so perfect an idea of bold and inflexible resolution"[26] . Peale may not have labeled his installation clearly, or Affleck may not have cared to read whatever texts were available. And it is probably no coincidence that he responded so strongly to the portrait of a man in the same line of military service as himself. Nevertheless, independent of any acquaintance with the sitter, Affleck understood a portrait to represent personal traits. Even the characteristic he singled out for praise —"bold and inflexible resolution"—closely resembled one that Rollin had noted in the Roman military—"Perseverance and Constancy in a Resolution." The visual signs for this in Jones may have been the uplifted eyes and the dramatic upward tilt of the entire head toward the sitter's proper left side, an angle emphasized by the lines of his hat.

FIGURE 2.8
Charles Willson Peale
John Paul Jones, c. 1781
Oil on canvas
Independence National Historical Park Collection, Philadelphia

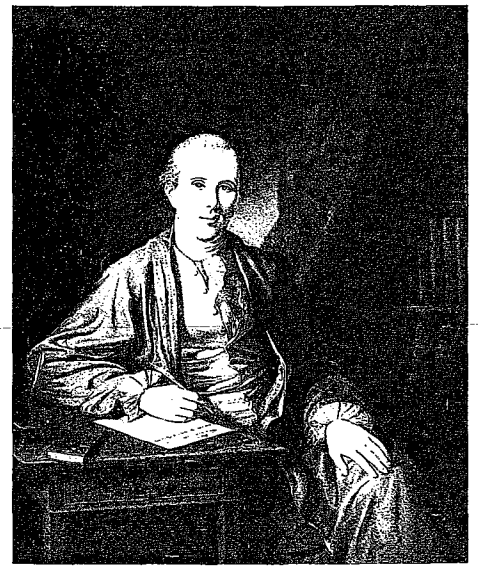
While the representation of good minds might seem to offer a means to promote a meritocracy—a social hierarchy based solely on individual merit—its meaning was ambivalent, and shifted according to the sitter's class background, sex, and age. In *Timothy Matlack* (Private collection; on loan to Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), whose sitter lacked much property or high social standing but who served as secretary to the Pennsylvania Assembly's Supreme Executive Council from 1777 to 1782, individual talent as the primary basis for rank is affirmed.[27] In its almost singular attention to government service and its intelligent fulfillment, the portrait declares its sitter's qualification for office. In a complementary manner, it validates the assembly's founding principles.

Constituted in 1776, the Pennsylvania Assembly was a radical experiment in government that rejected the typical bicameral structure of a popularly elected lower house and elite upper house. Cast as a unicameral legislature, the assembly purported to provide a government in which the people's representation would not favor the special interests of the wealthy. It even limited the power of its body of overseers, the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania.[28]

Affirming the rejection of social attributes that had given rise to the assembly, *Timothy Matlack* presents a figure set against an empty background while including a head-on-hand gesture and forehead-indicating finger that denotes a conspicuous capacity for cerebration oriented toward action. Significantly, the only other instance of Peale using this gesture in all of his portraits of living men appears in *Thomas Paine,* a portrait of another sitter without wealth or proper social connections (figure 2.9).[29] The abundance of published and written materials in Matlack's portrait indicates other credentials for office, such as a familiarity with the law (the legal volumes below the table), piety (the New Testament on the table), and industriousness (the neatly bound bundle of correspondence). The projecting seal-adorned scroll concludes prominently with an imitation of Matlack's signature, thereby announcing his service as keeper of the council seal.[30] Perhaps the most surprising evidence of the workings of Matlack's mind in the painting is

FIGURE 2.9
James Watson (after lost Charles Willson Peale painting)
Thomas Paine, published 1783
Engraving
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

The London printmaker erred in lettering the subject's name in this print, which he took from an original painting (now lost) owned at the time by South Carolinian Henry Laurens (1724–92).



its careful delineation of worry lines and crow's feet. These traces of prior facial muscle movement set the portrait far apart from the idealization common in portraits of well-to-do sitters; by analogy, the wrinkles announce Matlack's distance from such sitters.

Alternatively, the portrayal of wealthy, established men such as Thomas Wharton (1777, private collection) and Samuel Mifflin (figure 2.10) with intelligent faces reinforced conservative ideals. These paintings of "good minds" evidenced their sitters' membership among the "natural aristocracy," a contempory category devised by those whose hegemony the new politics threatened. Alarmed by the rejection of the stewardship of the highborn, Wharton and Mifflin nonetheless continued to occupy posts in the Pennsylvania Assembly. In their portraits, however, they affirmed their connection to other, more reputable social institutions. Both men had their wives painted along with themselves, so that each pair of paintings represents a couple bound in wedlock (figure 2.11).[31] (Matlack had been married since 1758, but his portrait apparently had no pendant.)[32] Depicting the council's president Thomas Wharton, Peale included law books below the table and a tabled sheet inscribed with council matters, as in the *Matlack,* but in the window vista of the Philadelphia coastline he recalled the source of Wharton's wealth in mercantile activity. The nearer view of sea and ship in *Samuel Mifflin* identifies the same basis of prosperity for its sitter. In all three cases, pictorial background is a visual metaphor for social background.

An even more extreme rejection of the assembly is represented by *Benjamin Rush,* in which the cerebral figure in the casual undress of a morning gown sits secluded in a study that lacks any window to the outside world (figure 2.12). Rush had initially criticized the assembly in restrained terms, and soon disowned the radical movement entirely. He wrote bitterly about the Pennsylvania constitution during these years, calling it "absurd in its principles," and lamenting how it "substituted a mob government to one of the happiest governments in the world." Elsewhere he scorned how "They call it a democracy—a mobocracy in my opinion would be more proper," and claimed that "my family and my business now engross all my time and attention. My country I have long ago left to the care of Timy. Matlack, Tom Paine, Charles Wilson Peale, & Co," mocking these men for claiming a capacity to govern.[33]

Showing Rush at a scene of writing similar, if not identical, to the place where he produced these letters, Peale offers a pictorial counterpart to Rush's rejection of the world of politics. A refined gentleman imagining himself addressing others of his station, he pauses to consider a work in progress. His paper reads, "Sec. 29. We come now gentlemen to investigate the cause of earthquakes." Because there is no record that Rush ever wrote or delivered a treatise on such disasters, however, this sentence needs to be considered an invention, contrived to serve the purposes of the canvas as a whole. The pose of preparing an oration showed the scholarly doctor contributing to the public good in a way other than political participation. Rush believed that every citizen of a republic should "be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property."[34] From this perspective, his portrait shows him fulfilling this ideal and providing viewers with an exemplum of civic activity.

The specific oration in the painting, however, represents Rush's uneasy relation to Philadelphia's public sphere in the 1780s, for it sublimates into the imagery of a natural phenomenon his belief that government by the assembly threatened society's foundations. To think of an earthquake in relation to the depicted scene is to undermine the sense of permanence and stability it otherwise constructs with such care. The sentence itself seeks to contain this potential violence: reason can discover the origins of geological disruption; a lecture on the topic can proceed in a measured manner from part to part. Including elements of both order and chaos, the painting depicts the sitter's models of society and citizenry constrained by the pressure of current events.

The similar setting in *Julia Stockton (Mrs. Benjamin) Rush,* the painting that Rush commissioned of his wife on the occasion of their marriage in 1776 and to which he later added his own portrait as a pendant, casts its sitter's contribution to public life in terms of what she could achieve within the domestic sphere (see plate 69). With a head as oval as any in Peale's portraiture, the image declared that its sitter had a good mind.

The distinctive iconography of oval-headed women helps to illuminate what this meant to some eighteenth-century men. As Hogarth commented in his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753): "this figure [of the oval] lessen'd at one end, like the egg, thereby being more varied [than the circle], is singled out by the author of all variety, to bound the features of a beautiful face."[35] Peale endorsed similar associations between ovals and beauty in 1790 when introducing an autobiographical fragment with a description of his recently deceased wife: "Her face a perfect oval . . . In short she would be called handsome amongst the most beautifull of an assembly of her Sex."[36] Calling the late Rachel Brewer Peale "Miss Rachel" at the beginning of this passage, Peale paired the ideal language of geometry with an invocation of a halcyon time prior to the intervention of childbearing and death. With portraits of Mrs. Rush, Mrs. Peale (see figure 1), and other female sitters, Peale negotiated between the representation of living, mutable sitters and timeless ideals. Favoring the imagery of archetypal purity over that of biology, his conceptually driven paintings seem to fulfill the prescription made by the London portrait painter and theorist Jonathan Richardson, who earlier in the century declared that "the painting-room must be like Eden before the fall, like Arcadia."[37]

Peale's thoughts on female beauty clarify how he intended pictures of women with oval heads to characterize sitters and to provide role models for female viewers:

> The temper of a man in a powerful degree fashions as I may say, the turns of the features. The constant exercise of any one passion the governing mucels being in constant action fixes the growing form—therefore as often as I find opportunity of giving instruction to young ladies, I teli them if they wish to be beautiful, they must be good natured and kind to all around them, but if they suffer ill natured Passions to govern them, their features will be moulded into extreme homelyness, and all their charms will vanish, and disgust be their Portion.[38]

Invoking the venerable belief that signs of personal qualities appear on surfaces of bodies, Peale's conversations with "young ladies" shifted the traditional

FIGURE 2.10
Charles Willson Peale
Samuel Mifflin, 1777–80
Oil on canvas, 49 7/8 x 39 3/4 in. (126.7 x 100.1 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Eggleston Fund, 1922 (22.153.1)

FIGURE 2.11
Charles Willson Peale
Rebecca (Mrs. Samuel) Mifflin and Granddaughter, 1777–80
Oil on canvas, 50 1/8 x 40 1/4 in. (127.3 x 102.2 cm).
The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Eggleston Fund, 1922 (22.153.2)

FIGURE 2.12
Charles Willson Peale
Benjamin Rush, 1783 and 1786
Oil on canvas, 50 1/4 x 40 in. (127.6 x 101.6 cm)
The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum,
Delaware

emphasis away from reading such signs toward controlling their formation. He cast himself as an adviser, cultivating listeners' mental self-government by manipulating whatever fears they might have had about their appearance as they grew older.[39]

In this passage, Peale's correlation of beauty with good nature and kindness marks the latter as qualities possessed by female sitters portrayed with oval—therefore beautiful—heads. In the portrait of Mrs. Rush, such characteristics complement the act of playing a cittern in the assertions it makes for the sitter. Just as music soothes the savage breast, Mrs. Rush, through the twin influence of her person and the beautiful sounds she created, had a refining effect on her new husband as well as on all that transpired in her new home. A beautiful object in itself, the painting might claim a similar function. Representing the sitter as an exemplum of beauty and kindness, the canvas presented female viewers with ideal physical and personal qualities toward which the painter believed they should strive. Given the contemporary belief in the connection of the domestic and political spheres, the effects of both sitter and painting on home life could have been understood to influence the world at large.[40]

Although men necessarily dominate any narrative about politics in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, republican ideology reserved for women an opportunity to serve the state by bestowing on them the role of educating boys who would grow up to lead the new nation.[41] As Benjamin Rush put it in his "Thoughts upon Female Education" (1787), "the equal share that every citizen has in the liberty and the possible share that he may have in the government of our country, make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government."[42] Rush's own wife could not play such a role in her wedding portrait, but by showing a woman educating a boy in *Mrs. James Smith (Mrs. Patrick Campbell) and Grandson,* Peale characterized his elderly sitter in terms of the most important role available to her for contributing to the public welfare (figure 2.13). It is telling that Peale never portrayed a man instructing a child in the art of reading.

The books with which he paired children demonstrate a concern to perpetuate this distinction between different kinds of republican action over the course of generations. While Smith oversees her grandson's training for public oratory with a lesson on "The Art of Speaking," Rebecca Mifflin teaches her granddaughter about familial ideals from a page crammed with figured medallions (see figure 2.11). The entire painting presents such a lesson, inasmuch as the grandmother's embrace of her granddaughter imitates the central picture of "Filial Love," with its large female figure resting her right hand on a short figure's shoulder. To the extent that these paintings provided the grandchildren with images of their appropriate roles, boys were to train for active participation in civic affairs, such as law and politics, while girls were to become grandmothers who, like their forebears, would prepare boys for adulthood in one way and girls in another.

In his model hierarchy, Peale reserved the highest rank for men who applied their good minds to leading others in advancing the public welfare. Although the brain belongs to the realm of biology and nature, the mind is

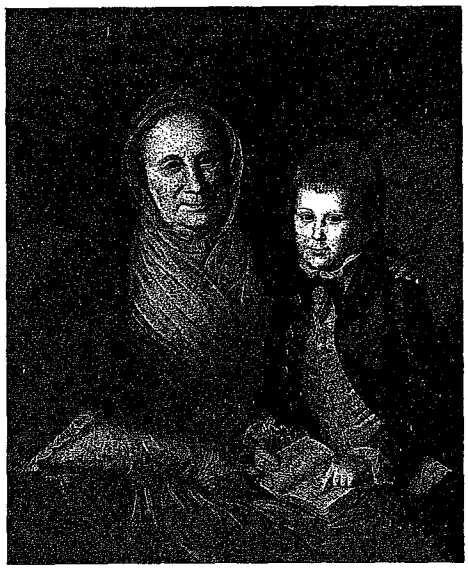


PLATE 69
Charles Willson Peale
Julia Stockton (Mrs. Benjamin) Rush, 1776
Oil on canvas, 49 ½ x 39 ¼ in. (125.7 x 99.7 cm)
The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Delaware

FIGURE 2.13
Charles Willson Peale
Mrs. James Smith (Mrs. Patrick Campbell) and Grandson, 1776
Oil on canvas
National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Levering Smith, Jr., and Museum Purchase

always subject to social forces that determine its development; similarly, society circumscribes the availability of opportunities to acquire leadership positions. While the 1770s saw the advent of a leveling institution like the Pennsylvania Assembly, its brief existence was marked by continuous efforts to wrest it from radical hands. More typically, traditional ideas about hierarchy informed the selection of leaders both military and civil. For this reason, when Peale fulfilled the commission from the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania to portray the commander in chief of the Continental Army in 1779, he could simultaneously honor both his concern with individual talent and respect for an established elite.

FIGURE 2.14
Charles Willson Peale
Conrad Alexander Gérard, 1779
Oil on canvas, 95 x 59⅛ in (241.3 x 150.2 cm)
Independence National Historical Park Collection, Philadelphia

Celebrating George Washington's early success at the Battle of Princeton (January 1777), Peale flanked the general at right with an anonymous groom and at left with triumphant soldiers leading British redcoats away from the recaptured Nassau Hall (see figure 31). The convention of perspective diminution offers a pretext for the use of a hieratic scale that distinguishes Washington from less auspicious countrymen. Peale derived this symbolic aspect of the composition, as well as the use of a cannon as a foreground prop, from West's *General Robert Monckton* (c. 1764, private collection). He made a decorous choice of source, for the Virginia planter and now full-time commander came as close as any American to the social rank of the English aristocrat and military leader celebrated by West in his full-length, grand-manner portrait.[43] As in a portrait such as *Richard Bennett Lloyd* (see figure 2.1), the casual ease conveyed by Washington's cross-legged stance denotes the "naturalness" of his aristocratic status (see plate 67).[44]

The striking ratio of head to figure length in the painting has sometimes been understood to represent an anomaly in the body of Washington, but it actually derives from an effort to make his image a vehicle for signifying greatness. Dodsley's *Preceptor* instructed readers to draw people so that "the Head is one-seventh Part of the Length of the Figureure," noting, however, that "the best-proportioned Figureures of the Ancients are 7 Heads ¾ in Height."[45] The standard proportion coincides with the contemporary full-length *Conrad Alexander Gérard* (figure 2.14), while the purportedly antique system describes the depicted Washington almost exactly: the ratio between his 9-inch head and 69⅝-inch total body height is 1 to 7.74.[46] Imitating what he thought was the ideal form from civilization's golden age, Peale exercised his neoclassical turn of mind.[47]

Despite the obscurity of some of its iconography, Peale's 1779 *Washington* unambiguously declared a lofty status for its sitter, a message antagonistic to the egalitarian spirit that had given rise to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania in the first place.[48] Slashed by "Sons of Lucifer" in 1781 as it hung in the Council chamber,[49] it was not reclaimed upon its repair; by 1783 it appeared in Peale's museum gallery. Given that almost every sitter in that collection also combined individual achievement with traditional qualifications for high social rank, the full-length portrait found a wholly suitable home in its maker's museum.[50]

Promoting hierarchies in general and heads in particular, the museum portraits coincided with Peale's social philosophy in ways that confirm the insight of anthropologist Mary Douglas about culturally specific correlations

between conceptions of the human body and social organization.[51] Filling the museum with paintings that either used the head as a module to determine a figure's length or isolated the head in a bust-length format, Peale followed conventional portrait practices attributing priority to the head over all other body parts (see, for example, plate 40). In an analogous manner, he believed that society should be a stratified structure with a clearly defined head.

Peale had supported the Pennsylvania Assembly during its radical phase, an organization that William Hooper described in 1776 as a "motley mixture of limited monarchy, and an execrable democracy—a Beast without a head."[52] Yet when Peale, the painter-cum-politician, refused to endorse the militia at the Fort Wilson riot of 1779, he supported the idea of absolute private property rights rather than a conception of the value of property for its service to the entire social body. He did not seek office again upon his defeat at the polls in 1780; after Fort Wilson, with the alliance between middle-class radicals and the laboring classes at an end, he no longer had a position at the head of a movement.[53] He also despaired of a politics of factionalism in which neither side ever clearly headed affairs. He recalled in 1784 that, "finding the party desputes of this State intolerably disagreable, four Years past I have laid politicks aside and persued the Brush."[54]

Established during a period of disquieting change, Peale's museum was intended to impart to visitors a sense that their new nation had a well-defined leadership. As James Madison declared in *The Federalist,* no. 62 (1788), "no government, any more than an individual, will long be respected without being truly respectable; nor be truly respectable, without possessing a certain portion of order and stability."[55] By displaying pictures of men who could be recognized as heads of state, the museum institutionalized order and stability from the top down. Furthermore, Peale avoided presenting sitters in ways that could call to mind the anti-Federalist rhetoric that accused Federalists of attempting to perpetuate the old hierarchy of wealth and traditional breeding with such obvious "qualifications of authority . . . as the dictatorial air, the magisterial voice, the imperious tone, the haughty countenance, the lofty look, the majestic mien."[56] Sporting uniform oval liners, the museum portraits presented their venerable sitters united in a common cause.[57]

The arrangement that Peale devised for the Long Room in Independence Hall introduced complementary structures of meaning (see figure 10.3). Looking at the array of paintings hung above the niches installed with stuffed fish and bird corpses, visitors could interpret the depicted male sitters as representatives of the human species situated atop the Great Chain of Being. While such a biological approach to the display allowed viewers to find themselves represented in it, a consideration of the installation in terms of the sitters' elevated social class would mean that the display did not represent visitors who lacked wealth, breeding, and the opportunity to lead.[58] Instead, the installation of the portraits high in the gallery offered such people a spatial and ocular metaphor of their limited social rank.

The only African-American that Peale depicted in the format of a museum portrait was "an Old Negro named Yarrow Mamout," who in 1818 claimed to be 133 years of age (figure 2.15).[59] Peale first used longevity as a criterion for gallery inclusion in 1809 to promote a correlation between

FIGURE 2.15
Charles Willson Peale
Yarrow Mamout, 1819
Oil on canvas
Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

the duration of one's life and the temperance with which one lived it.[60] While the portraits in this group are a colorful lot, *Yarrow Mamout* is the only one characterized in terms of the sitter's lack of control over his personal presentation. The left side of his inner coat collar creases properly in accordance with the cut of the garment, yet the right side flips up and sticks out. Portraying his sitter as genial and soulful but oblivious to his violation of sartorial decorum, Peale claimed Mamout as an exemplum of human longevity while marginalizing him relative to social conventions, and by extension, to full participation in the social order.[61] Accordingly, Peale never mentioned the painting in any of his gallery catalogues, and it is not clear if it ever hung among other museum portraits.

Commissioned almost three decades earlier by a son of its elderly sitters, *Mr. and Mrs. James Gittings and Granddaughter* includes black and white people in a single composition, but segregates them into discrete human communities through its representation of space, hieratic scale, detail, and action (see figure 15). In a distant field generalized figures of blacks toil, while on a foreground terrace individualized whites sit by a balustrade and draped column. As images of domesticated nature, the potted plants and chained ground squirrel mediating the transition between these spaces symbolize the Gittings' capacity to make transported African slaves and their descendants into a productive labor force, and (even though the Gittings do none of the work) to tame a fecund earth into a source of agricultural products. While painting this portrait, Peale noted that his elderly sitters' younger son "is a hearty, hard working boy. He constantly reaped the whole harvest."[62] But instead of an historically accurate image of black-white collaboration, the canvas shows no integration.[63] Its program offers a racially coded split between realms of property and owners, restricting signs of traffic between them to James Gittings' inexplicably attained handful of harvested wheat.

Peale used a similar left-right division in *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* to articulate a single workforce with one head and many hands (see plate 10). Pictorial space accords with numbers here, as the fully dressed Peale perches by the pit's bank, and the bare-chested and shirt-sleeved laborers who bring his conceptions into being dominate the composition's width (recall his remark that "with knowledge of the various powers, of the lever, the screw & the wedge, [man] can make machines to lessen labour, and multiply the conveniences & comforts of Life"). Mapping onto society a division between mental and manual labor that he had recognized since his days as an apprentice, Peale invented himself as a middle-class manager at a time of rapid transformations in production practices and working life.[64] Just as the head legislates the graphic order of the body in *George Washington,* the mind of Peale organizes the social body that appears in *Exhumation*. Analogously, on questions of public policy such as how to ensure morality or to achieve consensus, Peale distinguished a guiding head within the body politic and included himself among that head's membership.[65]

The painting's unifying, triumphant protagonist—the towering pyramid that supports both buckets and water sluice—demonstrates the necessary coordination of head and hands to achieve the public good, defined in this instance as developing land in Newburgh, New York, into a site that, by

yielding the remains of creatures that once walked United States' territory, produces national history. Nevertheless, the painting gives priority to the mind as it challenges viewers to reckon with its ingenious machine designs. This value system also extended to those whom Peale portrayed in the painting. While he included his own likeness, he apparently used anonymous Philadelphians to pose for the figures in the pit, since he did not return to Newburgh to record the features of the men whom he had paid to fetch bones for him. While those men had the franchise, they are represented in the *Exhumation* only through the portraits of other men.

In the nineteenth century, as the growth of democratic discourse made anathema all pretensions to rank, Peale's vision of the social order became increasingly unfashionable. William Dunlap, for example, criticized the structure of community support upon which Peale founded the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts as "an association of gentlemen of influence and fortune, (of course not artists)."[66] As John Lewis Krimmel envisioned the street outside Peale's museum, it was a space in which lowborn and highborn, blacks and whites mingled (figure 2.16).[67] Setting the dynamic public event of voting in a diagonally arrayed civic space populated by figures in a variety of unseemly poses, Krimmel gave form to his excitement about a thriving contemporary experiment in self-government. Such ideals clashed with those of the Long Room, where, as Peale depicted it, a graded order of things prompted quiet absorption and awe.[68]

FIGURE 2.16
John Lewis Krimmel
Election Day in Philadelphia, 1816
Oil on canvas
The Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Delaware

The span of hands in *The Artist in His Museum* (see figure 10.2) measures Peale's recognition of the distance between his vision of how America should be and its changing actuality, a difference readily cast in temporal terms. From the perspective of his figure, the past is the space behind him showing the Long Room he installed between the early 1800s and the early 1820s. The future lies before him in undone works of taxidermy and paleontology, and, on the other side of the picture plane, in the bodies of future viewers like ourselves who inhabit a world shaped by the democratic forces that Krimmel depicted. Peale raises a curtain with his right hand as if to declare "this is the order that I composed." He gestures with his left hand toward the viewer as if to challenge "what kind of order do you make?" (recall his remark that man "can compare the present with the past"). Created from an awareness that the days were drawing to a close when he could picture—and thereby hope to shape—his ideal body politic, the depicted body Peale left behind interrogates the world and its ideals for perpetuity.

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