In the Shadow of His Father:
Rembrandt Peale,
Charles Willson Peale,
and the American Portrait Tradition

During His Lifetime, Rembrandt Peale lived in the shadow of his father, Charles Willson Peale (Fig. 8). In the years that followed Rembrandt's death, his career and reputation continued to be eclipsed by his father's more colorful and more productive life as successful artist, museum keeper, inventor, and naturalist. Just as Rembrandt's life pales in comparison to his father's, so does his art. When we contemplate the large number and variety of works in the elder Peale's oeuvre—the heroic portraits in the grand manner, sensitive half-lengths and dignified busts, charming conversation pieces, miniatures, history paintings, still lifes, landscapes, and even genre—we are awed by the man's inventiveness, originality, energy, and daring. Rembrandt's work does not affect us in the same way. We feel great respect for his technique, pleasure in some truly beautiful paintings, such as Rubens Peale with a Geranium (1801: National Gallery of Art), and intellectual interest in some penetrating characterizations, such as his William Findley (Fig. 16). We are impressed by Rembrandt's sensitive use of color and atmosphere and by his talent for clear and direct portraiture. However, except for that brief moment following his return from Paris in 1810 when he aspired to history painting, Rembrandt's work has a limited range: simple half-length or bust-size portraits devoid, for the most part, of accessories or complicated allusions. It is the narrow and somewhat repetitive nature of his canvases in comparison with the extent and variety of his father's work that has given Rembrandt the reputation of being an uninteresting artist, whose work comes to life only in the portraits of intimate friends or members of his family.

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Despite their limitations, Rembrandt Peale's portraits, especially those forceful and elegant likenesses painted after he returned from England in 1803 (Figs. 5, 16, 17, 18), call for a re-evaluation of his artistic reputation. Ironically, however, such an effort must once again place Rembrandt in comparison with his father, since Rembrandt's paintings of this period reflect the elder Peale's artistic instruction and basic approaches to portraiture. Although many influences contributed to Rembrandt's achievement, including those he encountered in England during his 1802-03 visit and his own intrinsic talent, keen eyesight, and sensitive response to color and atmosphere, his father's ideas about art generally and portraiture in particular help explain many of Rembrandt Peale's artistic practices before he encountered the Parisian art world. In many ways, Charles Willson Peale's teaching contributed to the success of his son's work.

It was inevitable that Rembrandt Peale should have been influenced by his father. He was first introduced to paint and canvas as well as to works of art in his father's studio, and he began the practice of portraiture under his father's tutelage. He grew up in a household dominated by the various artistic projects in which his father was engaged: portraits, miniatures, transparencies, moving pictures. He was surrounded by artists, all of whom were taught by his father—his father's pupils, his uncle James, his sister Angelica Kauffman, and his elder brother Raphaelle. His father's treasured book, the Reverend Matthew Pilkington's Dictionary of Painters (1770), became the family "bible" and provided fascinating reading for an impressionable boy convinced that artists occupied a very special social position. Listening to his father reminisce about his early friendship with such renowned painters as John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West, and about his visits to the London studios of such great artists as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Francis Cotes, and Joseph Wilton, and observing him function in his museum and in the Philadelphia community, Rembrandt must have become even more impressed with the social rewards of the artist's life. If his father had not walked with kings and emperors, as had the artistic characters portrayed by Pilkington, the elder Peale could count among his friends equally eminent leaders of the American republic: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and Governor McKean among all those others whose portraits could be studied in the family's art gallery.
Rembrandt's affection for his father undoubtedly reinforced his receptivity to Charles Willson Peale's lessons in the art of portraiture. In turn, the elder Peale offered loving support to this talented son, for whose future he had great ambitions. He created numerous opportunities for the young man to develop as an artist and provided him with sitters to paint, pictures to copy, money for travel to London and Paris, and constant advice tempered by large amounts of praise. "My heart," he wrote to Rembrandt on his son's return from Paris in 1810, "has always been panting for your safety, success, and happiness."¹ Until his death in 1827, the elder Peale continued to provide guidance and support to Rembrandt; and long after his father's death, Rembrandt continued to draw upon the ideas and practices that his father had inculcated.²

Charles Willson Peale's art reflected the fundamentals of the British portrait tradition that he had absorbed in the 1760s when he had studied painting in the London studio of Benjamin West. This tradition also structured Rembrandt Peale's work. In their adaptation of the British portrait tradition to American conditions, both Peales contributed to the development of a national portrait style, one that simplified the British model and so departed in many important ways from it.

We do not know much about Charles Willson Peale's English experiences except what we are able to piece together from a pocket diary of expenses that he kept during his London stay and a few letters to his patrons.³ Peale probably attended informal life classes at St. Martin's Lane Academy, precursor to the Royal Academy School. The transplanted Philadelphia artist Benjamin West, a director of the school, sent his students to study there, as did the eminent British portraitist Sir Joshua Reynolds. Peale also may have drawn

² For Rembrandt's appreciation of his father and his artistic achievements, see Rembrandt's article "Charles Willson Peale. A Sketch by His Son," in The Crayon I (1855), 81-83.
³ P-S; see Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, Toby A. Appel, eds., The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family. Volume I. Charles Willson Peale: Artist in Revolutionary America, 1735-1791. (New Haven, Conn., 1983), 51-70; also see 47.
from casts in the Duke of Richmond's collection in Whitehall which was freely available. Not far from London, Hampton Court contained paintings from the Royal Collection which Peale may have studied; the walls of London's Foundling Hospital included a gallery of paintings by Thomas Hudson, William Hogarth, Joseph Highmore, Allan Ramsay, and Reynolds; old pictures frequently were auctioned in the public auction rooms, and in Benjamin West's private picture gallery hung paintings and drawings by the great masters along with West's copies. Although he was in London for less than three years, Peale absorbed both visually and intellectually the prevailing world of art; he acquired not only techniques, but ideas.

When Peale first made his appearance in West's studio in 1767, London artists and connoisseurs, inspired by their encounters with classical and Renaissance art, were excitedly debating new ideas about directions and possibilities of the art of painting. One of the leading contributors to this aesthetic ferment was West, recently returned from Rome and already gaining recognition as a practitioner of fashionable Italian styles based on the examples of Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio, and Titian. From these Italian masters, West had absorbed such artistic practices as subtle modelling, muted colors, clarity of form, and nearly invisible brushwork. Young and bold, West was ambitious for large commissions, and particularly for subjects demanding literary imagination and knowledge of classical models. With such large canvases as *Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus* (1766; copy, 1770: Philadelphia Museum of Art) or *The Departure of Regulus* (1767: Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II), West not only gave new impetus to large-scale history painting, but in doing so, became an important force in the London art world.

West taught his pupils some simple but important lessons. Accepting the contemporary conviction that Florentine draftsmanship was superior to Venetian color, he emphasized the importance of drawing. "Correctness of outline," he later wrote to Peale "and the justness of character in the human figure are eternal . . . all other
points are in a degree subordinate and indifferent—such as colour, manners and customs.” In drawing, the artist should confine himself to the antique; when painting, however, he should take nature as his model. Light and shadow, West lectured, were in constant motion, and the painter must always be concerned with effectively using chiaroscuro to present the illusion of reality.⁵

From Sir Joshua Reynolds, too, whose studio he visited, Peale must have discovered the importance of chiaroscuro, for Reynolds was “masterly” in his “control of the pattern of light and shade over the whole area” of the canvas.⁶ And from the British portraits he was able to study, Peale learned how to introduce into a painting such conventions of British eighteenth-century portraiture as the curving tree, straight pillar, landscape cutout, crossed legs, and accessories that indicate occupation or familial relationships (Fig. 19).

Peale also visited the studios of Francis Cotes (1726-1770), rival to Reynolds, and Allen Ramsay, an artist whose poses were generally more natural and intimate than those of conventional British portraitists.⁷ Cotes, too, emphasized design and draftmanship, with results that Alastair Smart calls “superb.”⁸ Like Reynolds, Cotes painted portraits in the “grand manner,” giving much attention to costume and accessories, and landscape backgrounds. From both Cotes and Reynolds, and perhaps from others, Peale learned how to present three-dimensional form on a flat canvas and how to use perspective to move into the canvas to indicate distance and space (Fig. 20).

Along with technique and style, Peale absorbed from West and Reynolds and other London artists a philosophy of aesthetic idealism, the belief that even while he took nature as his model, the artist should not confine himself to mere imitation. He should, instead, as

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⁵ Benjamin West to Charles Willson Peale, London, September 19, 1809, published in The Portfolio 3 (January 1810), 8-13; also see, Evans, Benjamin West and His American Students, 21, for quote of West to Constable: “Always remember, sir, that light and shadow never stand still”; and p.22 for his advice to students, “draw from the Antique, paint from nature. Study the masters but copy nature.”


⁷ For Peale’s visit to Reynolds’s and Cotes’s studio, see Charles Willson Peale to John Beale Bordley, London, March, 1767, P-S. Miller et. al., eds., Selected Papers, I, 47-51.

Reynolds later lectured in his Third Discourse, direct his efforts to reproducing "the more perfect ideas of beauty fixed in his mind." Rather than "seeking praise by deceiving the superficial sense of the spectator," the artist, said Reynolds, "must endeavor to improve [mankind] by the grandeur of his ideas." The intellectual content of art ennobled it, separated the artist from the mere mechanic, and produced those "great efforts in an instant which eloquence and poetry . . . are scarcely able to attain."

Aesthetic idealism persisted into the nineteenth century. In 1809, when Rembrandt was on his way to Paris to continue his artistic studies, West wrote to the elder Peale that he hoped Rembrandt would not waste his "genius" on portraits, but would "ever bear in mind, that the art of painting has powers to dignify man, by transmitting to posterity his noble actions, and his mental powers, to be viewed in those valuable lessons of religion, love of country, and morality."

Since spiritual, moral, and national themes were the stuff of history, history painting, which required the greatest mental effort, was regarded in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as the highest realm of artistic excellence. Even to be "a good face painter," West lectured his students, "a degree of the historical and poetical genius was requisite." The artist, West emphasized, "must strive for fame by captivating the imagination." To succeed, the artist required knowledge of "the science of painting," by which West meant not simply technique, but also acquaintance with the compositions and artistic practices of the Renaissance masters.

Charles Willson Peale's response to these ideas was immediate and longstanding: he never relinquished the hope of eventually creating a significant history painting. Although when he returned to Annapolis he was forced to limit his ambitions to portraiture, the major artistic interest of his Maryland patrons, he made the most of such

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10 Benjamin West to Charles Willson Peale, September 19, 1809.
limitations. The urban gentry of the city and eastern shore planters were eager to commission portraits in the British manner. For them Peale created a group of large full-length pieces, frequently consisting of more than one person, which in their elaborate costumes and accessories showed how much he had absorbed from his English experiences (Fig. 21). With their pale flesh tones but strong color in dress and accessories and their emphasis on a deep chiaroscuro, these early paintings reveal Peale’s debt to both West and Reynolds. These artists’ concern with draftsmanship is reflected in Peale’s tendency to outline features before painting—at first with charcoal, later with paint, a practice which resulted, as he later wrote, in “a minuteness of lines, and painstaking” but which also contributed to the faithful likenesses much prized by his American sitters. \(^\text{13}\)

His full-length Annapolis and early Philadelphia portraits and conversation pieces also reveal how impressed Peale had become with Grand Manner portraiture such as he had studied in Cotes’s and Reynolds’s studios and at the exhibitions of the Society of Artists of Great Britain, in which he also exhibited. \(^\text{14}\) One of his earliest efforts, painted actually while he was still in London, followed this convention: a full-length symbolic portrait of William Pitt (1768: Westmoreland County Museum, Montross, Virginia), in which he combined costume, accessories, background and pose to establish Pitt’s status in the British libertarian tradition and to symbolize the Great Commoner’s defense of the colonies. Portraits in the Grand Manner became Peale’s substitute for the history paintings which he believed impossible to execute without recourse to old master and classical models. Before and during the Revolution, Peale was able to create a large body of such works on either private or public commission.

Like Reynolds, Charles Willson Peale was interested not in the psychological condition of his sitters, but in character as it was revealed in externalities that could be read by the eye rather than probed with the mind (Fig. 22). Also like Reynolds, Peale had a particularly


\(^{14}\) For catalogues, see F:IIA/2C1-E5.
sharp eye. The strong naturalistic style he developed on his return to America was as much the result of good vision as it was of theory.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, strong emphasis on chiaroscuro, good draftsmanship, and rich colors became the elements in the British portrait tradition that Peale brought back to America along with conventional eighteenth-century poses, compositions, and aesthetic ideas. Not all of these were adaptable to American conditions. Here were no “Greechan and Roman statues,” no “works of a Raphael and Correggia”—with all of which “a good painter of either portrait or History” must be well acquainted. All that Peale had, as he explained to his friend and patron John Beale Bordley, was an “enthusiastic mind” and “a good Eye” and, “like Rembrandt,” a “variety of Characters to paint.” Nature, after all, he was forced to conclude, “is the best Picture to Copy.”\textsuperscript{16}

In settling for good draftsmanship, Peale remained convinced that the main concern of the portraitist should be to obtain a reasonable likeness, a concern his American patrons shared. In 1788 he proudly related to a correspondent “a favorable anecdote” which occurred when he painted the portrait of Thomas Johnson (Hammond-Harwood House, Annapolis). He had placed a looking glass so that the old gentleman could watch the picture while he was working on it. “When it was nearly finished,” Peale wrote, “[Johnson] put his hand on his cap, and exclaimed in some surprise that he felt his Cap on his head, yet that he could not see it, when in fact, he only see the portrait.”\textsuperscript{17}

Since Peale could not duplicate for his children the opportunities he had enjoyed in London, he had to modify the lessons he had learned in West’s studio. When conditions seemed favorable to the founding of such new organizations as the Columbianum (1795) and later, in 1805, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, he did attempt to introduce life classes (in the former) and study from casts

\textsuperscript{17} Charles Willson Peale to Christopher Richmond, Philadelphia, October 22, 1788, P-S. Miller \textit{et al.}, eds., \textit{Selected Papers}, I, 543.
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(in the latter). Occasionally, his children were able to examine copies of great paintings in the studios of British visitors such as Robert Edge Pine or in the private collection of such wealthy Philadelphians as William Hamilton or John Swanwick (whose collection actually was housed in Peale's gallery for some time), but these were transitory and short-lived artistic experiences, especially in the lean years following the Revolution during which Rembrandt developed his artistic talents.18

For teaching purposes, Peale had to rely on his few sculptured busts, his small collection of engravings, and his own gallery portraits of eminent Americans. He was able to teach his children drawing, which included line, chiaroscuro, and perspective, and how to mix pigments, but color was not his forte, and his emphasis on drawing tended to exaggerate the still-life quality of the objects and people rendered, freeze them in space, and emphasize thought over feeling, the conceptual over the sensuous. Engravings, also, confirmed the tendency to linearity as did casts, which the chaste and dignified coloristic patterns of Peale's gallery portraits did little to correct. Designed to exhibit the great men of the nation in republican simplicity and virtue, these bust portraits (Fig. 23) in oval frames became models for the kind of portraits Rembrandt painted in 1805 at fifty dollars each, hoping thereby to establish his reputation (Fig. 24).

Limited commissions or portraits done on speculation did not provide Rembrandt Peale the opportunity to attempt full-length portraits in the Grand Manner such as his father had produced in the years following his return from England. Whether he actually could paint such complicated works even if commissioned to do so, however, is a question. Certainly he displayed artistry at a very early age, as testified by his Self-Portrait at age 13 (1791: Private Collection), and by the remarkable Rubens with the First Geranium (1801: National Gallery of Art). But these were fairly simple busts or half-lengths,

18 In his "Reminiscences" for The Crayon (I, 22-23), Rembrandt described the Swanwick Collection as well as copies of paintings and engravings he had seen when a boy in the home of banker Robert Morris and in the studio of the British artist Robert Edge Pine. Later, in 1803 and again in 1811, he had the opportunity of examining the Stier Collection before it was returned to Holland.
requiring no special education in anatomy or composition or complicated drapery.

Possibly these were the kinds of lessons the elder Peale hoped Rembrandt would obtain in England when he sent him to London with his brother Rubens in 1802 to exhibit the mastodon and at the same time strengthen his painting skills. Rembrandt remained in England for only seventeen months, much of which time was spent carting the skeleton of the mammoth around the provinces. During the short period he spent in London, Rembrandt did begin studies with West, who introduced him to the American artist Washington Allston and to Sir Thomas Lawrence, but Rembrandt seems to have had little to do with either man. He painted two likenesses in London for his father’s gallery—one of Robert Bloomfield the poet (unlocated) and the other of the scientist Joseph Banks (Fig. 25), his only work that suggests, in its free treatment, “elaborate penciling around the eyes, eyebrows, and mouth, and squiggles of viscous paint in the hair,” a distinct English influence, as Dorinda Evans has pointed out. He sent two portraits to the exhibition of the Royal Academy in 1803, an unknown subject in chalk and a self-portrait holding a tooth of the mastodon (unlocated). We can surmise that this was either a bust portrait like the Banks or a half-length like that of his brother. Presumably he sketched for a while from casts at the Royal Academy but was refused admission to the life class (which constituted official enrollment) because of an undescribed “trick practiced on Mr. West,” President of the Academy. As a result, until he went to Paris in 1810, Rembrandt seems never formally to have studied anatomy, either at an academy or later, in the Medical College of the University of Pennsylvania where classes in anatomy were offered.

In 1805, casts of full-length figures were imported to Philadelphia by the newly organized Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, but casts were not an adequate substitute for the live body, as Rembrandt would later discover when he finally was able to draw from the nude

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20 Evans, *West and His American Students*, 142.
in Paris. Together with his limited experience with the great paintings of the Renaissance, which might have served as compositional models, Rembrandt's limited knowledge of anatomy, the influence of the bust portraits hanging in his father's gallery, and perhaps, also lack of commissions contributed to his eschewing portraiture in the Grand Manner and concentrating on small-scale canvases.

Rembrandt may also have been influenced to concentrate on this kind of portraiture by the success experienced by Gilbert Stuart with the bust portrait—paintings, as E.P. Richardson has written, "without movement or background." Making no great demands on the artist's imagination or education in connoisseurship as did the large-scale and rich backgrounds of portraits in the Grand Manner, the Stuart-type portrait was favored not only by American artists but also by American patrons for its simplicity and clarity—and also for its cheapness. For the most part Rembrandt's portraits follow Stuart's pattern: heads looking either to right or left, with few accessories of background or costume except for the back of a chair and an occasional curtain, simple pictures that emphasize naturalistic representation and reveal a sensitivity to character and position.

If Rembrandt did not return to America with knowledge or skill in Grand Manner portraiture or history painting, he did seem to acquire some useful lessons about color. Impressed with the coloristic practices of London painters, and perhaps also with Stuart's successful performance in this respect, on his return Rembrandt undertook the study of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania. His innovations much impressed his father, who after having experienced difficulties with his pigments—especially with a fading lake red—when he first

22 Rembrandt never dismissed the usefulness of casts for the artist. In his "Lecture on the Fine Arts" (1839), he urged the careful preservation of "admirable and authentic casts, executed under the responsible professors in Europe. Casts such as we already possess [in the Pennsylvania Academy]. . . ." (p. 29). F:VIB/21.

23 Later, in 1828, Rembrandt travelled to Italy to make copies of the great paintings of the Renaissance for a gallery he hoped to open in Philadelphia upon his return. He also used Renaissance paintings as models for some of his "fancy pieces." See John Mahey, "The Studio of Rembrandt Peale," The American Art Journal 1 (Fall, 1969), 20-40.

24 E. P. Richardson, Gilbert Stuart. Portraitist of the Young Republic, 1755-1828 (Providence, R.I., 1967), 31-32. Richardson points out how few full-lengths Stuart painted on his return to America other than the Lansdowne portrait of Washington. In America, Richardson writes, Stuart "abandoned the large scale and rich backgrounds of his London style" (p.20).
returned to America in 1769, thereafter was particularly concerned with color and frequently cited as a touchstone for his improvement in art, his improvement in color. In 1805, for instance, the elder Peale waxed enthusiastic about his own painting The Exhumation of the Mastodon (1805-08: The Peale Museum, Baltimore) not only because it demonstrated "a neater pensil" but because it showed his "better knowledge of Colours and the judgment ripened by observation on what has been done by the most noted artists." Especially significant, however, were Rembrandt's experiments with pigments and oils, which "opened my Eyes," Charles Willson Peale wrote to his English correspondent John Hawkins, "and I realy expect to paint much better pictures than I have ever done before." Rembrandt's "fondness of Chimstry," Peale was convinced, would acquire for him "a great name as a Colourist of the first grade."[25]

Both the elder Peale and Rembrandt were well acquainted with Leonardo da Vinci's Treatise on Painting (1802 edition), and in Rembrandt's copy of the book (Redwood Library and Athenaeum, Newport, R.I.), one of his most emphatic pencil lines was placed against the passage recommending painters to "colour and dress their figures with the brightest and most lively colours; for if they are painted of a dull or obscure color, they will detach but little and not much be seen, when the picture is placed at some distance; because the colour of every object is obscured in the shades" (p. 165). Rembrandt's pursuit of pigments, then, and clear color (which eventually succeeded with his discovery of encaustic painting techniques in Paris in 1810), is understandable in the light of his father's concerns and his own reading.[26]

Charles Willson Peale was also captivated by the use of light in paintings: how it both revealed form and illuminated images, how it could be used compositionally—as "the management of light"—and how it could be used symbolically (Fig. 26). Rembrandt's interest in light may be seen in the deep chiaroscuro of one of his very first paintings—the 1791 Self Portrait, while a flooding of light and composed shadows emphasize the rich coloring of his William Raborg

[26] Later in life, Rembrandt attributed his interest in color to a Venetian painting he had seen while still a schoolboy in John Swanwick's collection. The Crayon I, 23.
(Fig. 27), a portrait that in many respects—in such small details as ring, letter, buttons, as well as in such larger considerations of “dignity and pleasing effects”—reveals clearly how much Rembrandt had absorbed from his father’s teaching. Light and color not only enhance but create the power of such works as his 1805 portrait of Thomas Jefferson (Fig. 5); and his interest and mastery of these elements would develop greatly over time, as the beautiful and vivid portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Koch illustrate (Figs. 28, 29).

Peale’s concern that portraits emphasize the dignity of the sitter—a characteristic he very much missed in his son Raphaelle’s portraits and the absence of which he blamed for Raphaelle’s failure to obtain commissions”—derived from a didactic attitude toward art and life which Rembrandt absorbed and reflected in his own work along with the fundamentals of the elder Peale’s art education. A picture, Rembrandt lectured in language reminiscent of his father’s, must be addressed to the sober mind, and not to “wild imagination.” Like Charles Willson Peale, Rembrandt accepted the principle of “naturalism”: “painting . . . must possess the forms, the colours, and the finish of Nature, of which the eye is the sole judge,” he wrote. Along with good eyesight, Rembrandt stressed an understanding of the laws of chiaroscuro and light, knowledge of the chemistry of color and of perspective “that shall seem to divest the Canvas of its flat and tangible surface,” and a capacity for execution “that shall happily imitate the texture of all known bodies, and especially give to flesh its diversified hues of health and beauty.” He echoed his father’s insistence that a portrait should present an individual in his most cheerful and attractive state, and insisted that although the eye was “the sole judge,” it was the “cultivated eye” of which he spoke, the eye “that can appreciate the touches that remark the expression of thought.”

27 Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin West, Philadelphia, September 11, 1815, P-S. F:IIA/56B5-8. Rembrandt’s interest in a deep chiaroscuro was strengthened by his reading; in his copy of Leonardo’s Treatise, he marked the passage giving advice about the ways in which objects placed between lights and shades have “greater relievo” than those placed “wholly in the light or in shadow” (p.188).

28 See Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin West, September 11, 1815.

29 Rembrandt Peale, “Lecture on the Fine Arts,” National Academy of Design, 15-16. Also see p.24, in which Rembrandt discusses portraits that “exemplify a Moral.” His later attempts at imaginative compositions in such paintings as The Roman Daughter (1812:
Such an emphasis on the role of the intellect reflected the eighteenth-century theory of the ideal more than nineteenth-century romanticism, and brought Rembrandt Peale closer to his father’s generation than to his own. Some of Rembrandt’s best portraits combine clear likeness with the kind of classical idealism the elder Peale had given to his 1795 portrait of Washington (New-York Historical Society): a combination of particularity of image and a recognition of the meaning of the individual in public, or universal, terms, an image that is timeless and therefore iconic. Rembrandt’s two portraits of Thomas Jefferson demonstrate this iconic quality (1800: The White House, Washington, D.C.; Fig. 5).

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Although Rembrandt later deviated from naturalism, his most artistically accomplished works of any period are strongly marked by it, as, for example, his 1812 portrait of his father (Fig. 8) or his 1834 portrait of his brother, Rubens Peale (Fig. 30). His portraits are very real images of recognizable individuals, and in artistic technique—although not in variety, imagination, or scale and complexity—they frequently surpass similar works in his father’s oeuvre. The clarity of drawing he later responded to in French neoclassical art was a reinforcement of lessons his father had inculcated in him since childhood. He admitted as much later in life when he wrote in his “Reminiscences” of the necessity for beginning artists to “learn to draw everything before their eyes, with accuracy and facility.”

Along with a crisp naturalistic style, Rembrandt’s work is marked by meticulousness of execution and graceful line (as in Samuel Buckley Morris, Fig. 31), strong sense of character (as in Judge Moses Levy, Fig. 32), and intense concern with painterly techniques (as in the beautifully rendered textures of his portrait of his wife Eleanor Short Peale; ca. 1810: Amherst College). Throughout his long career, his major strengths derived from a well-trained eye rather than imagi-
nation, a deficiency recognized by his father when he wrote to Benjamin West in 1815 that Rembrandt was “very successful in colouring. In composition I cannot say so much for him, but he may yet improve, as he possesses literary talents and some gen[i]us in poetry.” How-

ever, “his talent of catching strong character,” as the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe reported to Thomas Jefferson, his love of light and color, his strong draftsmanship and his careful concern with artistry and the profession of the artist mark him as his father’s son and, at the same time, earn for Rembrandt Peale a very high place in the roster of American nineteenth-century artists.

31 Charles Willson Peale to Benjamin West, September 11, 1815.
Figure 16
William Findley.
Figure 17
*William Short.*
Figure 18

Commodore Edward Preble, USN.
Figure 19
Figure 20
Figure 21
Figure 22
Figure 23
Figure 24  
*Albert Gallatin.*
Figure 25
*Sir Joseph Banks.*
Figure 26
Figure 27
William Raborg.
Figure 28
*Portrait of Mr. Jacob Gerard Koch.*
Figure 29

Jane Griffith Koch (Mrs. Jacob Gerard).
Figure 30

Rubens Peale.
Figure 31
Samuel Buckley Morris.
Figure 32

Judge Moses Levy.
Figure 33

*Dominique Vivant Denon.*
Figure 34
Figure 35
Figure 36

Edward Shippen Burd, of Philadelphia.
Figure 37

Roman Daughter.
Figure 38
Self-Portrait.