



THE WORKS OF *John Vander Lyn* ❧





# THE WORKS OF JOHN VANDERLYN

*From Tammany to the Capitol*

*by*

KENNETH C. LINDSAY

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A LOAN EXHIBITION

October 11 to November 9, 1970

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UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
AT BINGHAMTON

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## PREFACE

After years of neglect, the study of American art of the 19th century is finally enjoying a resurgence of interest. That the University Art Gallery takes this initiative to clarify the contribution of John Vanderlyn, a native son of New York State and one of our important American artists, is more than appropriate. Born in Kingston, New York, Vanderlyn was recognized as early as 1808 by the French Government for his painting, *Marius Amid the Ruins of Carthage*, a highlight of the present exhibition.

We are grateful to Dr. Kenneth C. Lindsay, Professor of Art History, for his efforts in organizing the exhibition as well as in preparing this catalogue.

We wish to extend special thanks to Mr. John Paul Remensnyder and Mr. Herbert Cutler of the Senate House Museum in Kingston for their valuable and enthusiastic support of this undertaking. To the lenders, colleagues and friends who helped, we express our gratitude.

This project and the publication of the catalogue have been supported by a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts.

Michael Milkovich  
Director, University Art Gallery



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this exhibition would not have become a reality without the cooperation of many people. Above all I would like to thank Herbert Cutler, Superintendent of the Senate House Museum in Kingston, New York and Edward Dwight, Director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute in Utica, New York, for giving me their unstinting support.

I also benefited from a stimulating exchange of letters with William S. Talbot, Assistant Curator of Paintings at the Cleveland Museum of Art; Mr. Wilder Haines of Cambridge; Peter O. Marlow, Curator of Paintings and Sculpture at the Wadsworth Atheneum; Mr. Randall J. LeBoeuf, Jr., of New York; Milo M. Naeve, Director of Colonial Williamsburg; George E. Jordan of the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art, New Orleans; Frances Follin Jones, Chief Curator, The Art Museum, Princeton; and William Voelkle, Assistant Curator of Manuscripts at the Pierpont Morgan Library.

Martin Leifer, Assistant Curator of the New-York Historical Society, and Donald J. Gormley of the Art Commission of New York City, went out of their way to be helpful.

Three congressmen kindly used their offices to assist my cause; The Honorable B. Everett Jordan, Senator from North Carolina; the Honorable Howard W. Robison, Representative from New York; and The Honorable Samuel N. Friedel, Representative from Maryland.

Miss Mildred Steinbach of the Frick Art Reference Library was always patient with my numerous queries, and Miss Agnes Mongon, Director of the Fogg Museum, kindly checked out a technical question of drawing media used for the Gerry portrait. Victoria Levene, member of the New York Council on the Arts, and Doris Friedman, Department of Cultural Affairs in New York City, were both unusually helpful.

Kenneth Haley of Binghamton spent three weeks helping me organize the Vanderlyn documents in a useful way by preparing an extensive chronology of the artist's life. Konstanze Bachmann, Curatorial Assistant of the Office of Artistic Properties, Columbia University, showed great ingenuity in investigating the background of the Bard portrait.

Among the many others who helped in one way or another I would like to mention: Mrs. Louise Zuckerman; John Paul Remensnyder, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Senate House Museum; J. D. Hatch of Spelman



College; James W. Hall, University Wide Activities, State University of New York; Jeremiah V. Kiley; Mrs. Carol Jana; Patrolman A. J. Dunn; Godfrey S. Glaiber; William M. Pillsbury, Senior Curator of History, New York State Education Department; Diego Suarez, The Brook; Prof. Salvatore Mondello, Rochester Institute of Technology; Miss Anna K. Cunningham, Supervisor of Historic Sites, New York State Education Department; Jack Harrison Pollack and Margit Chanin. To Michael Milkovich, Director of the University Art Gallery, my departmental colleagues, and my family, special thanks for their forbearance and help.

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K. C. L.

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Photo Credits: Christopher Focht—Figs. 4, 8, 12, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 61, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 81, 90, 91; Joseph Klima, Jr. Fig. 27; John D. Schiff—Figs. 14, 66b, 83; Pach Brothers—Fig. 37; Charles Uht—Fig. 6; and E. I. Blomstrann—Figs. 63 and 87.

Abbreviations: Frequently used references are cited by the last name of author, date of publication, and page. More complete information for these short titles is given in the bibliography. Figure numbers refer to objects listed in the catalogue.

Works numbers 58a, 66a, 66b, 66c, 86a, 88a, 93a, 95 and 96 are illustrated in the catalogue section.

All letters cited are in The Senate House Museum, Kingston, New York, unless otherwise specified.

The cover illustration is a detail of Fig. 58, the watercolor study for *Ariadne*. The signature under the illustration is enlarged from Fig. 65, Penmanship Specimen.





## LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

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## INTRODUCTION

The name "John Vanderlyn" rings few bells. This should surprise no one since standard books on American painting discuss the same five or six Vanderlyn paintings in about the same way. A few other works can be found in old journals and scattered catalogues, but for the most part Vanderlyn's *oeuvre* remains either unexamined or problematic.

Thirty-two years ago the Senate House Museum in Kingston held the first and only exhibition of Vanderlyn's works. Of the forty-six pieces then displayed, only eleven are included in the present exhibition. While our information is too limited to consider making a *catalogue raisonné* at this moment, an exhibition can help by providing a special environment for carefully scrutinizing in ensemble both authentic and questionable works.

Some American artists today speak of Vanderlyn with affection and sympathy. They identify not with Vanderlyn's work but with what they refer to as his "tragic life." Tragic is a potent word. We use it properly when we speak of artists such as Van Gogh, Giorgione and Vrubel, for their careers were truncated by suicide, early death and insanity; these are inexplicable forces, large and dark, that exacerbate our sense of mortality. But should we use it for Vanderlyn?

I see Vanderlyn rather as a deeply frustrated man. Basing his dream of fame upon the dying European ideal of history painting, he was bound to be disappointed upon his return to America in 1815, for this country had little taste for such things. In addition to this he was thwarted in realizing his dream of bringing culture to the people. People got along fairly well without "culture." It is doubtful if even a Barnum backed by a Getty fortune could dissuade the larger society from the inducements of material pursuits.

Vanderlyn was condemned to spend most of his lifetime suffering under the "burden of portraiture"—to use Neil Harris' apt phrase.<sup>1</sup> When limning failed to satisfy his needs, he copied European masterpieces or his own works. A poor manager of finances, he had to borrow money throughout his life. Twice he tried to extricate himself from penury with money-making schemes: but in both cases, the *Niagara* prints and the *Versailles* panorama, they fell far short of expectations.



While some of the blame for these failures could be laid at the doorstep of bad luck, much of it was caused by Vanderlyn's own personality. He was, as Lillian Miller has shown, a poor business man.<sup>2</sup> He mired himself in petty detail. Often he failed to delegate authority, and when he did so he estimated people badly. He frequently destroyed alliances because of his suspiciousness and growing sourness of disposition.

This spectre of bad luck no doubt inhibited the written assessment of Vanderlyn's contribution. William Dunlap tried to do fairly by him in his *History of the Arts of Design in the United States* of 1834, but the effort was marred by the ill-will which existed between the two men. Robert Gosman began a biography in 1848 which had the artist's cooperation. Financial problems and procrastination kept Gosman from completing his work and the manuscript was never published. Reverend Roswell Hoes energetically gathered and copied Vanderlyn letters during the latter part of the nineteenth century. He checked out all sources and tracked down paintings with admirable perseverance but for some reason he failed to put his research into writing.

Perhaps the Schoonmaker manuscript intimidated him. Marius Schoonmaker came from an old Kingston family whose relationship with Vanderlyn went back to 1816. He had direct access to the resources of the Vanderlyn estate, and his manuscript, completed before his death in 1894, transcribed many of the basic documents and letters. Ironically, the Schoonmaker manuscript was not published until 1950.<sup>3</sup>

Other than two excellent articles on the *Jane McCrea* painting,<sup>4</sup> little of a basic scholarly nature has been published. Lillian Miller's and Salvatore Mondello's essays contribute to our understanding,<sup>5</sup> but most of the reviews and snippet comments in books and catalogues do not help. Without any question the finest accomplishment is Louise Averill's unpublished dissertation on Vanderlyn written at Yale University in 1949.

1. Neil Harris, *The Artist in American Society*, New York, 1966, Chapter 3.

2. Lillian B. Miller, "John Vanderlyn and The Business of Art," *New York History*, XXXVI, No. 1 (January, 1951), pp. 33-44.

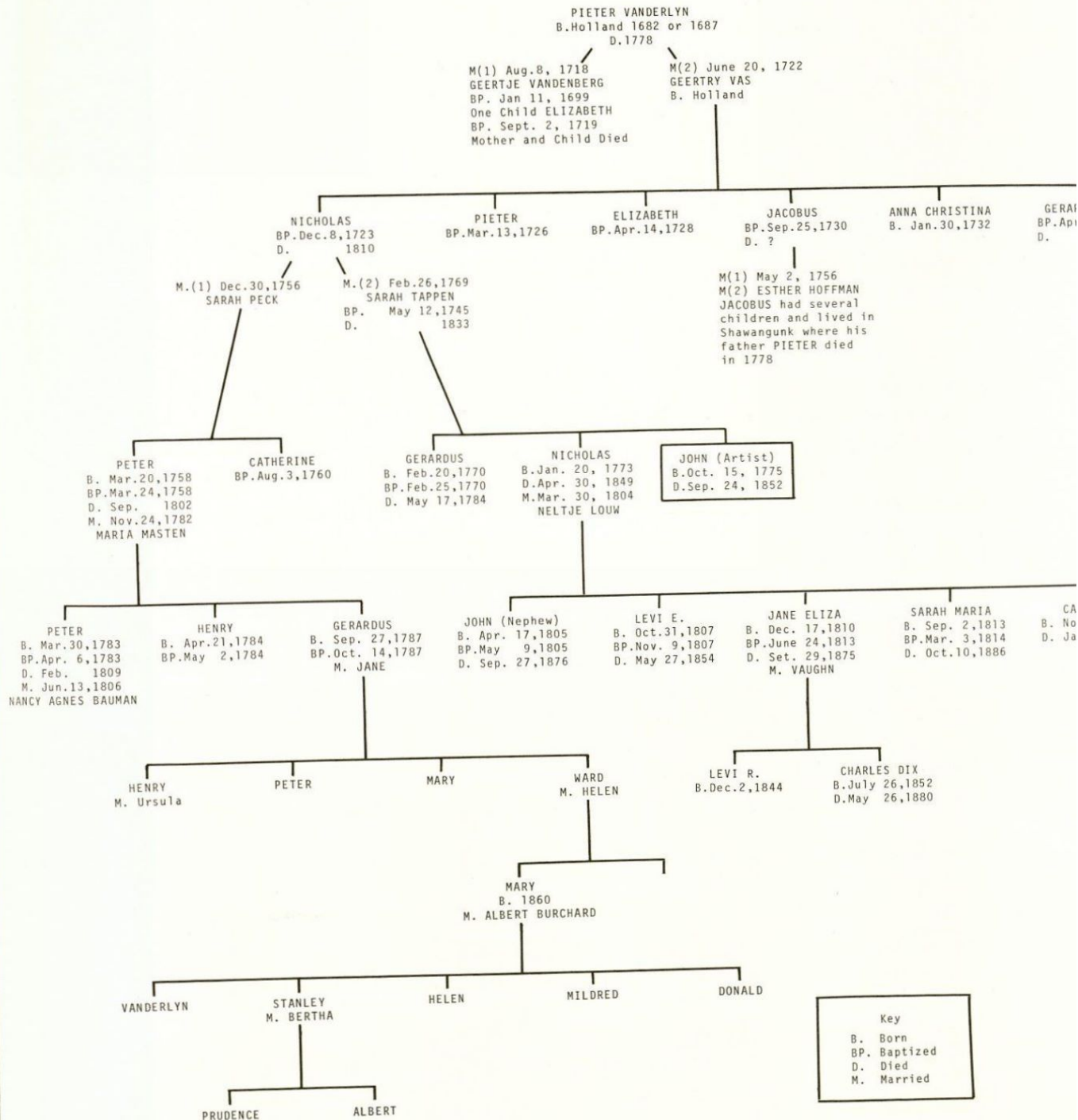
3. See bibliography.

4. See references for Figure 63.

5. *Op. cit.*, Lillian Miller; see bibliography for Mondello.

# VANDERLYN FAMILY TREE

Prepared by Herbert Cutler, Superintendent, Senate House Museum



# THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

BY SAMUEL JOHNSON

IN TEN VOLUMES

LONDON: Printed by A. MILLAR, in Strand, 1742.

THE SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

LONDON: Printed by A. MILLAR, in Strand, 1742.

THE SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

LONDON: Printed by A. MILLAR, in Strand, 1742.

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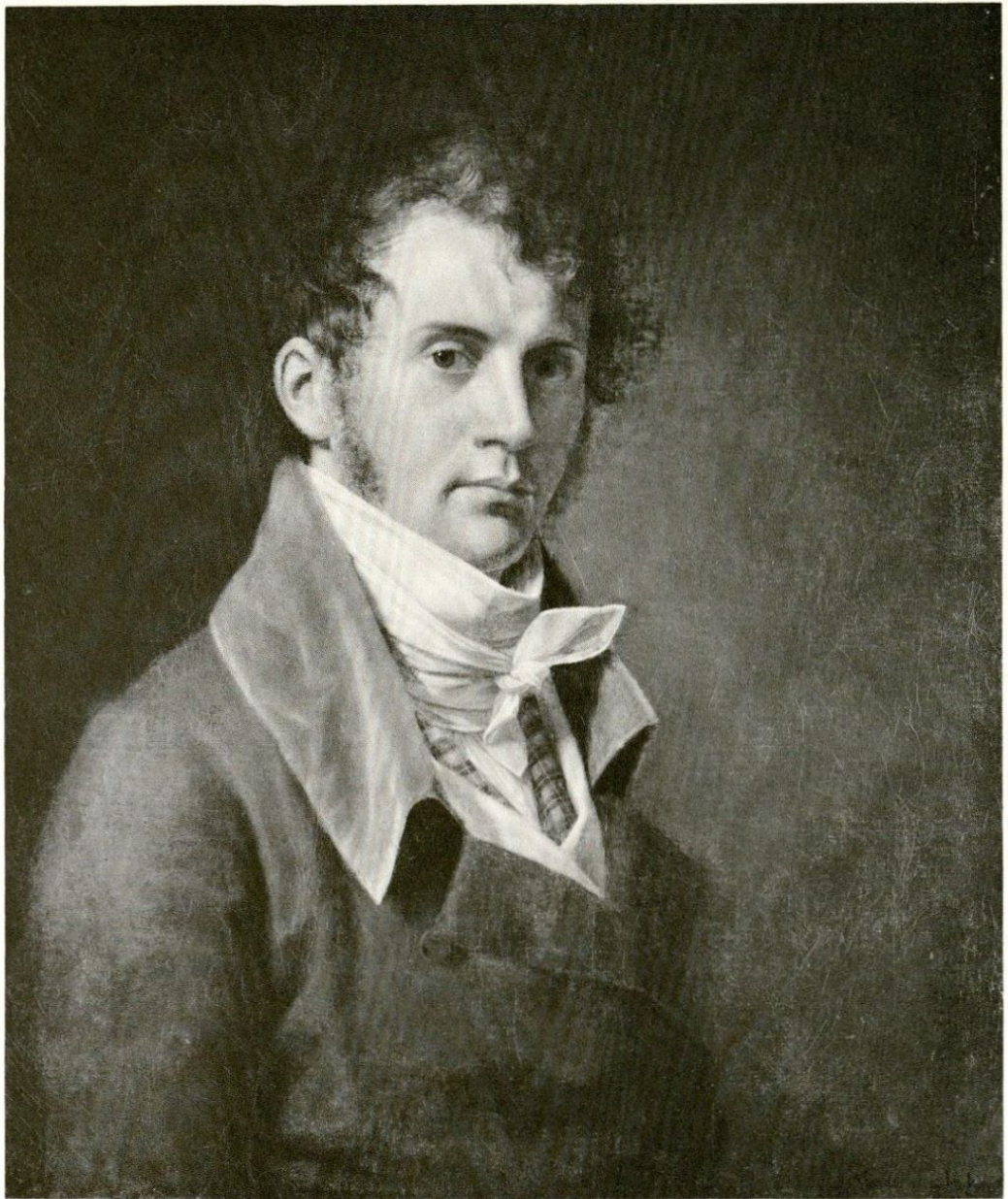
LONDON: Printed by A. MILLAR, in Strand, 1742.

THE SECOND EDITION, CORRECTED.

LONDON: Printed by A. MILLAR, in Strand, 1742.



1



1. Portrait of the Artist, 1800



## I. VANDERLYN THE MAN

In the self-portrait of 1800 (Fig.1) the twenty-five-year-old John Vanderlyn looks out with a somewhat uncommunicative air. He reveals little of himself and asks no more of us than to notice his romantic hair style replete with long side burns and the way the light plays upon his fashionable clothes. The personality of this handsome young provincial from the provincial young Republic remains relatively obscure.

No one knows why Vanderlyn never married. Of course romantic journalists of the 19th century ventured to supply an answer: they claimed the artist suffered from an unrequited love affair with Theodosia Burr, the remarkable daughter of Aaron Burr. According to the story Burr wanted to marry his daughter into a powerful Southern family as a means of gaining political support there for his presidential ambitions. When he became aware of the attraction between his artist protégé and his daughter, he immediately induced Vanderlyn to study abroad at his expense.

The events which followed give the story plausibility. Burr came close to obtaining the presidency and Theodosia did marry into the influential Alston family of South Carolina. Shortly after the marriage took place in 1801, Burr encouraged Vanderlyn to return. Heartbroken and true to the memory of his great love, the story goes on, the artist lost himself in his art.

The story is based upon sentimental retrospectivism, not fact. Vanderlyn remained Burr's loyal friend for years. In a spirit of camaraderie Burr teased the artist about "woman-chasing" and the degree to which he unclothed his models. But there is not a single word in the extant letters of Theodosia, her husband, her father, or the artist which alludes to a thwarted love affair.

As a young man Vanderlyn was a pleasant person although on the sober side. He made friends easily. Around 1794 he participated in the Sons of Tammany movement and joined the Sovereign Chapter of the Knights of the Red Cross in Paris in 1808.<sup>1</sup> When he returned from France in 1815 he was forty years old and prospects must have seemed bright: his Salon exhibition record was unequalled by any other American; his large history paintings were ready to exhibit; the panorama scheme was soon to unfold; and important commissions to portray presidents and generals came



his way. But during the next twenty years he turned into a morose and suspicious man. Several incidents describe the change.

In 1821 in New Orleans the young James Audubon wanted to show Vanderlyn his drawings and asked for an audience. Vanderlyn kept him waiting for an unseemly amount of time and then rudely assessed the work with the hauteur of an artistic aristocrat.

It is a credit to both men that their relationship later became more congenial. But the calculated nature of Vanderlyn's pose suggests that his pride was self-conscious and thus vulnerable. This supposition is supported by his lack of self-criticism; a long string of excuses blaming everything but himself explained away each adversity.

As early as 1822 his surliness became so apparent he was advised to "imbibe daily a reasonable quantity of strong beer."<sup>2</sup> Vanderlyn's irascibility became public in 1826 when he lashed out at his friends in the newly formed National Academy of Design, headed by William Dunlap and S. F. B. Morse. It seems that members of the Academy applied for Vanderlyn's Rotunda in New York when it became certain that his lease would irrevocably run out. He had built the Rotunda as an exhibition hall for his panorama and large paintings, and his investment in the enterprise was considerable. By chance he was in Washington in January when he was elected to the Academy. For some reason he did not respond to this gesture of confidence bestowed upon him by his brother artists, even though he returned to New York in March to continue the losing fight for his Rotunda. Then in May he spewed out his animosity in a petulant letter published in the *New York American*. The artists of the Academy retaliated with a letter asserting that their purpose was to help their brother artist reach his goal. Mortified by Vanderlyn's ill-will they expunged him from membership. Though he exhibited with the Academy after a cooling-off period of four years, the wound never healed.

If Vanderlyn was intemperate, the Academy was not blameless: Dunlap and Morse should have informed him that they were tinkering with this delicate situation. A man who had suffered financial insecurity for years can be excused for over-reaction if the enterprise upon which he based his dream of financial independence was threatened.

As the taste of the century swung to genre and landscape visions of the American scene, Vanderlyn kept fighting for his point of view. His stub-

bornness was admirable. He would not allow his existence as an artist to be denied, and imposed his will on the art world into the 1840's. During the last months of his life, in 1852, when he was so hard up he had to borrow a dollar for transportation, he still had the optimism to propose a National Gallery of Art.

1. See Fig. 65 for his association with Tammany. The Senate House Museum has on display Vanderlyn's membership notice with the Red Cross.

2. S. B. H. Judah, *Gotham and the Gothamites*, New York, 1823, as quoted in Harold E. Dickson's book, *John Wesley Jarvis*, New York, 1949, p. 265.





2

## 2. THE LEARNING PROCESS

Vanderlyn was born in Kingston, New York on October 15, 1775. Behind him lay the example of his grandfather's painting and the legacy of Dutch patroon artistry. By the time he completed his education at the Kingston Academy in 1791, he had made wash drawing copies of imported Dutch landscape prints (Fig. 2). Somewhere he picked up a book showing Le Brun's celebrated studies of human expression and proudly transcribed them into his own "Drawing Book" (Fig. 3).

His family must have been impressed with his talent for they sent him to New York in 1792 to work for Thomas Barrow, seller of colors, glazing, paintings, and groceries. Before long he noticed an advertisement in the paper which announced the opening of the Columbian Academy of Painting. Here a student could:

continue to paint portraits and miniatures, and make draughts of all kinds, from nature, designs for engravings, etc.

He could also receive instruction in

the arts of designing and drawing (on Indian ink, water colours, chalks, etc.) of heads, figures, landscapes, flowers, patterns, architecture, and perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Evening classes on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays were available to gentlemen. Vanderlyn took advantage of the opportunity.

The Columbian Academy was run by the two Robertson brothers from Scotland, Archibald (1765-1835) and Alexander (1772-1841). Archibald had studied at the Royal Academy with Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1786. Upon the urging of Dr. Samuel Bard (Fig. 83) and others, the two young men came to this country in September of 1791. They were stolid practitioners, endlessly patient with students who imitated their thin achievements. Vanderlyn undoubtedly learned something about techniques from Archibald for he was well versed in such matters.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime Gilbert Stuart left his portraits of Egbert Benson and Aaron Burr at Thomas Barrow's for framing. Vanderlyn obtained permission to copy them and did so well that he became Burr's protégé. He also became Stuart's assistant in Philadelphia between the summer of 1795 and the spring of 1796. Stuart's influence guides us in dating the artist's early portraits.

The portrait of *Nicholas Vanderlyn* (Fig. 4) was the earliest and must have been done prior to any contact with Stuart. Its lean image exists in an



undefined dark background. It is without substance or style, a primitive icon of a picture. No flourish of learning obtrudes between us and the sitter's pinched features.

Vanderlyn's copy of *Egbert Benson* (Fig. 5) is half a world apart. Though the brush work is more fluid and the head emerges with solidity, showing that he learned a great deal from Stuart, the copy stands apart from the original (Fig. 96) by virtue of its earnest searching.

The portrait of the two boys, *Henry Vanderlyn* and *Edmund Bruyn* (Figs. 6 and 7), flank the Benson copy in time, one being painted before and the other after the copy. Young Henry is sprightly in color, more knowing than Nicholas, yet still innocent of artifice. This picture makes one wonder how Vanderlyn's gift might have developed if he had never studied abroad. *Edmund Bruyn* still possesses the charm of the artist's original vision, but additives from the Benson experience can be seen in the easier pose and greater richness in the modeling of the face.

The portrait of *Maria Maston* (Fig. 8) was painted after the artist's first-hand contact with Stuart's method during his apprenticeship in Philadelphia. The fleecy brush work and silvery tones suggest Stuart at first glance. The angular severity of the image then begins to assert itself, revealing Vanderlyn's native touch.

Studying with François André Vincent in France from 1796 to 1800, the Kingston artist absorbed French academic discipline and learned by viewing old masters in the museums. The *Standing Male Nude* (Figs. 9 and 10) is a school piece. Its linear conception differs radically from the charcoal wash drawing after Poussin's *Baptism* (Fig. 11). Vanderlyn's flexibility of method is also demonstrated by the two versions of the *Charity* motif (Figs. 12 and 13).

The Senate House Sketchbook shows how assiduously Vanderlyn studied the great masterpieces of the past during his Roman period (1805-1807). He made drawings after Giulio Romano, Raphael, and antique statuary. With the painting of *Marius* in 1807, his study period came to an end.

1. Emily Robertson, ed., *Letters and Papers of Andrew Robertson*, London, 1895, p. 7.
2. Examples can be found in the exhibition catalogue, "American Drawings, Pastels and Water-colors," *Kennedy Galleries*, Part I, March 14-April 28, 1967.
3. See his "Treatise on Art," *op. cit.*, Emily Robertson.





2. Drawing of Harbor Scene, 1789

1949.28

Jn<sup>o</sup> Vander Lyn's

*Handwritten:* 24.7  
1791  
*Handwritten:* 4.5.92  
Drawing Book

1792.

ADMIRATION.

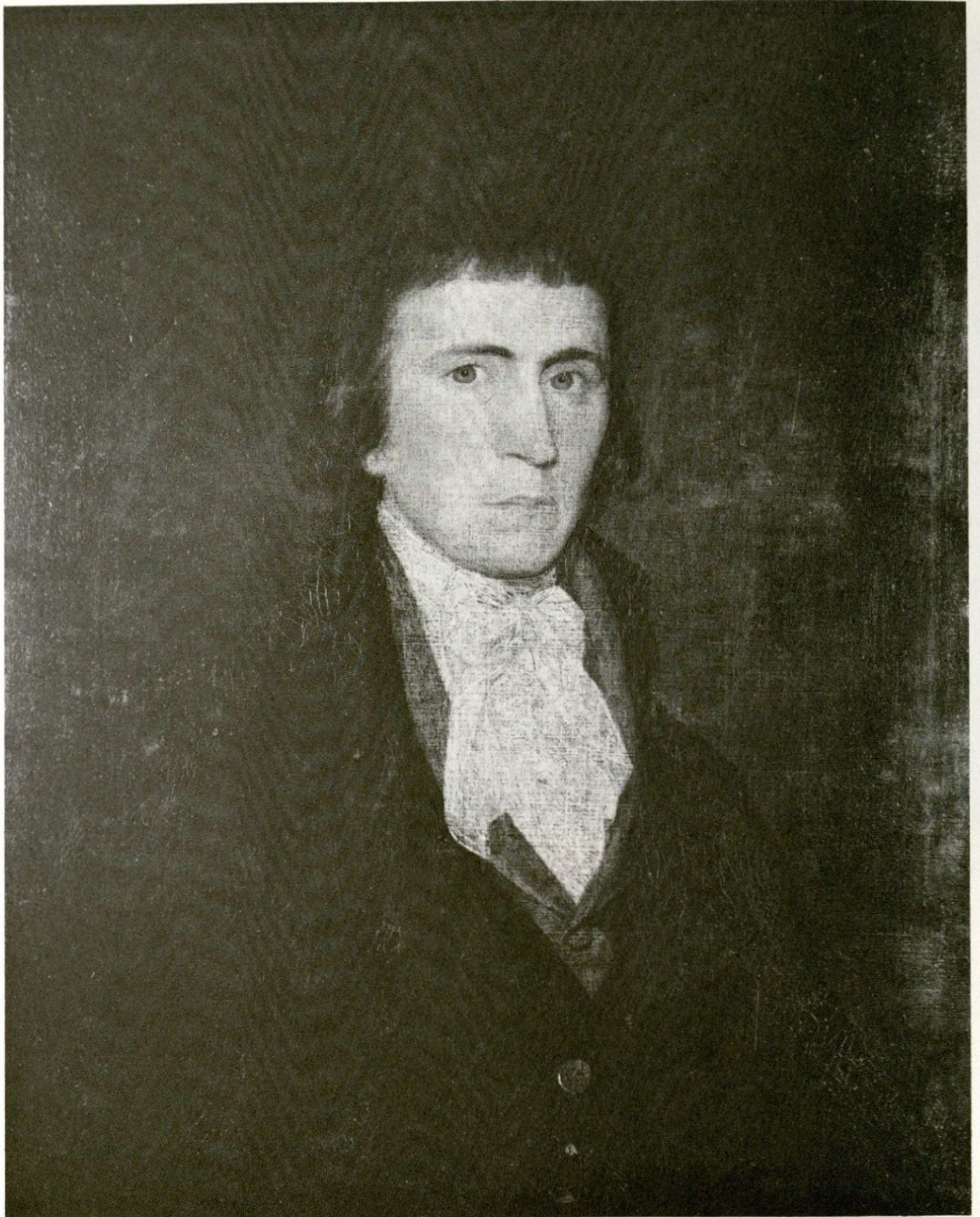


*This Passion causes but little agitation in the mind & therefore  
but very little the parts of the face; nevertheless the eye-brows rise  
up a little more than ordinary; the eyelids become equally better;  
the appearance of the mouth happens to be as usual & no sensible alteration.*

*Joh. Vander Lyn.*

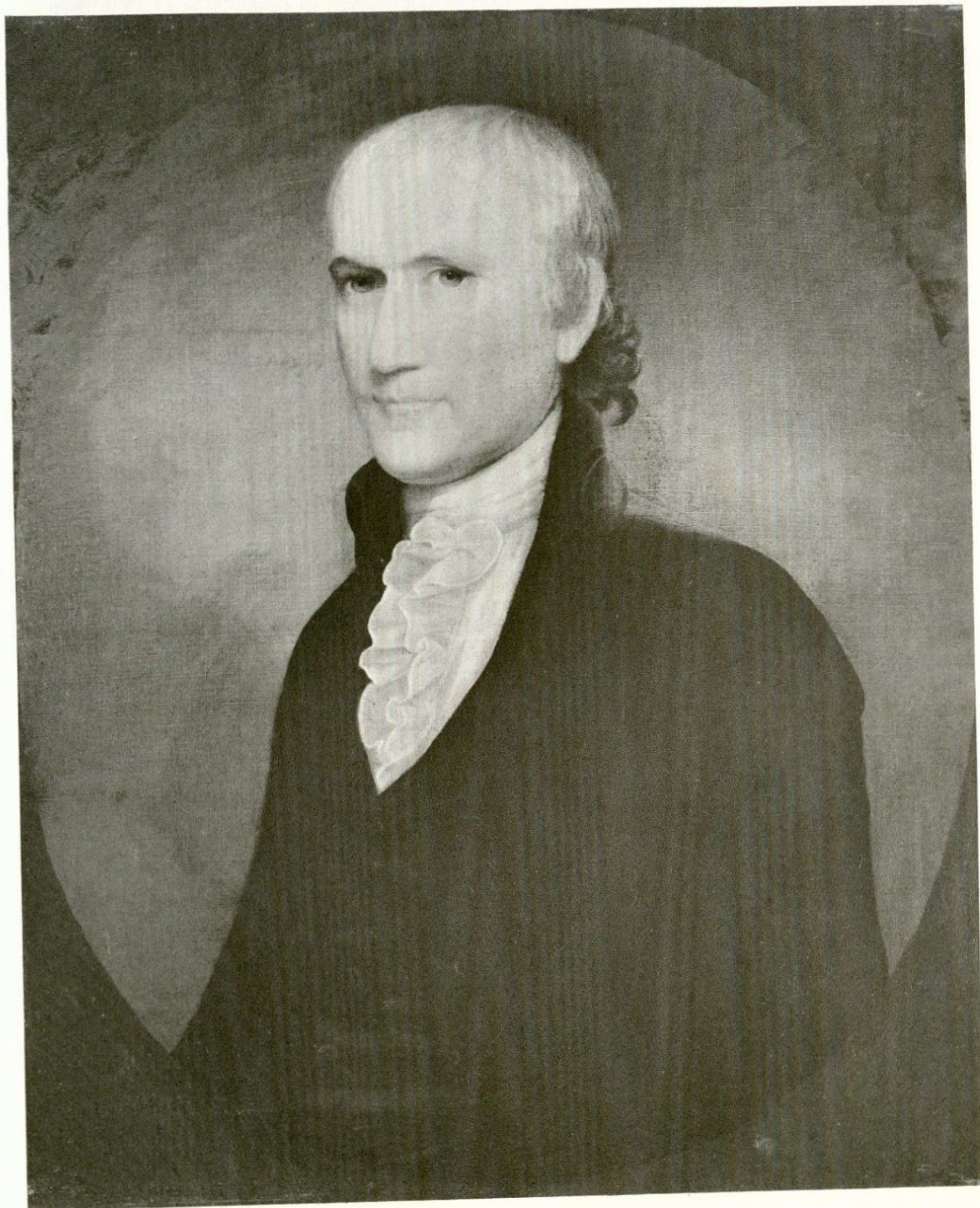
3. Drawing Book (Albany), 1791 and 1792





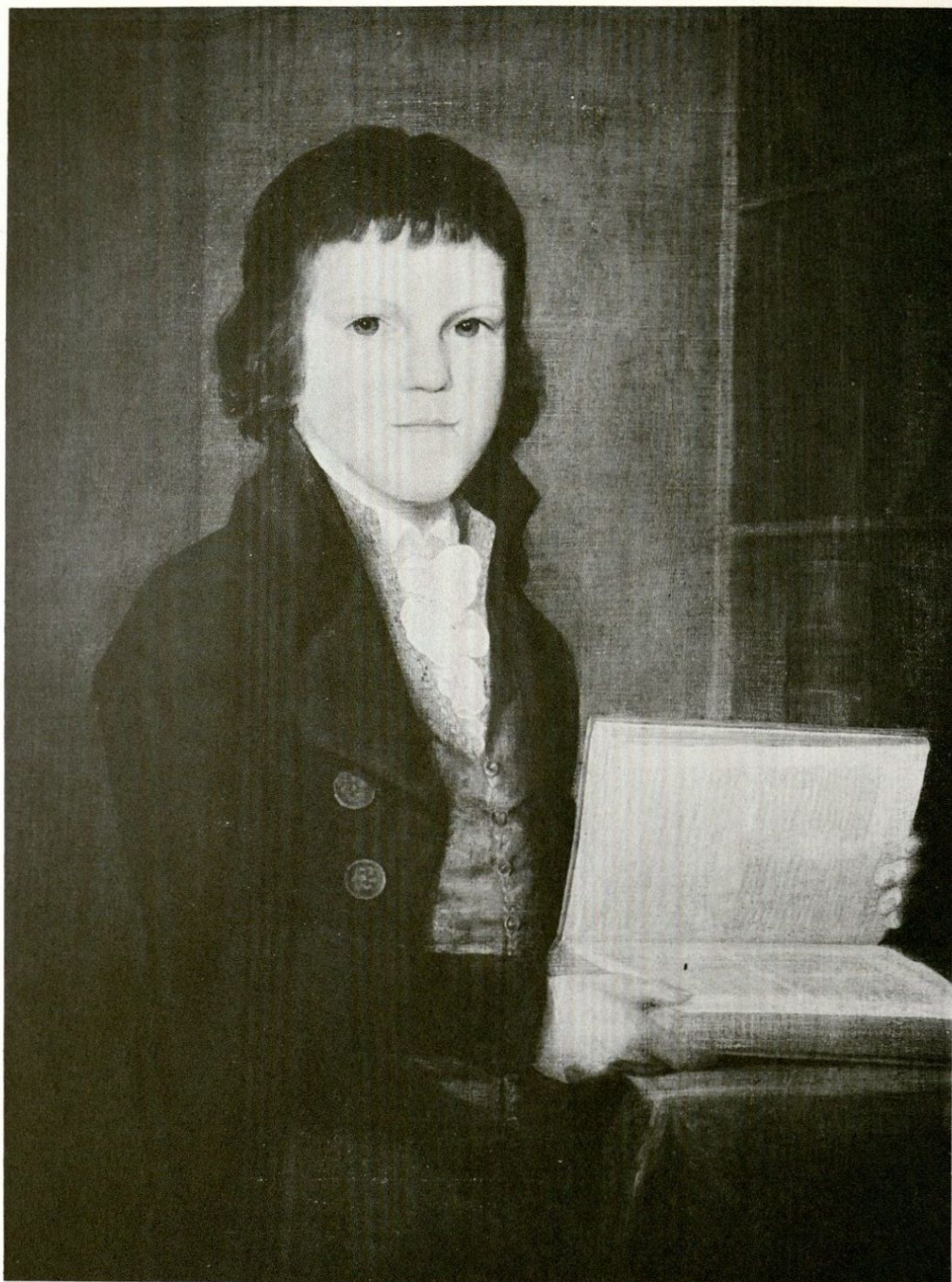
4. Portrait of Nicholas Vanderlyn, 1794





5. Judge Egbert Benson (after Gilbert Stuart), 1794-95





6. Portrait of Henry Vanderlyn as a Young Boy, 1794





7. Portrait of Edmund Bruyn, 1795-96



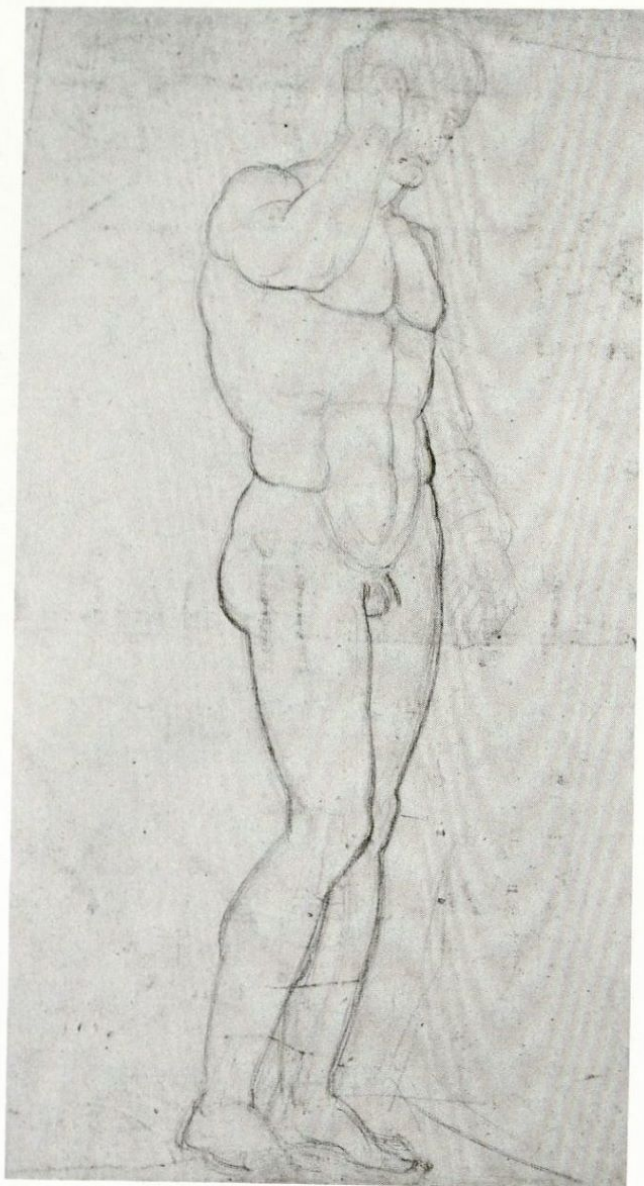


8. Portrait of Maria Masten Vanderlyn, 1796

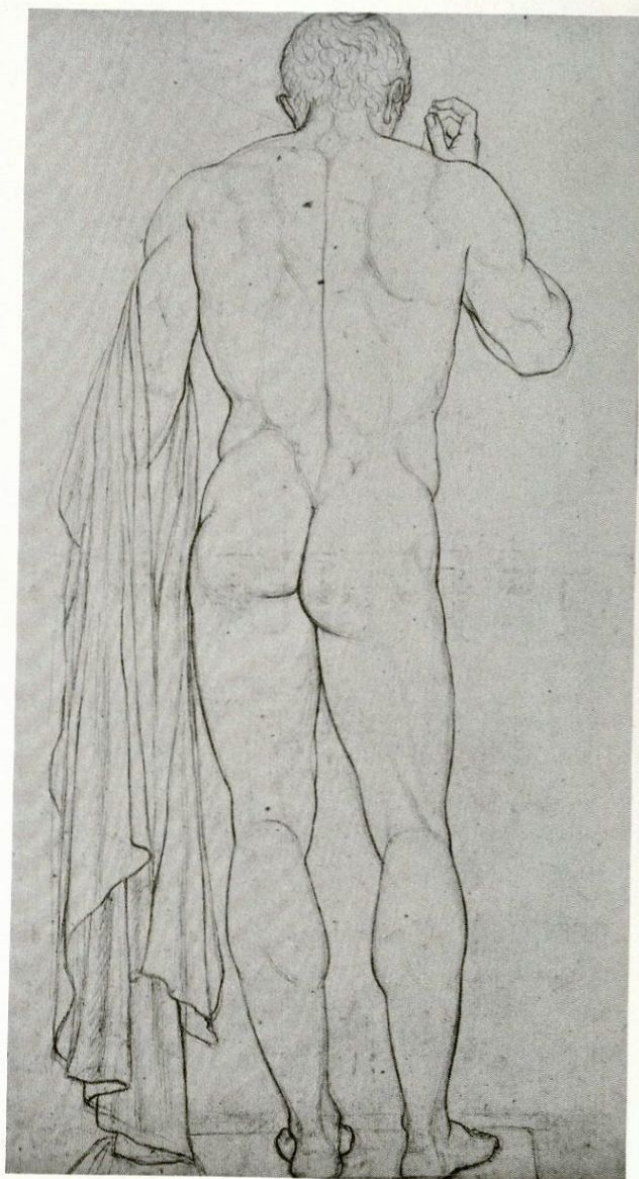






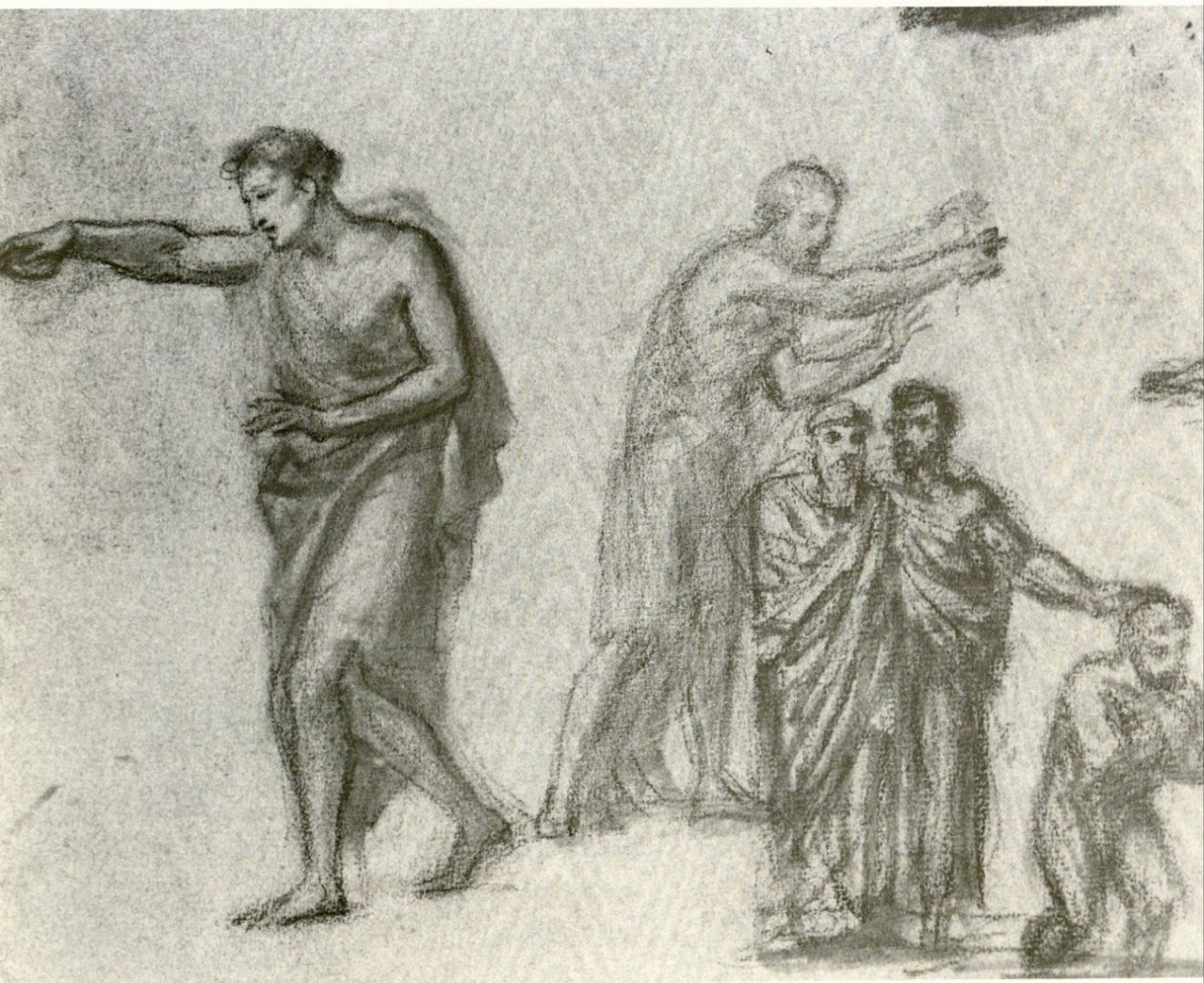


9. Drawing of Standing Male Nude, c. 1797-99  
(recto)



10. Drawing of Standing Male Nude  
c. 1797-99 (verso)





. Study of the Baptism of Christ (after Poussin)





12. Drawing of Charity from Senate House Sketchbook, prior to 1815



13. Allegorical Figure: Abundance





3

### 3. COPIES AND PORTRAITS:

#### *the means of subsistence*

To ignore the fluctuation of values is a fool's way to counterfeit time. It produces an illusion of permanence, one that veils the reality of events. Recall how the great Renaissance discoveries played themselves out within less than half a millenium, and how each year these discoveries grew more arcane unless history revived them.

Vanderlyn's copies and portraits are a case in point. Being old-fashioned exercises in verisimilitude, these two art forms hold little meaning for people today who have blind faith in the lens of the camera. We should recall why portraits came into being, who painted them and under what circumstances, and why today man is no longer recorded by man.

Portraiture, still life, and genre painting emerged during the Renaissance "discovery of the world and man," and became full-blown, independent art forms in the seventeenth century. These upstart art forms were put in their place at the bottom of the status heap by a new academic establishment which, in the field of art, was striving to be "upward bound." The academics felt the only way to make society forget the craftsman background of artists was for them to assume a learned pose. Thus mythological, biblical and historical painting were placed at the top of the hierarchy. Practitioners in these higher forms received full respect in the academies, including the right to vote.

Some artists worked happily within the confines of this system, while others like Rembrandt achieved greatness without it. Trouble did not really begin until the emergence of the modern spirit around 1750. On the one hand the neo-classic ideal gave highest honor to subjects from ancient and biblical history; on the other hand the new sensibility for landscape as personal expression began to challenge the validity of all societal hierarchies. Therefore if you were a Jacques Louis David, a great success in heroic painting, you could gracefully do portraits on the side without affecting your status. But if, as Thomas Gainsborough, you *liked* to paint landscapes, portraiture was a pesky means of subsistence.

Artists with provincial backgrounds often found it difficult to meet these problems with equanimity. Ambitious Americans, suffering from cultural inferiority more than anyone else, tolerated portraiture as a lowly burden,



hoping always for the "great subject" with which to paint themselves out of their provincial heritage.

Vanderlyn suffered from this syndrome. While he was perfectly happy with the eighteenth century system of patronage and produced well when enjoying the support of Aaron Burr and William McClure, support money frequently ran out and he was forced to somehow make ends meet. Portraits brought a quick but small sum—about \$60 for a bust-length. Because he took great pains in his portraiture and demanded many sittings, little time was left him for important projects. Copies brought in more—for example, \$400 for the *Antiope*. But these were speculative ventures. Buyers had to be solicited and the time-lag between painting and payment was a frequent irritant.

We judge Vanderlyn chiefly by his history paintings, exhibiting thereby values which paralleled his. Books and articles concentrate primarily upon his *Marius*, *Ariadne*, and *Jane McCrea*, treat his portraits as afterthoughts, and ignore his drawings. This must be rectified for the portraits in this exhibition alone should qualify Vanderlyn for an important position in the history of American painting. Which of his compatriots had his range? Who else could conceive the delicate *Sarah Church*, lost in her romantic dream (Fig. 19), the proud asperity of *Sampson Wilder* (Fig. 25), the pedestrianism of *John Sudam* (Fig. 36), and the unforgettable beak-nosed smile of *William Denning* (Fig. 37)? And who could do this without overwhelming the sitters' respective personalities with the fashion of one's technical wit?

Americans have also erred by generally ignoring the many copies our artists made of European masterpieces. A quick perusal of early nineteenth century exhibition records reveals how common a practice copying was, even for such a venerable landscapist as Thomas Doughty. Perhaps we avoid this matter because it reminds us of our esthetic serfdom to Europe and because a few of the old masters in our museums may turn out to have quasi-American parentage.

The *Antiope* of 1809 (Fig. 14), based upon the Correggio original in the Louvre, proves Vanderlyn's competence as a copyist. He began working on it shortly after he returned to Paris, as a soft feminine contrast to the severe Roman drama of the *Marius* (Fig. 51). Even before the *Antiope* was done it suggested to the artist the subject of his next painting, *Ariadne Abandoned on the Island of Naxos* (Fig. 57). Obviously the pose of *Antiope* inspired that of *Ariadne*. But what is surprising is the similiarity of mood



and the relation of these two mythological creatures to *Jane McCrea* (Fig. 63). Vanderlyn seemed enchanted with the idea of young female beauty being corrupted in a forest setting by male perfidy.

Thirty-five years later the artist painted a smaller version of *Antiope* for a gentleman from South Carolina (Fig. 15). The same sequence of events happened with the *Ariadne*: the early Philadelphia version (Fig. 57) was followed by the smaller and later version, this time purchased by a gentleman from Wisconsin (Fig. 62). In both instances the major effort was followed by a truncated adaptation of lesser quality. If the aging Vanderlyn exploited his earlier triumphs because of financial need, he still had the nerve to adapt his copying to different subjects and styles. This is shown by his Rembrandt head (in the Gibbes Memorial Art Gallery), and the *Calumny* after Raphael (Fig. 16).

The two dozen portraits which make up one quarter of this exhibition should give the viewer a fair estimate of Vanderlyn's contribution to the art of portraiture. In my opinion seventeen of these portraits are authentic without question. The others either lack a convincing ownership pedigree or appear slightly unusual. Some deviation must be allowed because even a few of the unquestionable Vanderlyns vary from whatever sense of the norm we can establish. On the other hand, works which push too hard on the probability parameter are kept for the later grouping of "Problem Pictures."

The sympathetic observer will find much to interest him in this assemblage of portraits. He can discover the compositional similarity in the two works showing a mother and child and try to explain why the French sophistication of the first (Fig. 20) was relinquished in favor of rusticated severity in the second (Fig. 21). He can ponder the reasons why the two early Burr portraits stand somewhat apart from the rest (Figs. 22 and 23). Or he can consider how the image of President Taylor (Fig. 38) measured the way Americans began cutting their leaders down to normal scale. Earlier, President Jackson could be seen with noble stance and visionary glance (Fig. 33), but now, at mid-century, the hero arm of the great man lowers, he takes his seat like the rest of us, and gazes out at the graspable.

The *Portrait of George Washington* (Fig. 39) could not be lent to this exhibition because it is an integral part of the decor of the House of Representatives. Many visitors to the United States Capital see this work from the balcony, but no one can inspect it close up from the floor of the House unless he is accompanied by a Congressman. The painting should be better



known for it ranks among the finer portrayals of our first president. In commissioning this work for the Washington Centennial of 1832, Congress gave the artist a double task: he must copy the famous head of Gilbert Stuart and create his own figure and setting.

Vanderlyn was the ideal person for the job, and Congress had the good sense to realize it. If, in supporting his candidacy no one recalled his apprenticeship under Stuart when the Washington head was in the making, his fantastic ability as the copier of the *Antiope* was not forgotten. Indeed, it was used as one of the strongest arguments in his favor. For once in his lifetime both of Vanderlyn's means of subsistence conspired together for his advantage.



14. Antiope (after Correggio), 1809

Not in Exhibition





15. Antiope (after Correggio), 1843-44

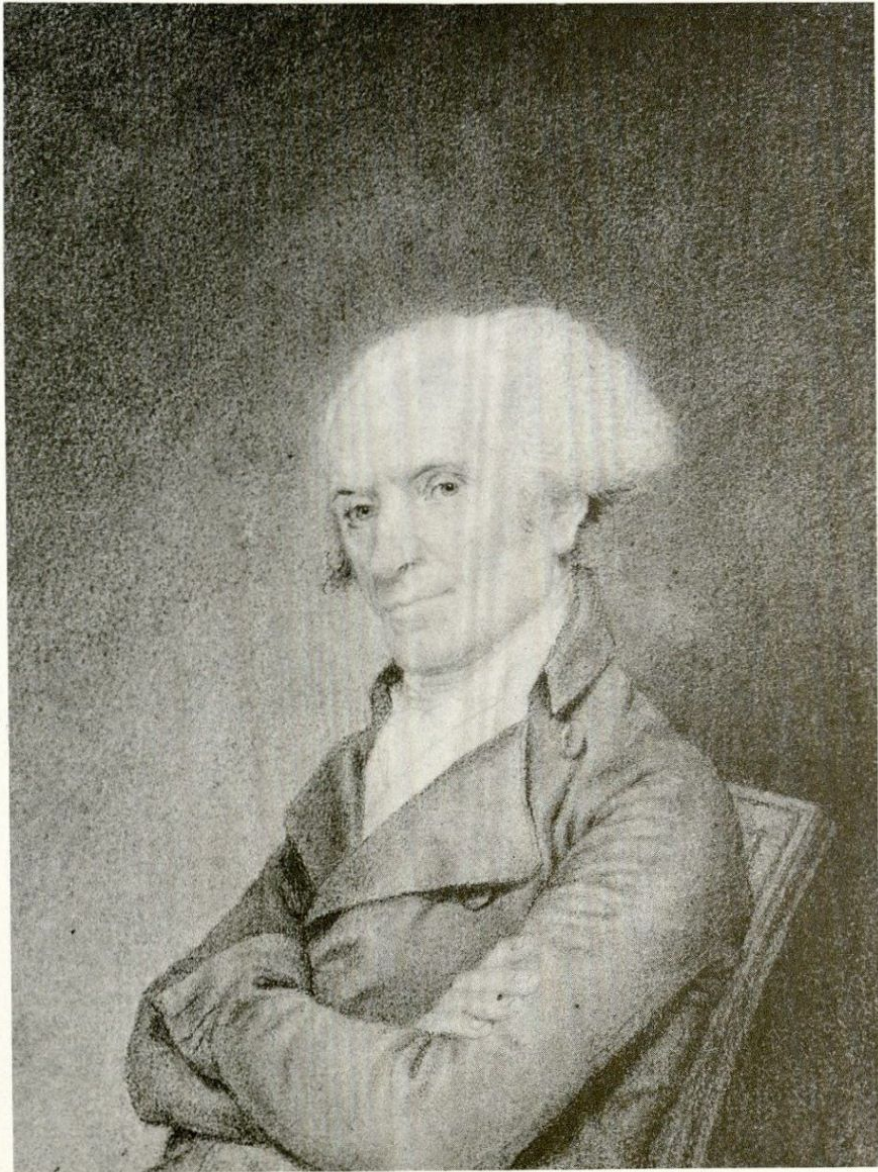




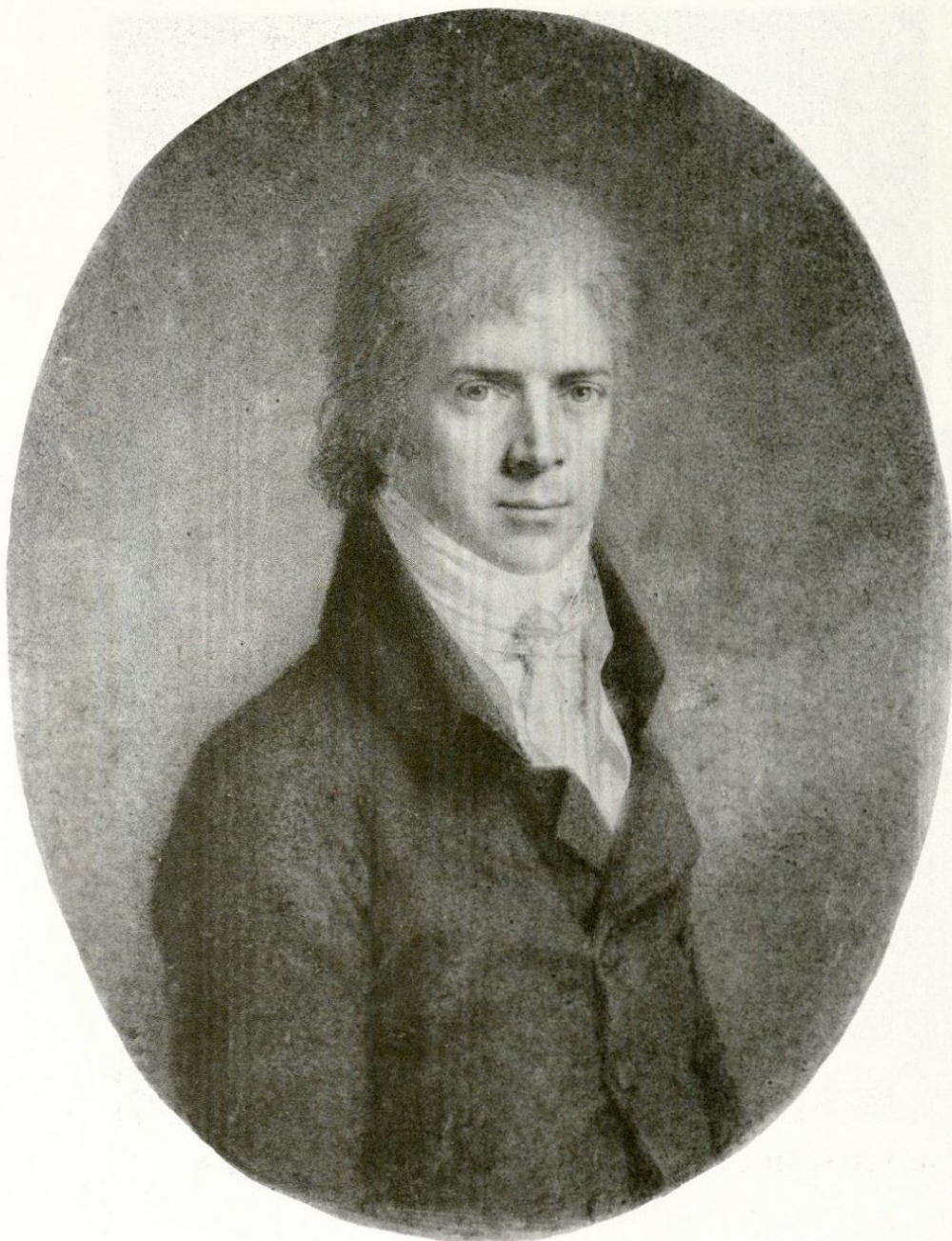
*After a drawing in bistre by Raphaël composed from the description given by Lucien of a picture painted by Apelles representing Calumny, on the occasion of a false accusation brought against the painter Apelles.*

16. The Calumny of Apelles (after Raphael), after 1835





18. Portrait Drawing of Governor Elbridge Gerry, Sr., 1798



17. Portrait Drawing of Robert Fulton, 1798





19. Sarah Russell Church, 1799



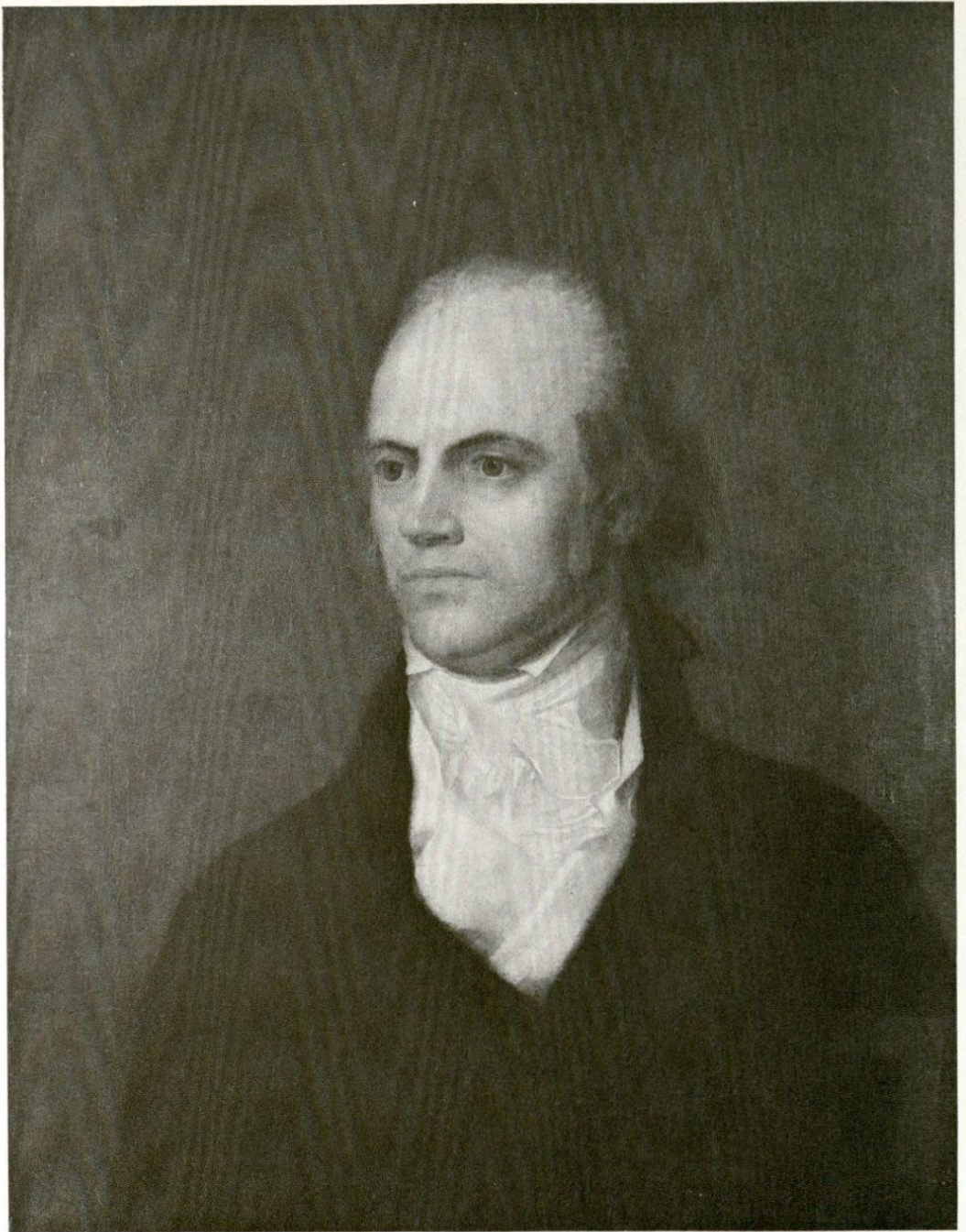


21. Mrs. Marinus Willett and her Son, Marinus, Jr., 1802





20. Mrs. Edward Church and Child, 1799

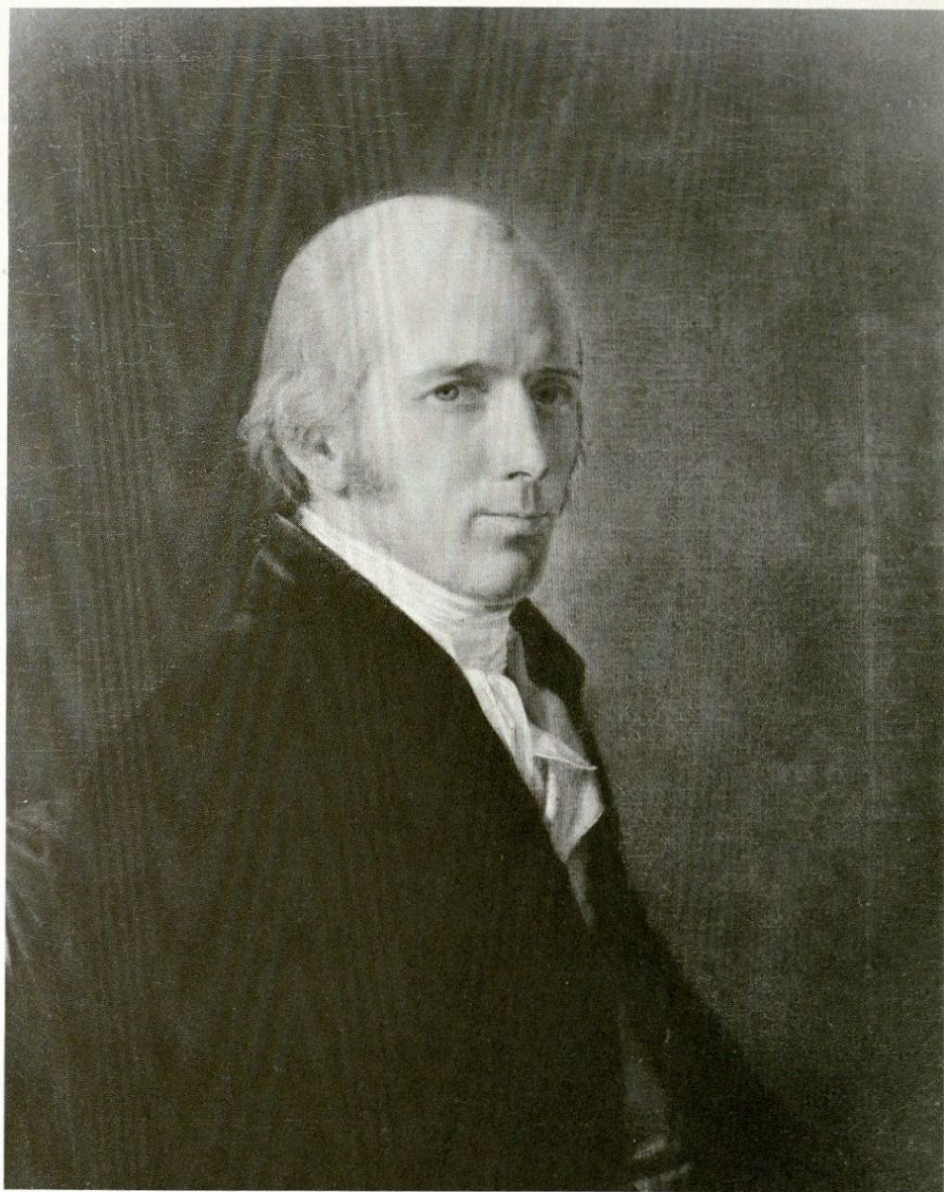


22. Portrait of Aaron Burr, 1802-03



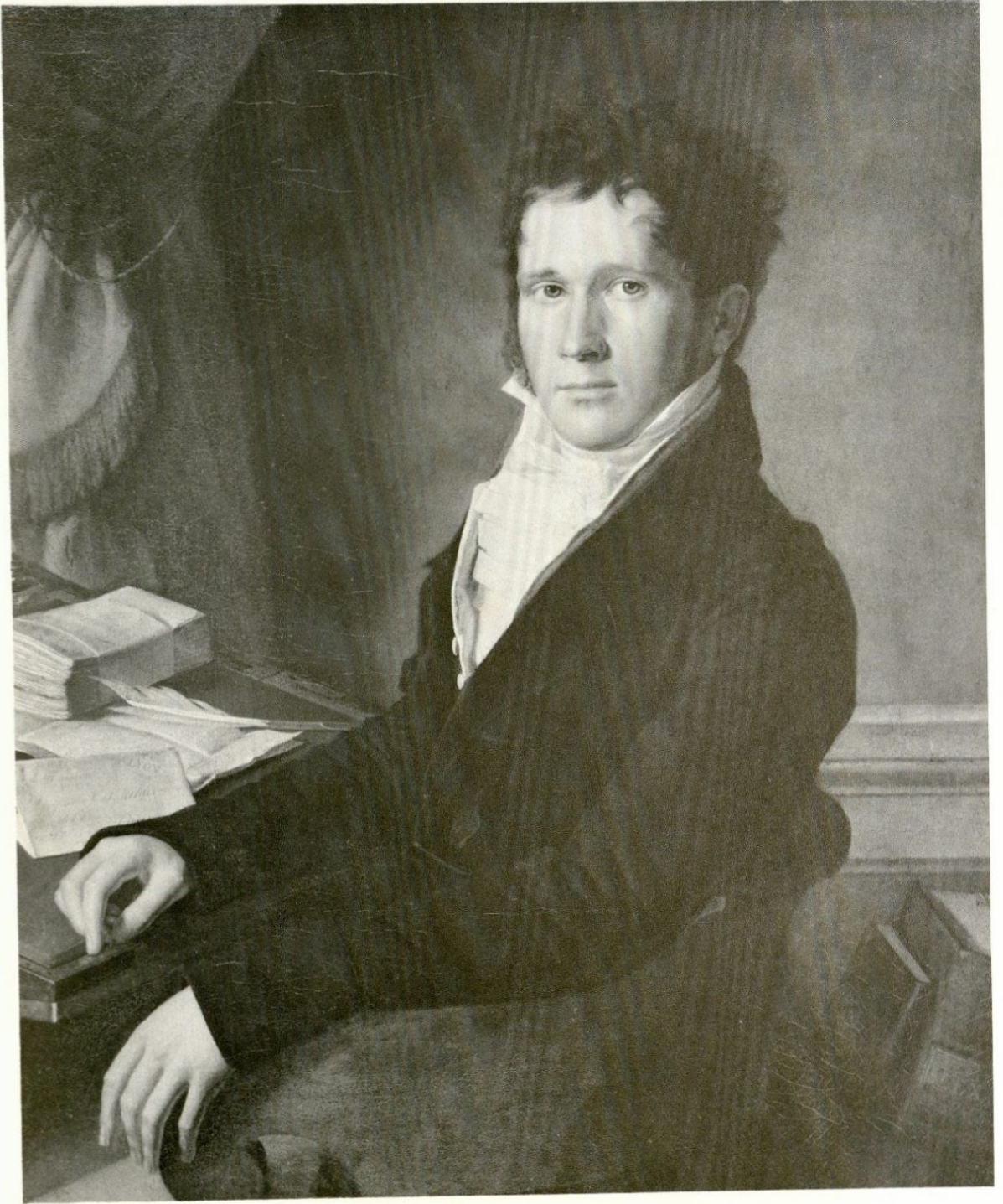


23. Portrait of Theodosia Burr, 1802-03



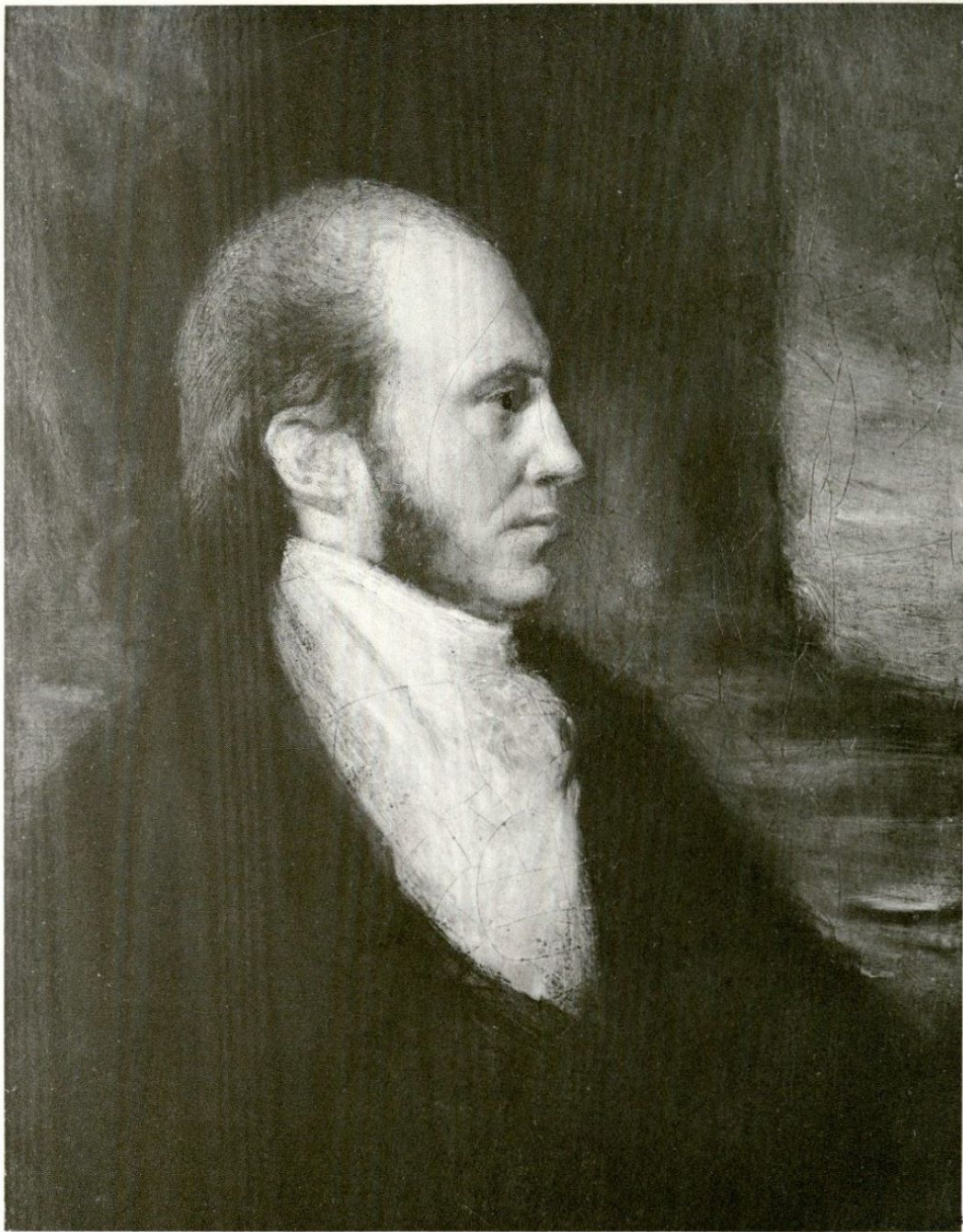
24. Portrait of Roger Strong, 1802-03





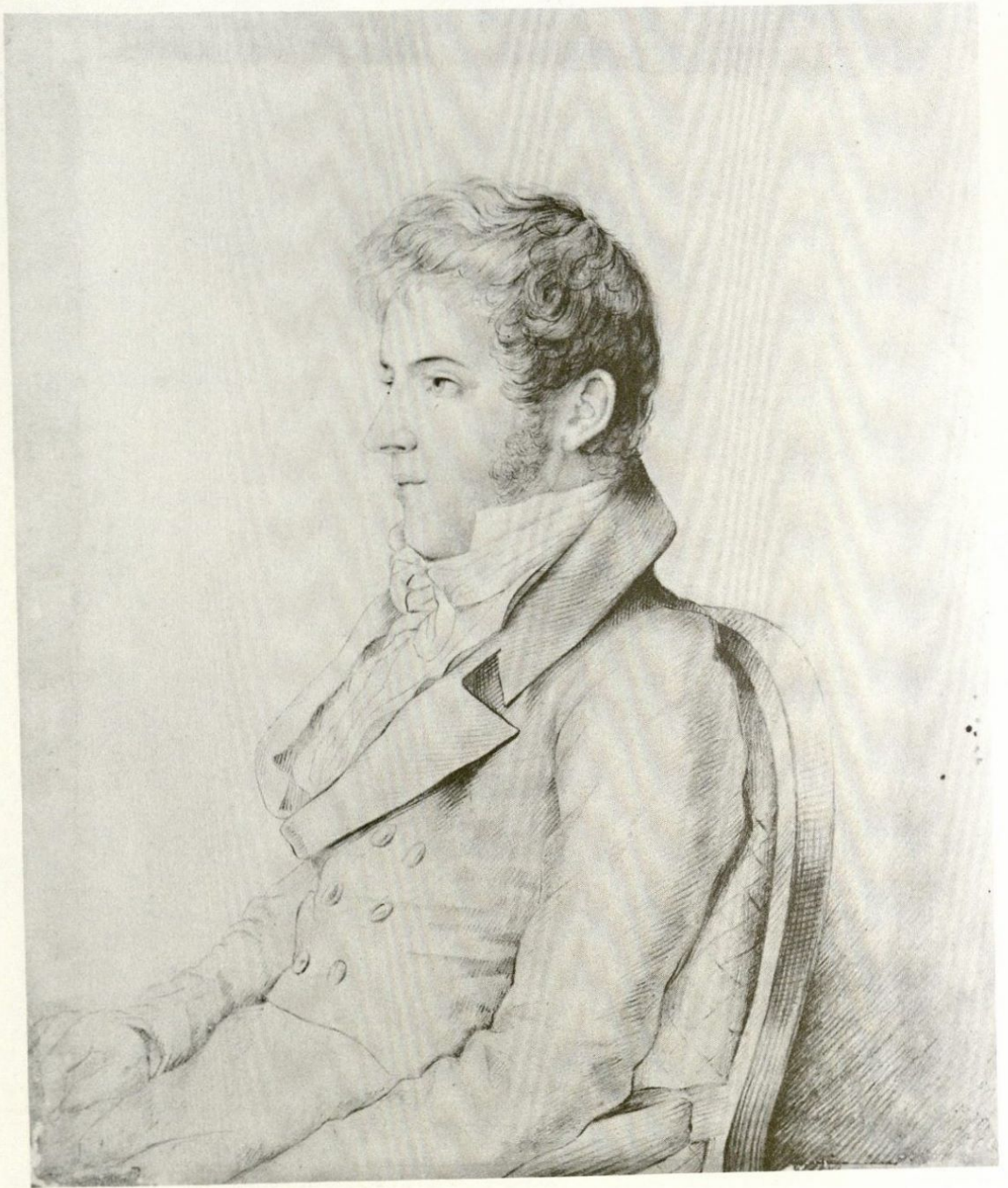
25. Portrait of Sampson Vryling Stoddard Wilder, 1805





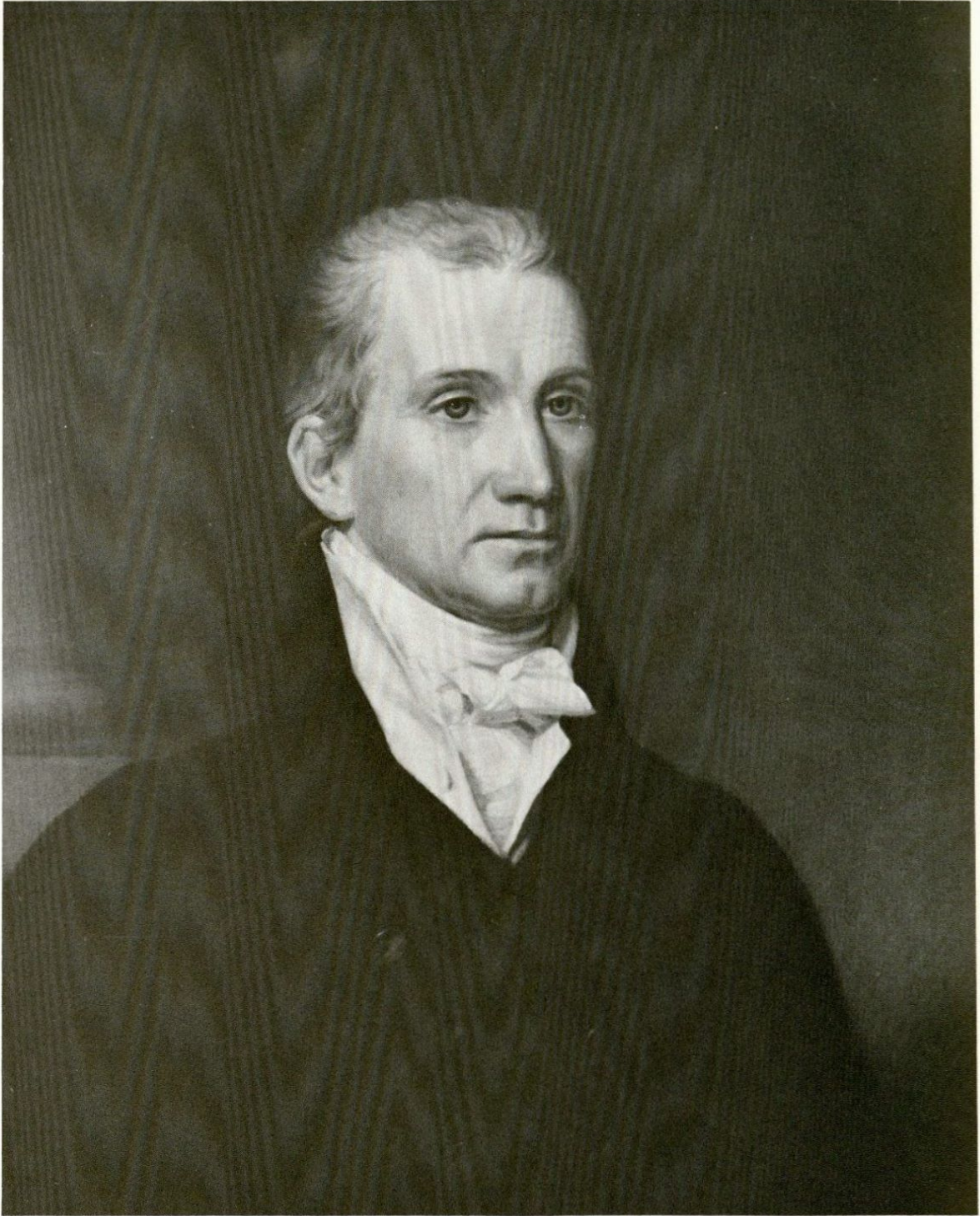
27. Portrait Study of Aaron Burr, 1809





26. Portrait of Washington Irving, 1805





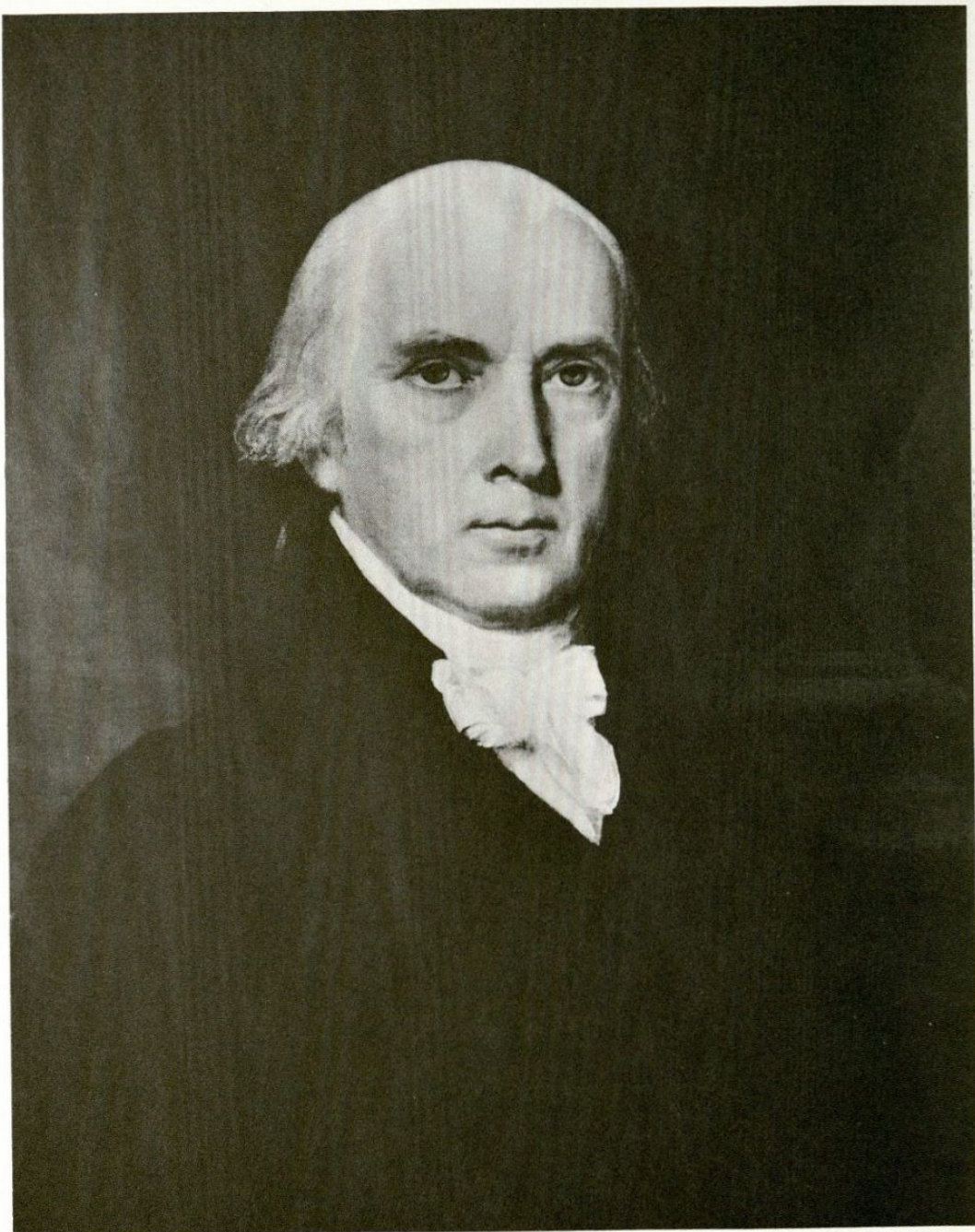
29. Portrait of James Monroe (replica), c. 1816





28. Portrait of Zachariah Schoonmaker, 1816

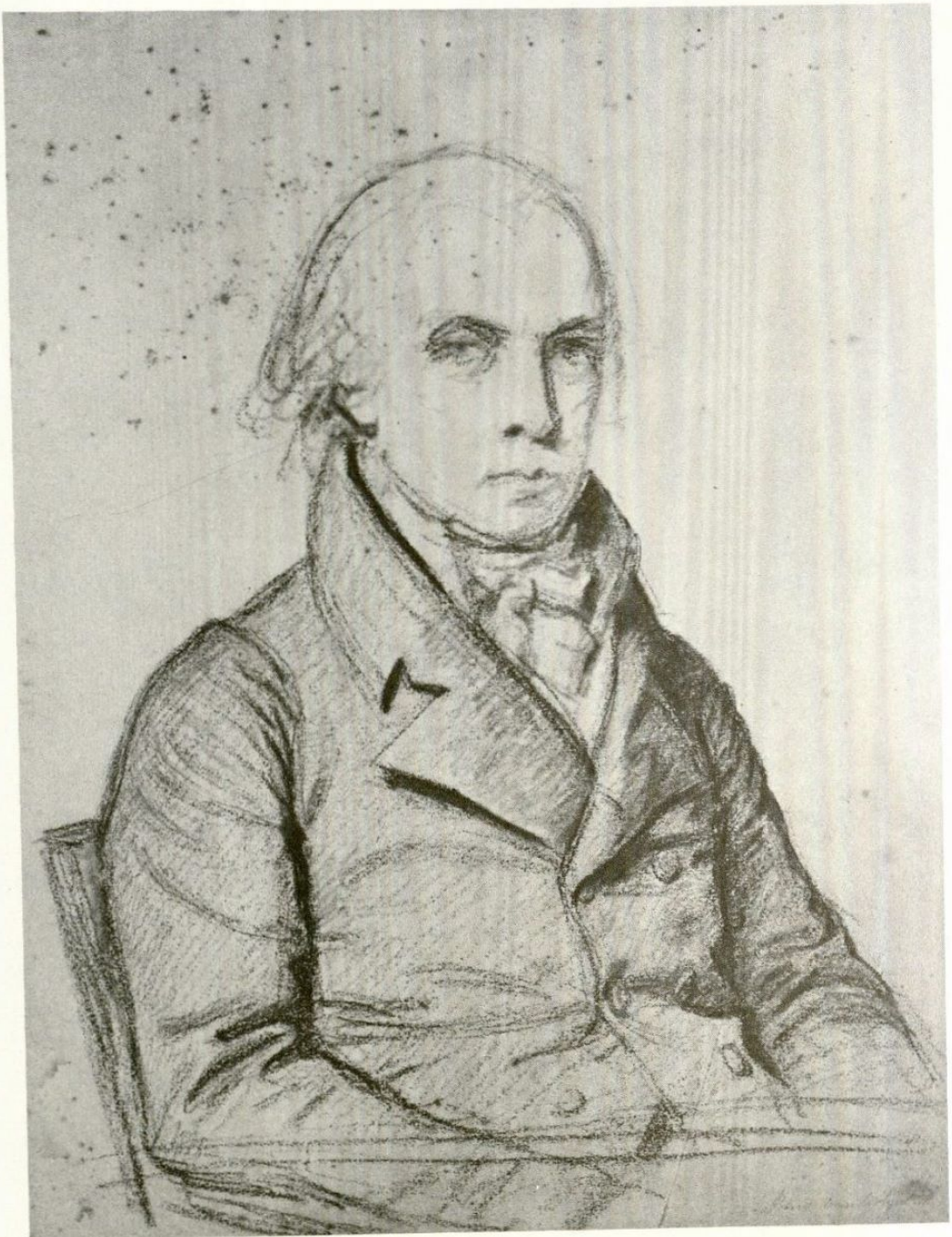




30. Portrait of President Madison, 1816

Not in Exhibition





31. Portrait Drawing of President Madison, 1816



32. Portrait Drawing of Martin Van Buren

33. Drawing: Standing Fi  
and Study of Head,









36. Portrait of John Sudan, 1830



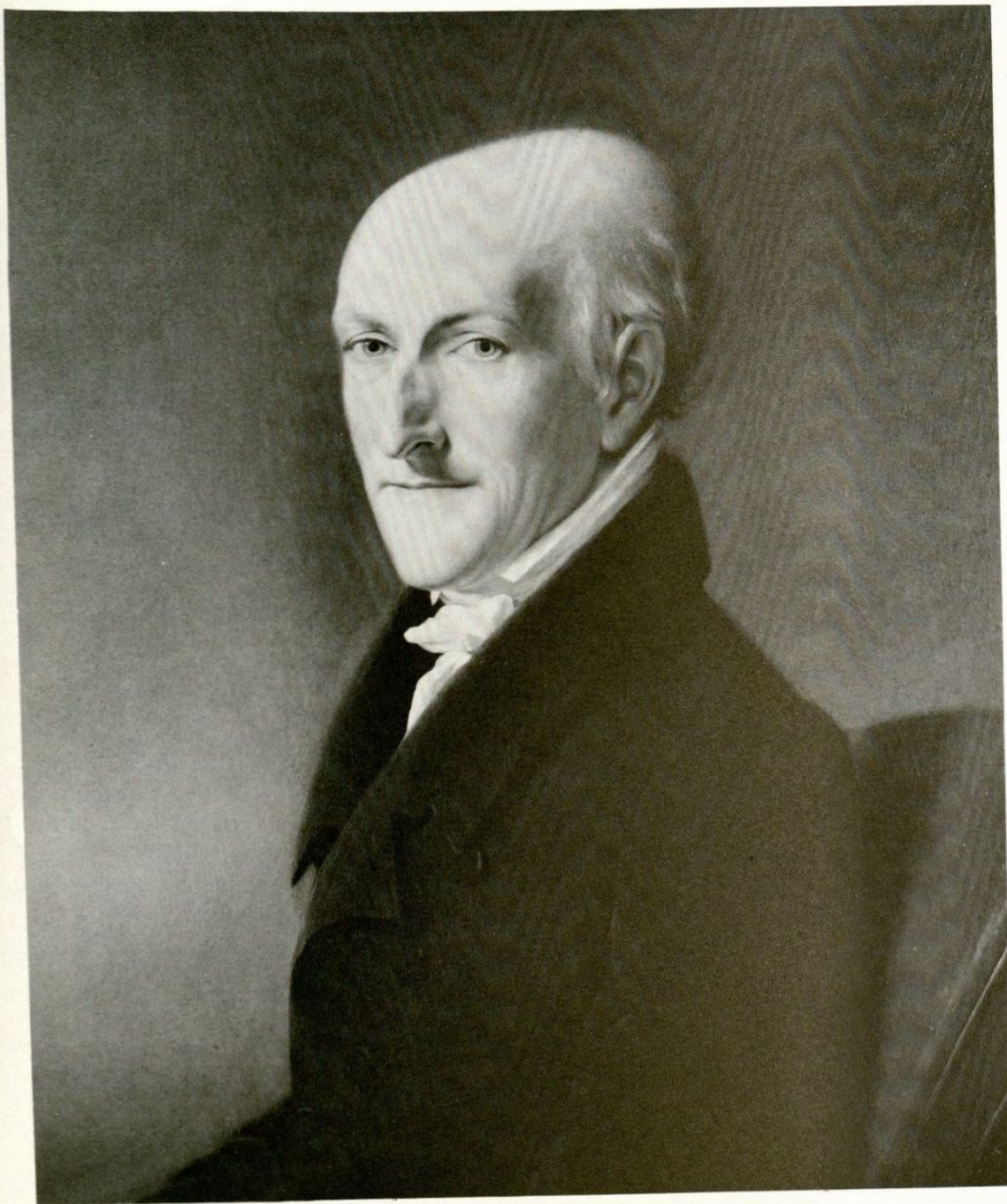


35. Portrait of Philip Hone, 1827



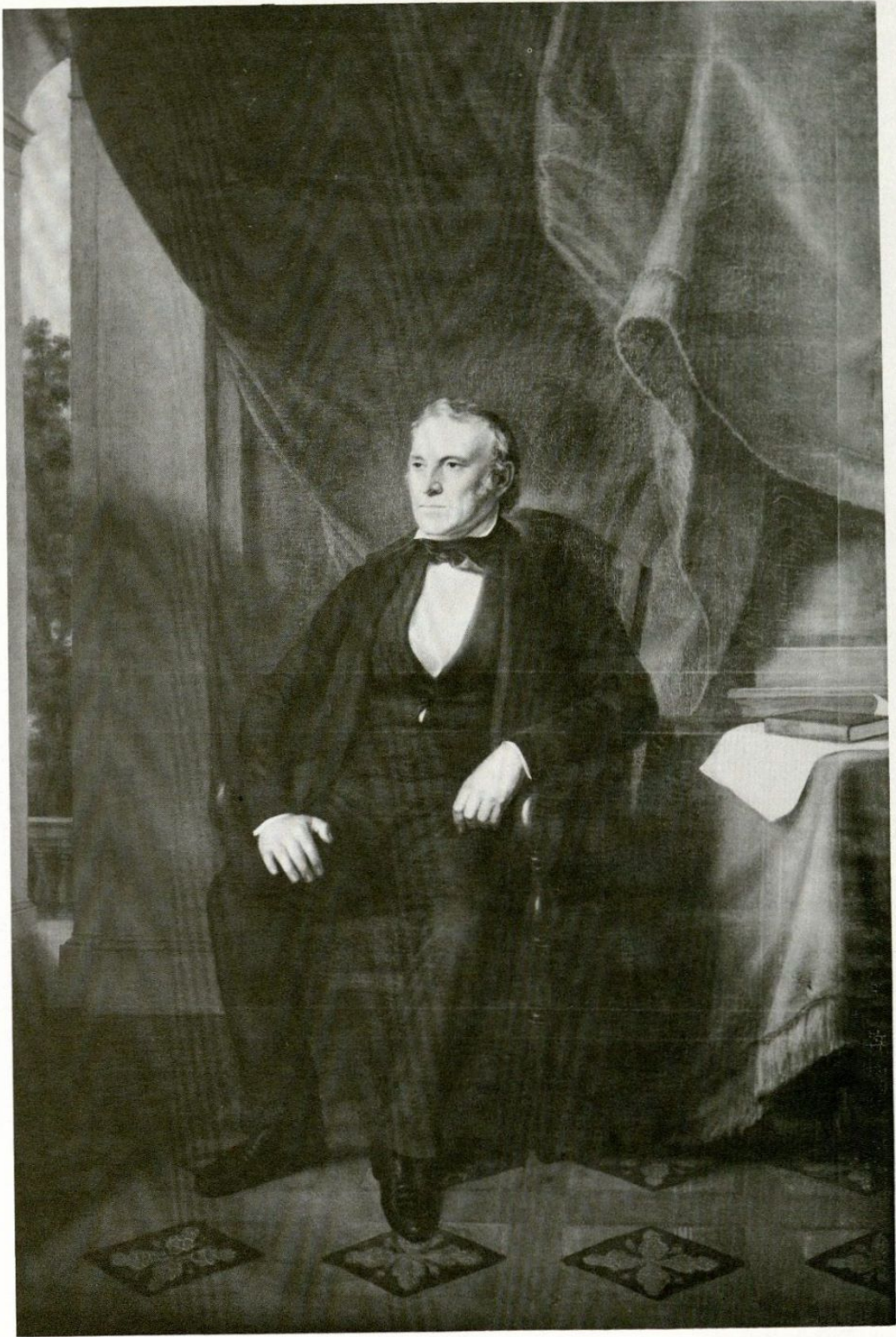






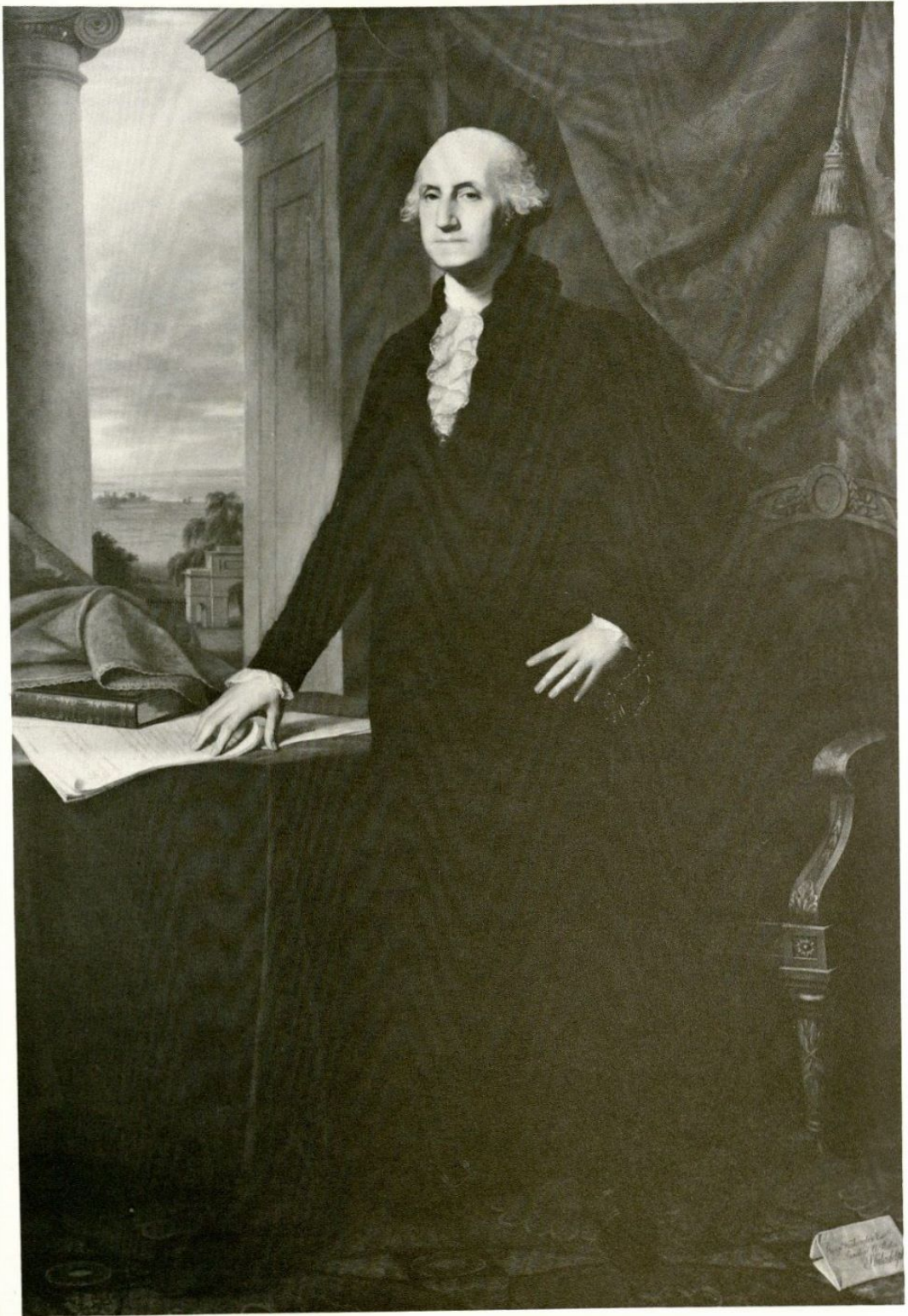
34. Portrait of Judge Henry Brockholst Livingston, c. 1820





38. Portrait of Zachary Taylor, 1850





39. Portrait of George Washington, 1832-34

Not in Exhibition





4

#### 4. NIAGARA FALLS AND VERSAILLES:

##### *providential projects that failed*

Vanderlyn made two efforts to emancipate himself from financial worry. In each instance he tried to reach a different kind of public than had been his wont: the larger public which could afford engravings but not paintings; and the yet larger public which loved spectacles such as panoramas. If all went well, profits from these low price high volume enterprises would continue, providing thereby security like an annual income. However, such projects succeed only if the timing is right and if public taste is satisfied as it changes.

If Vanderlyn was the first American to paint Niagara Falls, we ought to be sure when he did it. Everyone mistakenly agrees that Vanderlyn traveled to the Falls in the autumn of 1802. The most impressive evidence for this date can be found in the special study Frank H. Severence made on Vanderlyn's trip: he based his date upon the Gosman manuscript which he considered an impeccable source.<sup>1</sup> But if Vanderlyn left in the autumn of 1802 to begin his work on the Falls, he could not have discussed its completion during the early spring of that year: in his March 25, 1802 letter to Aaron Burr he wrote:

(I will) return to this city (New York) to finish my engagement and pass the heat of the Summer in the country, retired and wholly devoted to the completing of my Niagaras...<sup>2</sup>

The case for mid-September of 1801 as Vanderlyn's true date of departure can be based on Aaron Burr's letter of September 18. After requesting advice and protection for the young artist, Burr said that "he is now on his way through your country to Niagara."<sup>3</sup> Possibly the idea of painting the Falls came from Theodosia Burr, for she had traveled to Niagara with her new husband during the preceding month.<sup>4</sup>

Vanderlyn took almost two years to finish the paintings. By the end of July, 1803 they were ready to be taken to London in search of an engraver.<sup>5</sup> Completed in 1804, the two engravings (Figs. 40 and 46) yielded far smaller profits than expected. Thereafter the artist returned to the Falls twice to make new paintings of the subject.

It is difficult to know when these later paintings were made. They have to be fitted in, with Vanderlyn's correspondence as sole guide of how to do



so. This is not easy for the two dates he gives for revisiting the Falls (1827 and 1837),<sup>6</sup> and the vague references of small, large, or raffle paintings of Niagara cannot be associated with certainty with this or that extant work. I would guess that the Senate House *Niagara* (Fig. 45) was painted in the early 1840's and was based on the oil sketch of 1827 (Fig. 42). The Albany oil (Fig. 41) must have been made after the engravings of 1804 for the fir tree in the foreground has not grown. The Kingston two-part study (Fig. 44) could be either an adaption from the engraving or the sketch which he said was made "on the spot in oil colours" in 1827.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever the historical facts may be, Vanderlyn's *Niagara Falls* did not satisfy the clamor for sensational viewpoints or the stress on power which taste began to demand of the Falls after 1830. Yet he did make a solid statement of objective fact and, before Barbizon, sketched in oils from nature.

We should not overlook the way Vanderlyn interjected human and animal activity into the large Kingston canvas (Fig. 45). At the left a farmer leads his ox and cart. A small village is seen at the right. While a romantic bird perches on an appropriately dead tree, a dog forages below. An Indian family, at peace with the environment and the white settlers, observes the expansive scene. These additions show how Vanderlyn tried to respond to the emerging Hudson River aesthetic of "painting as poem."<sup>8</sup>

Vanderlyn also approached the painting of *Versailles* with objective practicality. The early printed brochures for *Versailles* asserted that

The original sketches of which were taken on the spot by him in Autumn of 1815, supposed time of day, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m.<sup>9</sup>

This unusual awareness of the specificity of time was developed into systematic methodology fifty years later by the Impressionists.

The claim that Vanderlyn introduced panoramas to America is not true. The old records of the New York art world around 1800 are full of notices concerning this new form of spectacle. The circular view of Charleston, South Carolina, advertised on February 4, 1797 in the *Weekly Museum*, was 110 feet long and 20 feet high.<sup>10</sup> The view of the Cities of London and Westminster was even larger (2,400 square feet). As this was announced in the *American Minerva* on August 21, 1795 Vanderlyn could have seen it before he left for Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Vanderlyn first thought about making a panorama during his stay in Rome.<sup>12</sup> By the time he returned to America in 1815 the panorama idea

was "well established in New York."<sup>13</sup> The artist's talent for being behind the times was matched by his obtuseness to changing tastes. He was almost deaf to the excellent advice given in *The National Advocate* on April 21, 1818:

Although it was not to have been expected that Mr. Vanderlyn would have left the high department of historical painting, in which he is so eminent, to devote his time to the more humble, though more profitable, pursuit of painting cities and landscapes—yet, in a new country, taste for the arts must be graduated according to the scale of intellect and education, and where only the scientific connoisseur would admire his *Marius* and *Ariadne*, hundreds will flock to his panorama to visit Paris, Rome and Naples. This is to 'catch the manners living as they rise,' and with them catch the means to promote a taste for the fine arts. We suggest to Mr. Vanderlyn now, for fear we should forget it, that panorama views of our battles, such as Chippewa, Erie, New Orleans, Lake Champlain, etc., with the likeness of officers engaged on those occasions, would not only be highly national and popular, but exceedingly profitable.

He responded to this advice with a proposition to paint the battles of General Jackson during the War of 1812. Easily discouraged when the City of New Orleans did not accept the idea, Vanderlyn ceased painting panoramas and depended thereafter on European imports purchased at great expense from the successful Robert Burford of England.

1. Frank H. Severence, "John Vanderlyn's visit to Niagara Falls in 1802," *Buffalo History Society Publications*, XV (Buffalo, 1911), pp. 159-173.

2. Letter kept at the Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia.

3. Matthew L. Davis, *Memoirs of Aaron Burr, II*, New York, 1837, p. 153.

4. See Dorothy Valentine Smith, "An Intercourse of the Heart: Some Little-Known letters of Theodosia Burr, *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, 37 (Jan. 1953), pp. 41-53. Theodosia was born in 1782, married Joseph Alston in Albany on Feb. 2, 1801.

5. Letter to Nicholas Vanderlyn July 1, and July 30, 1803.

6. Description of the Falls written by Vanderlyn in 1843; and a letter of April 20, 1843 to Levi E. Vanderlyn. The artist also gave 1826 as a date in a published handbill: "A general view of the Falls & Rapids of Niagara from a highly finished sketch painted on the spot by John Vanderlyn in 1826."

7. *Ibid.*



8. See Donald A. Ringe, "Painting as Poem in The Hudson River Aesthetic," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 12 (1960) pp. 71-83. Ringe succinctly describes the general situation which confronted American artists: "Once the artists accepted the principle of suggestiveness as the foundation of their aesthetic theory and sought to challenge the expressiveness of poetry, they were confronted with a dilemma. Faced on the one hand with the necessity for accurate representation of the external world so that they might communicate the truths of nature, they believed on the other hand, that such imitation—or even representation—was in reality an inferior form of art. Since they could not break away from accurate, though perhaps idealized, representation, their only recourse was to try to instill in their works as much thematic meaning as their subjects would bear. Only by such means could they achieve the 'content' deemed essential in any serious work."

9. Brochure for the *Versailles Panorama*, (New York, 1822).

10. Rita Susswein Gottesman, *The Arts and Crafts in New York 1770-1799*, New-York Historical Society, 1954.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Letter to D. B. Warden, March 20, 1807.

13. Richard Carl Wickman, *An Evaluation of the Employment of Panoramic Scenery in the Nineteenth-Century Theater*, unpublished dissertation, Ohio State University, 1961, p. 86. This excellent study is far more helpful than the short pieces written in response to the Metropolitan display of Vanderlyn's *Versailles* in 1956; e.g., Theodore Bolton, "Vanderlyn and American panoramania," *Art News*, (November, 1956), pp. 42-45, 52.



40. Niagara Falls (engraved by J. Merigot), 1804

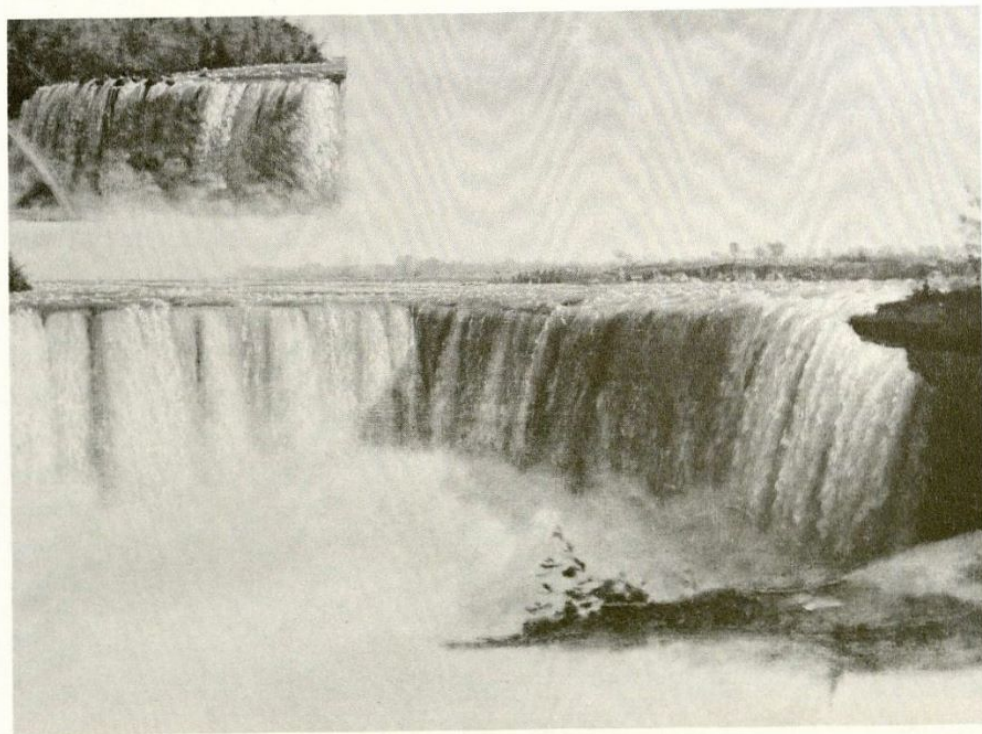


41. View of Niagara Falls, either 1827 or 1837



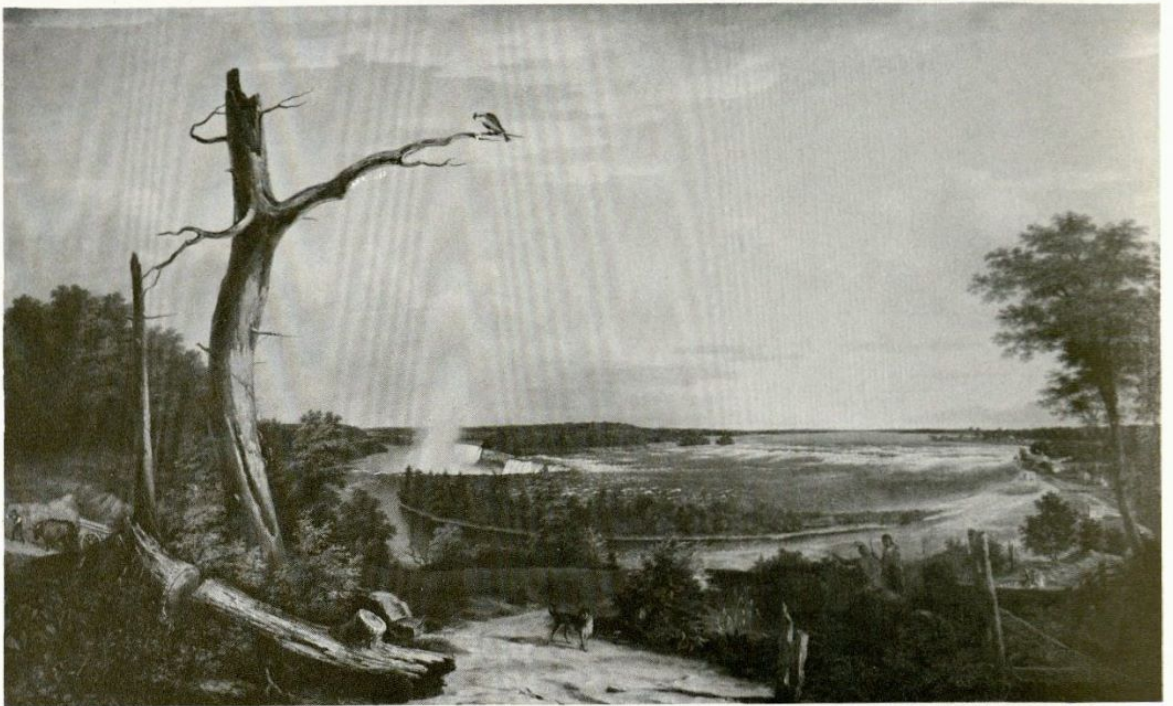


43. Niagara Falls (engraved by F. D. Lewis), 1804



44. Double View Oil Study of Niagara Falls, c. 1827





45. Niagara Falls, c. 1842-43



42. Oil Study of Niagara Falls, c. 1827





46. Study of Allegorical Figure Poëma Lyricum,  
for Versailles Panorama, c. 1814-15

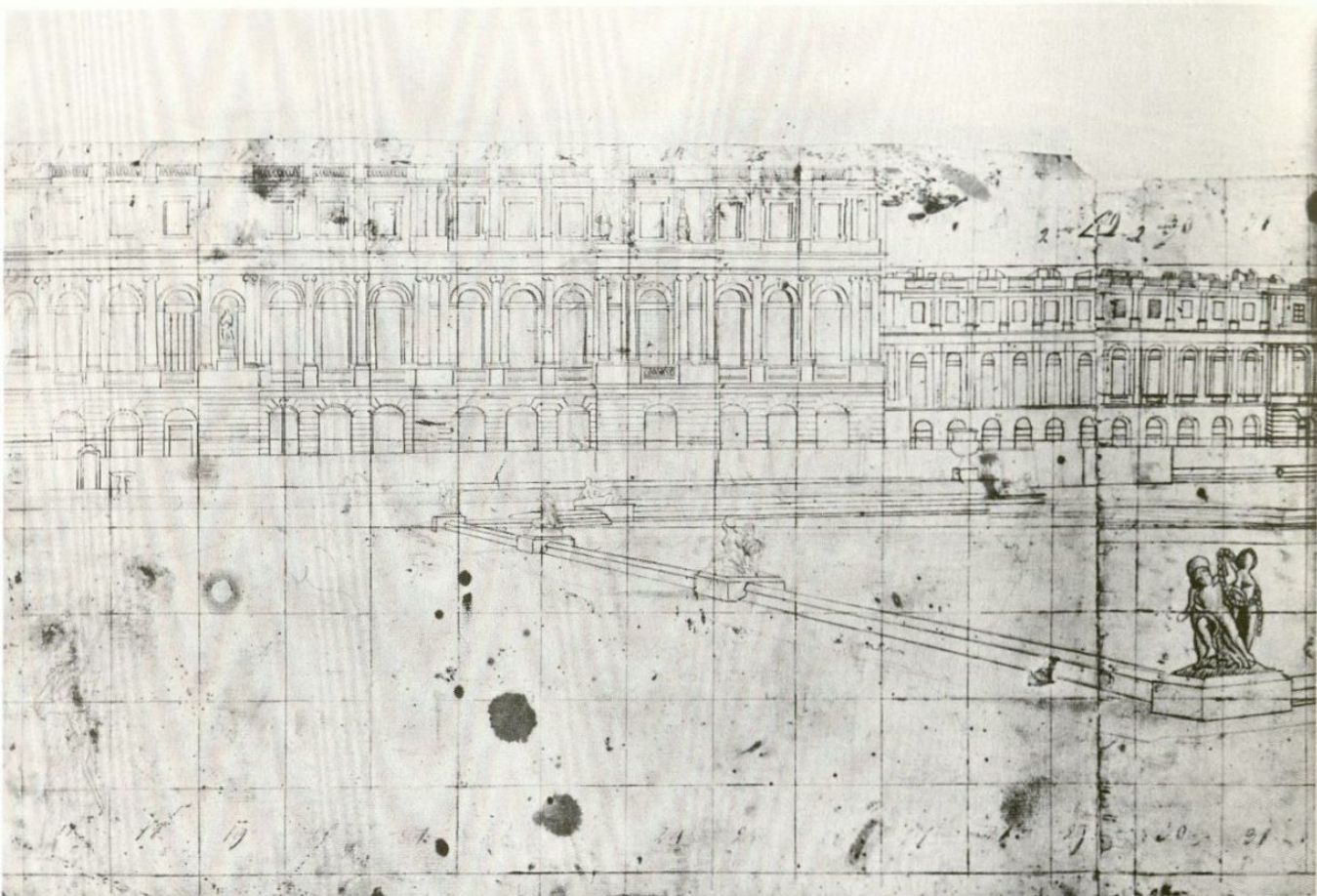


47. Study for Versailles Panorama: Basin, Left, No. 8, c. 1814-15





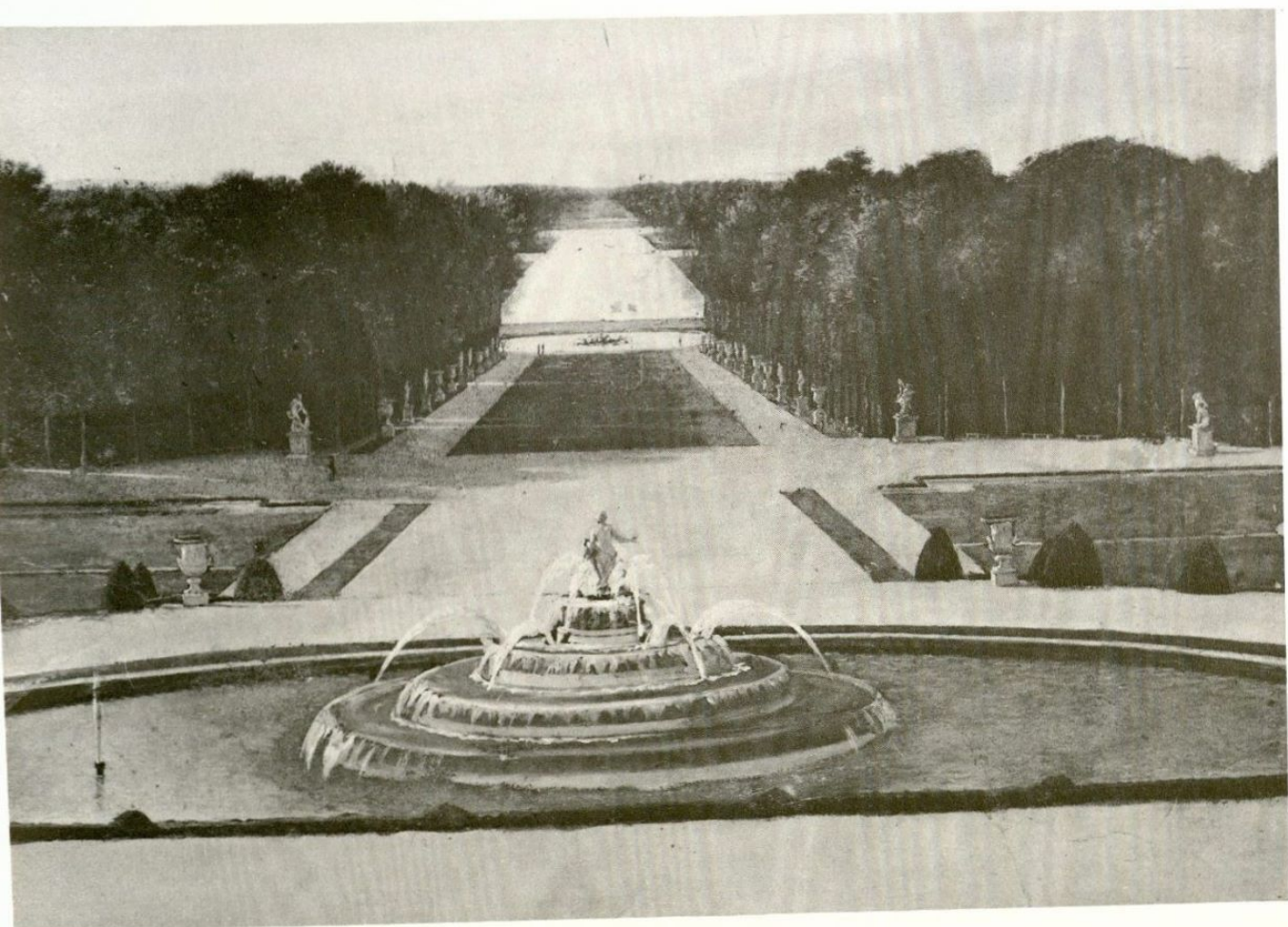
48. Study for Versailles Panorama: Basin, Right, No. 2, c. 1814-15



49. Perspective Grid Sketch for Versailles Panorama (by Jenner)

Not in Exhibition





50. Oil Sketch for Versailles Panorama: View to West, c. 1814-18

