

Reading American Art

Edited by Marianne Doezema and
Elizabeth Milroy



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3 Charles Willson Peale's Expressive Design: *The Artist in His Museum*

Roger B. Stein

Although I am friendly to portraying eminent men, I am not friendly to the indiscriminate waste of genius in portrait painting; and I do hope that your son will ever bear in his 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 invaluable lessons of religion, love of country, and morality; such subjects are worthy of the pencil, they are worthy of being placed in view as the most instructive records of a rising generation. *Benjamin West to Charles Willson Peale, 1809*

Any work of art is a moment in the life of its culture, but some capture that moment with a special richness and complexity. The large-scale self-portrait by Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827) entitled *The Artist in His Museum* (1822; fig. 3.1) is such a work. A self-conscious cultural statement, it stands at the end of the amply documented life of a major artist and crystallizes in its particular ways some of the shapes of American culture at a crucial point of transition, just as Peale and his world were giving way to a new “romantic” America.

In an obvious sense, all portraits are cultural and historical documents, biographical statements about the life of an individual. This is especially true of a self-portrait, since the artist is shaping the materials of his or her own life and externalizing them, making them publicly available on the canvas. Over the course of his lifetime Charles Willson Peale painted a number of self-portraits, of which at least eighteen are known. Although undoubtedly some of these self-portraits were relatively private acts, for his own instruction or for family and friends, *The Artist in His Museum* was a direct response to a public commission.¹

The museum that he had founded in the 1780s and to which he had devoted a large proportion of his enormous energies over almost forty years had finally become in fact, as it had always been in intent, a public institution; and the trustees of the newly incorporated Philadelphia Museum in their meeting of July 19, 1822, had asked the eighty-one-year-old Peale “to paint a full length likeness of himself for the Museum.”² He responded with alacrity and set to

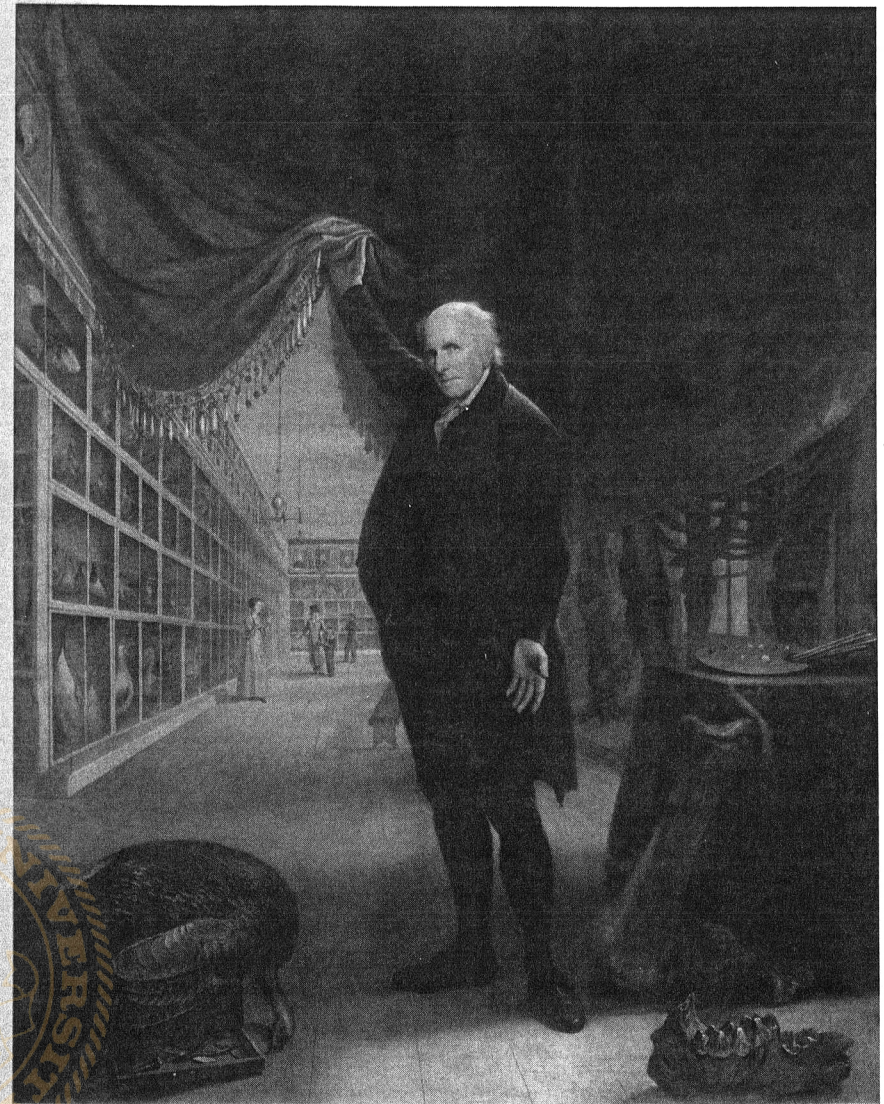


Figure 3.1 Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in His Museum*, 1822. Oil on canvas, 103½ × 80 inches. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison, the Joseph Harrison, Jr., Collection.

work immediately, and his energetic efforts over the seven weeks it took him to complete this huge 103½-by-80-inch canvas are richly recorded in a wealth of documents—letters to relatives and friends, a retrospective autobiographical account, and finally and most important, the completed work itself—all of which can define for us as they did for Peale the web of relations between the artist and his world, between a particular self and the culture in which he was such an involved participant.

The autobiographical act of self-definition is at one and the same time an act of public relatedness, an attempt to locate himself personally and pictorially within his times and for the largest possible audience. The completed painting was hung initially in the museum and, after 1878, on the walls of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. It has appeared in many exhibitions, and the image has been reproduced in countless books, articles, and catalogues on American art and culture. This familiarity and popularity are themselves testimony to the painting's function as a public image—comparable in kind, if not quite in degree, to Gilbert Stuart's Athenaeum portrait of Washington or, more nearly, to Asher Durand's double portrait of Thomas Cole and William Cullen Bryant, *Kindred Spirits*—a shared and sharable cultural re-presentation of a man in his time and place.

The Emblematic Portrait

The historical archaeology required to understand Peale's 1822 cultural statement demands not only that we dig up, identify, and label the constituent parts presented to us but also that we reconstruct the vision, focusing our attention on how and why the parts are related on the canvas. Peale himself was unmistakably clear on the primacy of the pictorial organization as he worked out the conception and execution of the painting. The task was not merely to gather around the figure separate elements, associated in some random way with his public experience as founder of the museum. On July 23, only four days after the trustees acted, Peale wrote to his son Rembrandt: "My next object in writing is [to] try your invention of a composition of a large whole length portrait. . . . I think it important that I should not only make it a lasting Monument of my art as a Painter, but also that the design should be expressive that I bring forth into public view, the beauties of Nature, and art, the rise & progress of the Museum."³ The first task, thus, was compositional: how to give shape to the only requirement, that the work be a full-length portrait. Beyond this the task was not merely to make the work his best artistic effort but that "the design should be expressive," that in the organization of images the formal pattern should be itself a mode of shaping meaning.

This idea crops up again and again in his letters. By August 4 the prepared

canvas is before him, and he writes to another son, Rubens, that he is "studying the composition. The design which I have thought best, as simply shewing that I have brought subjects of Natural History into view, is by representing myself putting a Curtain aside to shew the Museum."⁴ Or after the work was completed he writes to Thomas Jefferson of the commission, beginning, "I have made the design as I have conceived appropriate."⁵ In all cases Peale's first attention is to composition and "design," the mode of organizing meaning on the canvas. Where and in what attitude to place the figure, what the "scene" was to be, what particular elements to include and for what reasons of time and individual significance, how to solve problems of perspective, what sources might be useful as examples (Rembrandt suggested a Thomas Lawrence portrait currently on exhibit in New York)⁶—all these questions followed from or were subsequent to the problem of design. In simplest terms, Peale's emphasis reminds us that a painting is a construction in a two-dimensional space, a patterning of elements on the canvas, and that even the clearly powerful ego satisfaction involved in representing oneself publicly must, in the painter's eyes, be controlled by the pictorial need to map the constituent parts in a meaningful series of relationships on the canvas.

This truism of pictorial practice must not be seen as an alien technical matter to the historian of culture, for Peale's decision that "the design should be expressive" offers us a clue to the understanding of his intellectual, scientific, and aesthetic universe. The design of the painting, I will ultimately suggest, is coterminous with the design of Peale's universe. The form and shape of the painting are not merely means to convey meaning; they are themselves bearers of meaning, and the student of culture cannot separate the constituent elements from the "design" without missing how Charles Willson Peale's painting re-presents its culture. As for the second repeated note in Peale's emphasis on "design"—that its function is to "bring forth into public view the beauties of Nature and art"—that also suggests not only a subject matter, "nature" and "art," but a mode of making them available to the viewer, the full understanding of which depends ultimately upon our recapturing the dynamics of Peale's particular version of Lockean epistemology.

Two cases in point should make initially clear Peale's focusing of the biographical data, the source material of his life as founder and director of the museum, around the needs of "design" and bringing forth of "the beauties of Nature and art." The commission clearly indicated that the setting for the portrait should be the museum itself, which after its earliest years in his house on Lombard Street in Philadelphia and then in Philosophical Hall had been located since 1802 in the second floor of the State House, the building we know as Independence Hall. The Long Room, a hundred-foot-long chamber running the

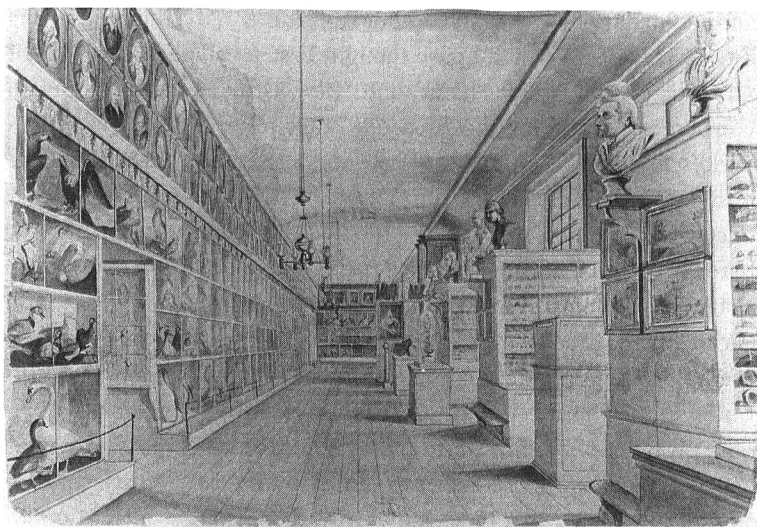


Figure 3.2 Titian Ramsay Peale, *Interior of Peale's Museum*, 1822. Ink and watercolor sketch on paper, $14 \times 20\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Photograph copyright 1977 The Detroit Institute of Arts, Founders Society Purchase, Director's Discretionary Fund.

length of the building, was the obvious setting since it housed the larger share of the museum's exhibits. Peale employed his drawing machine to establish the perspective lines of the room. He set his son Titian "at work to fill it up with his water colors, and he has nearly finished an admirable representation," he writes in his letter of August 4 to Rubens. But even a brief comparative glance at the sketch (fig. 3.2) and the finished painting (see fig. 3.1) indicates that Peale has altered "reality" to meet the needs of his design. The perspective has been opened up into the foreground at the base of the painting. The cabinets between the windows on the outside wall to the right, which contained cases of insects, minerals, and fossils, a group of landscape paintings, a series of busts above, and the organ case (visible about halfway down the room in the sketch), have all been displaced by the partially hidden skeleton of the mastodon and other animals, brought in from quite another room in the building, as museum visitors would have quickly recognized.

Into the big space at the lower left opened up by Peale's manipulation of the perspective he has introduced the dead turkey on a taxidermist's chest. This turkey was one of the specimens that Titian, who along with another son, Linnaeus, was now administering the museum, had brought back from his experience as artist-naturalist with the Stephen Long expedition to Missouri, to be stuffed and included in his father's collection. The documentation of elements in

the painting to their sources in Peale's life is an almost endless task, for the work is richly associative, and the turkey is one particular choice that Peale has made to fill the space that the widening of the perspective has produced.⁷

However, understanding its biographical source does not explain its larger significance within the painting for Peale and his culture; and beyond its value as a separate object lies its dynamic function within the design in bringing forth the beauties of nature and art. Its foreground role for the viewer is as a still life, *nature morte*, but it is dead nature that will be transformed within the space of the canvas and the museum into an artistically framed object in one of the cases behind it, to be revitalized by the beauty of art in several senses. Our perception of this is part of the complex spatial interplay, a cognitive game that Peale controls to define for the viewer the significance of each separate object within the world of the artist and his museum.

The first important clue to Peale's method lies in his notion of the kind of portrait he has created. The convention within which Peale was working became explicit in his unpublished third-person autobiography: "Peale thought as he was required to make this Portrait, that he would not make a picture such as are usually done in common Portraits, and having made some studies he determined to have the light received from behind him, and putting himself in the attitude of lifting up a curtain to shew the Museum—emblematical that he had given to his country a sight of nature history in his labours to form a Museum."⁸ By defining this special portrait as "emblematical," Peale illuminates his method in this work and underlines his allegiance to a long tradition.

The emblem is an Italian Renaissance creation—a pictorial image with a verbal commentary that interprets it and creates meaning by explicating the often complex and frequently arbitrarily organized visual image or images. The visual thus comes to stand for some idea not because it illustrates its subject perceptually, in a narrative or realistic or discursive or psychologically expressive manner, but through our acceptance conceptually of the wittily contrived arbitrary pattern. Andrea Alciati and Cesare Ripa were the progenitors of a century or more of emblem books, gatherings of such witty and learned images and texts. Linked initially to heraldic devices and, in the seventeenth century, to poetic conceits ("Make me, O Lord, thy Spinning Wheele compleate," intoned the Puritan poet Edward Taylor), the emblem tradition flourished equally in southern and in northern Europe, where the engraved Dutch versions far outshone in aesthetic quality their often visually crude Italian sources. Emblems became part of the visual language of history painting and portraiture as well, even long after the visual image had lost its explicit verbal commentary. The cultural audience for whom they were created could be depended upon to understand that a column in a portrait stood for firmness and steadfastness, a dog for fidelity, a Phrygian

cap for liberty, a figure with snakes in its hair for discord. In the emblematic portrait the conceptual controls the perceptual, asks us to know the value of its subject through these images, which surround it and stand for attributes, ideas, and values of the sitter. The emblematic portrait requires the viewer's knowledge of a system of meanings and his or her active engagement to create intellectual coherence and meaning out of the images so arranged—rather, that is, than merely perceiving persons in their living space at a particular moment in historical time.⁹

Despite the emphasis of earlier American art historical scholarship on the “realism” of American portraiture, we need to recognize that Peale was, like John Singleton Copley and others, thoroughly familiar with the emblematic tradition.¹⁰ At several points he attributed his inspiration to becoming a portraitist to seeing the large full-length emblematic portrait of Charles Calvert, Fifth Lord Baltimore (fig. 3.3), now attributed to the Dutch artist Herman Van der Myn, which in the eighteenth century hung in the Annapolis State House. One can see this emblematic portrait as the distant ancestor (reversed) of *The Artist in His Museum*. The figure stands before the elegantly raised drapery with his baton of authority gesturing into the background, at his back a covered table, and beyond that an Indian with bow. The deep space defines a coastline with ships on the horizon, standing for the maritime present of the colony, while the Indian defines the interior wilderness and savage past of America. The middle



Figure 3.3 Herman van der Myn, *Charles Calvert, Fifth Lord Baltimore*, c. 1730. Oil on canvas, 106 × 67 1/8 inches. The Peale Museum, Baltimore City Life Museums.



Figure 3.4 Charles Willson Peale, “Worthy of Liberty, Mr. Pitt scorns to invade the Liberties of other People.” Mezzotint by C. W. Peale, on laid paper, 22 3/8 × 14 3/4 inches. Published London, c. 1768. Courtesy of the Winterthur Museum.

third of the canvas groups together emblems of colonial authority and the white man's aristocratic power: his hat, his sword, the gathered flags, his elegant embroidered waistcoat echoed in the embroidered Baltimore heraldic device on the figured drapery of the table. On the floor at his feet, by contrast, we find what seem to be images of Indian authority—a shield, arrows, and a ceremonial sword. Political and social power relations are thus defined by the spatial location of particular emblematic elements grouped in an intellectually coherent though arbitrary order around the controlling figure.

If this public image offered to Peale one noble example of the possibilities of the grand style of emblematic portraiture, his two years in England offered him the opportunity to study other emblematic portraits, to know Joshua Reynolds and see his work in that vein and to hear him argue, at least informally, for the grand style, which meant for Reynolds, as it did for others, adaptation and imitation of classical elements and drawing upon the emblematic tradition.¹¹ The consequences of this became clear when Peale returned to America in March 1769 with his most traditional effort at an emblematic portrait: the large eight-by-five-foot oil painting and the mezzotint engraved version of a portrait of William Pitt (fig. 3.4).

The Whig Parliamentary leader and spokesman for the colonial cause had not had time to pose for the American, who had been commissioned by Edmund Jennings to paint Pitt's portrait for the gentlemen of Westmoreland County, Virginia; and Peale chose to depict him not in contemporary dress, as William Hoare had done, nor in the robes of state, as Copley and West would

later do in their death scenes of the Earl of Chatham. Instead Peale drew upon Joseph Wilton's statue of Pitt dressed as a Roman, in toga and tunic, and surrounded Pitt with a wealth of emblems to locate him politically for his American audience as the spokesman for colonial liberties. Hoping to achieve fame and financial reward for the painting, he completed in London the mezzotint engraving of the large work to bring home with him and struck off at the same time a broadside to accompany the mezzotint. "The Principal Figure," the broadside explained, "is that of Mr. Pitt, in a Consular Habit, speaking in Defense of the Claims of the American Colonies, on the Principles of the British Constitution."¹² It went on to point to verbal elements in the work—the Magna Carta in Pitt's hand, the banner placed between the heads of Sir Philip Sydney and Hampden (whom he identified) on the sacred altar of liberty, which reads "Sanctus Amor Patriae Dat Animum" (The sacred love of one's country gives spirit)—and to supplement these, as emblematisers frequently did, with quotations from other intellectually related sources (in this case, from Montesquieu). The view of Whitehall, an elegant architectural backdrop (traditional in such portraiture), is identified in the broadside for its political relevance to the emblematic program. He further identifies and explicates complex emblematic groupings like that of the shadowy Indian—we recall the Calvert portrait's use of the Indian—sitting beneath the statue of a British Liberty with Phrygian cap, who is "trampling under Foot the Petition of the Congress at New-York." "An Indian is placed on the Pedestal, in an erect Posture, with an attentive Countenance, watching, as America has done for Five Years past, the extraordinary Motions of the British Senate—He listens to the Orator,¹³ and has a Bow in his Hand, and a Dog by his Side, to shew the natural *Faithfulness and Firmness of America*."

The interplay of word and image within the portrait, and of broadside and picture more fully, make this a rich emblematic commentary on the current political crisis. As an independent work of art, the painting and its mezzotint must be judged awkward performances, spatially crowded and rhetorically stilted. The existence of the elaborate broadside guide to the work suggests Peale's didactic intention in assisting his potential audience to read the emblematic program. Sales of the mezzotint were small, despite the political appeal of Pitt and Peale's emblematic clarity. He did, however, complete a second version of the large-scale portrait for the sophisticated politicians of the Annapolis State House.¹⁴

Peale's 1770 portrait of his friend John Beale Bordley (fig. 3.5) suggests both his persistence in the emblematic mode and his sensitivity to his native American context. It was a sequel to the Pitt portrait intended for the same patron, Edmund Jenings, almost as large (84½ by 58½ inches), similar in structure, with the figure gesturing toward the statue that holds the Phrygian Liberty cap



Figure 3.5 Charles Willson Peale, *John Beale Bordley*, 1770. Oil on canvas, 84½ × 58½ inches. Copyright 1997 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of the Barra Foundation, Inc.

and in this case also the scale of justice. Where Pitt holds the Magna Carta, Bordley leans on the book which notes in Latin that the laws of England have been changed, and at his feet is a ripped sheet with the legible inscription "Imperial Civil/Law—Summary/Proceeding," an angry counterpart of the Pitt, where Liberty tramples underfoot the petition of the Congress at New York. But the contrasts are equally striking. A curving tree trunk replaces the Doric column of the Pitt, and the setting is rural America rather than urban London or Rome, for Bordley represented the agricultural gentry of a prosperous America. His "altar" is a large rock, and the peach tree, the house under construction in the background (Bordley's own, at Wye Island on Maryland's Eastern Shore, was of a different construction), the sheep and pack driver—all thus emblemize the rural wealth of America now in danger of forfeiture by British colonial policy.¹⁵

Peale even took care that in fulfilling his patron's desire for native American material, he would give it a function that went beyond the merely topographical. He placed a flowering jimson weed—named, he writes Jenings, "from Jamestown (Virginia), where they were found in abundance on the first settling of that place"—at the foot of the statue, mentioning to Jenings that it was known to cause madness and violent death to those who eat it. As Charles Sellers rightly emphasizes, such a choice is no accident but "a warning similar to the rattlesnake's banner 'Don't tread on me,' . . . that to devour the American plant [itself a visual pun on plantation?] will lead to madness and death." In the jimson weed, the historical past becomes present, and American natural history is

turned to political purposes. Peale had learned well the emblematic mode of portraiture. From copying Old World usages he began to refashion it partially to native American purposes.¹⁶ In *The Artist in His Museum* some fifty years later he would set a similar gesturing figure into a context that would, by the canons of Reynoldsian imitation, combine the beauties of nature, which the Bordley portrait emphasized, with those of art—an art freed from the directly imitative neoclassicism of statues and columns and altars and togas. The exterior of Whitehall would be exchanged for the interior of Independence Hall, but the mode of relating the component parts of the picture would still be essentially that of the emblematic portraiture he had learned as a young man.

In the years after 1770 Peale's portraits were often less complex, and there was less demand for full-scale emblematic portraits.¹⁷ The outlet for his emblematic inclination lay more especially in a range of patriotic purposes. The political and military struggles of the war for independence had their conceptual and aesthetic counterpart in a national search for an adequate system to express and propagandize the emerging United States of America. In his later autobiography Peale noticed that as early as 1765 he had helped to make "emblematical ensigns" as a part of the Newburyport, Massachusetts, public protest against the Stamp Act, and in 1775 he was called upon to design an emblematic flag for the Baltimore Independent Company as the colonies prepared for war.¹⁸ In the later years of the war, Peale made frequent emblematic contributions to the development and popularization of a national public iconography, and this persisted after the war as well.

Peale's repeated excursions into the emblematic for political purposes—sometimes relatively simple transparent paintings, sometimes elaborate programs on triumphal arches, theatrical performances for Washington's procession northward toward his inauguration, or other kinds of emblematic displays—have been amply documented,¹⁹ but the importance of these activities needs clarifying. In the first place, they remind us that artistic activity in the eighteenth century was by no means limited to what we now call the "fine arts" of painting, sculpture, and architecture. English court masques from the time of Inigo Jones on, Dresden court parades, waterworks and fireworks, like those for which Handel wrote music, and the arrangement of gardens at Stowe, Stourhead, and Versailles typically drew upon the emblem tradition and the leading artists of the day to shape and execute their vision.²⁰

In the second place, Peale's efforts were part of a search for American national emblems, an aesthetic contribution to a process of national self-definition that involved the reinterpretation and adaptation of traditional emblems and the creation of new ones to define the emerging nation. Finally, if the emblematic tradition had its origins in a sophisticated courtly tradition, clearly in the eigh-

teenth century and perhaps especially, though by no means exclusively, in Peale's America, it had been translated as well into popular terms for a larger audience. The emblematic could be found in cartoons and broadsides, on currency and newspaper mastheads, as well as in portraits, on the pediments of public buildings, and in collections of poetry and prose from Ben Franklin's broadsides to Joel Barlow's *Columbiad*. Although scholars of American art history have tended to emphasize the native (that is, realistic, hard, linear) qualities of American art, it seems clear that the larger American audience during Peale's lifetime was also more or less familiar with reading experience emblematically.²¹ Thus to read these works in emblematic ways is not a hermetic and anachronistic mode of analysis imposed upon the works but a recapturing of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century cognitive modes that Peale shared with his patrons, whether gentlemen or the wider republican audience he increasingly sought.

Peale was of course not alone as a practitioner of emblematic portraiture; and of all the American national heroes subject to emblematic treatment, surely George Washington is the most important. The decades after his death saw an outpouring of graphic mourning pictures, apotheoses, and statues, from Canova's ill-fated North Carolina likeness to the notorious Horatio Greenough Olympian *Washington* for the national capitol. Peale had five separate sittings with Washington from 1772 to 1795. In most of the works produced out of these opportunities the background is empty or a simple landscape, without curtains, columns, and other conventional accessories. But the 1779 sitting clearly resulted in an emblematic portrait (fig. 3.6). Peale the designer here drapes the fallen Hessian flags of Trenton to the right, the British flags of Princeton to the left, a version of the American flag in the sky above, two cannons emphasizing the two battles. The raw landscape contains a train of marching prisoners and barren trees—not only, one suspects, a realistic temporal clue but an emotional statement from Peale, who hated war and conflict and searched always for harmony. Nassau Hall stands on the horizon—again, not only as an index of location but as an image of the seat of learning that could produce intellectual harmony.²²

This public portrait, though commissioned for the chamber of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, spent most of its early years in Peale's possession, in the 1780s in his first portrait gallery on Lombard Street. After 1802, when Peale moved into the old State House, the portrait remained there (even though the government had removed to Harrisburg) on one of the end walls of the Long Room next to the equally large-scale 1779 emblematic portrait of Conrad Alexander Gérard, the French minister to America, with its statues of America and France entwined in flowers.²³ These portraits are not visible in

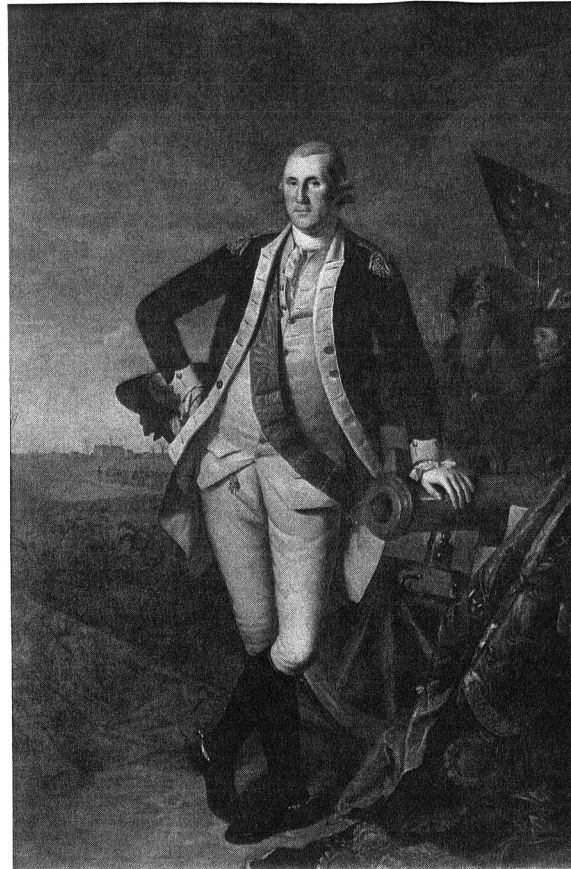


Figure 3.6 Charles Willson Peale, *George Washington at Princeton, 1779*. Oil on canvas, 94 × 59 inches. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, gift of Maria McKean Allen and Phebe Warren Downes through the bequest of their mother, Elizabeth Wharton McKean.

either Titian's sketch or the finished canvas of *The Artist in His Museum*. Their absence suggests that they had been crowded out of the Long Room by the ever-present need for more space for newly acquired objects in the museum, or else that Peale chose to "remove" them from the wall in the final picture, perhaps to avoid their drawing the viewer's attention too clearly or forcefully to that perspectival focal point or to avoid their competing as separate emblematic statements within the total pattern of the picture. A third, equally intriguing, possibility is that these large portraits are hung at the other end of the Long Room, that is, behind where we as viewers are standing. We cannot finally know Peale's reasoning on this particular issue, in the absence of documentary evidence, but we can point to the several grounds here upon which Peale's choice to exclude *Washington* and *Gérard* might be based, grounds that clearly did shape his decisions more generally in this picture: historical (the "actual" situa-

tion of the Long Room in 1822), pictorial (the formal need to create a coherent, visually satisfying design), emblematic (the relation of parts to a total program of meaning), and epistemological (the relation of the viewer outside to the view within the canvas).

The portraits that are visible on the walls in *The Artist in His Museum* are not large-scale emblematic portraits of the type we have been discussing but head-and-shoulders works, mostly without background, in what came to be the standard museum format of about 22 by 19 inches, mounted in uniform oval gilt frames. The design within Peale's Museum in his 1822 self-portrait lay not in the isolated significance of individual portraits but in the pattern of the whole, in the use of the portraits within a total program, in the role they play in bringing "into public view the beauties of Nature and art." In *The Artist in His Museum* individual heads are not recognizable, though it seems likely that the military one closest to us, in the upper left-hand corner, is that of Baron de Kalb. If so, this is particularly appropriate, for Peale's portrait collection began, in at least one version of the history of the museum, with the Kalb portrait, completed only two months before his death after the battle of Camden in 1780. The argument about the function of the object to denote the museum's origin is reinforced spatially by the placement directly below him, in the vertical strip of the doorway under the eagle, of another such object, the Allegheny Paddlefish, with its inscription: "With this article the Museum commenced, June 1784." As Peale's portrait gallery of the 1780s expanded into the more comprehensive museum housed in the State House, the portraits came to function as instances of measuring past and present military heroism, public and private merit—in politics, natural philosophy, and even longevity (age itself as a human merit and standard). The collection focused primarily on national figures, but because Peale was an international philosophe in attitude, it included as well some French and German heroes, such as Lafayette, Baron Cuvier, and Alexander von Humboldt. Peale's printed guides to the paintings offered biographical précis with pointed indications of the public merit and moral character of these individuals, and the collection thus becomes a visual expression of the age's concern with biography.²⁴

The emblematic tradition within which Peale frequently worked thus needs to be seen not as an occasional aberration or an unfortunate European heritage that sometimes tainted his "Americanness" as an artist, but as a substantial part of Peale and his generation's way of seeing and knowing, their cognitive equipment and their way of visually and verbally shaping their understanding of their universe. During the 1820s Peale had a renewed interest in painting self-portraits: In three half-lengths he shows himself with a palette or brush "in the character of a painter," in another with a mastodon bone as a public lecturer.

The commission to do the large-scale *Artist in His Museum* produced initially and rapidly another half-length in which he tried out in a preliminary way his unusual scheme for backlighting the head.²⁵ The task, in the final work, was to fill in the space behind, to articulate in the painting with the emblematic mode fully at his command the meaning of the museum.

"The Beauties of Nature"

The history of Peale's Museum, the growth of its collection, its absorption of Peale's energies to the point where he abandoned painting almost completely during the years 1798–1804, and the connection of the activities and achievements of the museum to those of other institutions and individuals, cooperatively and competitively, is a story that has often been told. Similarly, the strains and tensions between the museum's scientific and didactic purposes or between the Peales' roles as curators and cataloguers and their roles as artists and promoter-showmen—these also are well known. What must concern us here is the significance of the elements Peale selected from that long and complex story for inclusion within the picture, so that we may understand how his choices function to make the design of *The Artist in His Museum* "expressive."

One choice, implied in the commission, is so obvious as to be easily overlooked: Peale's decision to show "the beauties of Nature" indoors, within the museum walls, rather than in their original outdoor setting. In this painting Peale has studiously eliminated the exterior world, not only by enclosing us within the perspectival lines of the Long Room but by arranging what we do see to reinforce that sense of enclosure. The turkey from the Long expedition is, we have noted, limp and dead, awaiting taxidermic transformation into a piece of museum statuary. The cases along the left wall offer us views of other birds; they barely give us a glimpse of the natural setting that the Peales painted on the walls of those cases to locate the birds and animals within their habitats for the museum visitor.

Clearly this was a choice; Peale's interest in "Nature" was not confined to its role within the museum. A number of his portraits had included landscape settings. During his 1801 boat trip up the Hudson in search of the mastodon bones he had excitedly sketched view after watercolor view of the passing scenery as the boat moved toward Newburgh,²⁶ and the key pictorial record of that venture, the 1806–08 "Mammoth Picture," was a painting with an outdoor setting. As he approached his official retirement in 1810, he purchased land in the suburbs of Philadelphia near Germantown and created "Farm Persevere," later "Belfield." Here he not only carried on agricultural experiments in consultation with Thomas Jefferson and other gentleman farmers and scientific agriculturists but also, like Jefferson at Monticello, laid out an elaborate emblematic garden

with statues, walkways, grottoes, and pedestals with appropriate mottoes—a complex program modeled upon English gardens of the first half of the eighteenth century. Belfield is important in our present context because Peale consciously eliminated it from *The Artist in His Museum*. In Titian's sketch, Peale's Belfield landscapes are clearly visible in the right foreground, but these emblems of his life of rural retirement have been excluded from the final work, their place taken by the table, the curtain, and the skeleton of the mastodon.²⁷

Comparison of the preliminary watercolor (see fig. 3.2) with the final painting (see fig. 3.1) makes clear that Peale has redesigned the exhibition space of the Long Room for pictorial purposes. He has preserved the regularity of his perspective lines on the left, even though he has opened them up at the base. But instead of contrasting these to the predominantly vertical lines and illuminated box forms of the outside window wall on the right, as we see them recorded in the watercolor, he has draped the curtain on that side, confining the strong light primarily to the area in front of the curtain and filling in the lower half of the foreground with the pile of bones and the table. Behind them stands the skeleton of the mastodon, with the intertwined heads of the llama, deer, and other quadrupeds vaguely visible between the mastodon's legs. In thus arranging his material, he gave up the possibility of juxtaposing the more purely geometrical and rectilinear design of the museum to the soft curves of the black-dressed central figure of himself, and offers us instead in the museum space a counterpoint of light-gridded pattern on the left and the dark and murky irregular shapes on the right.

The overall patterning is reinforced by his sensitive treatment of color and detail. The deep red of the damask curtain is brighter in intensity on the left side, and the gold-fringed bottom of the curtain is confined also to the left half, where it is carefully related in hue and placement to the band of gilt that frames the two rows of portraits. Indeed, the little decorative band that separates the portraits from the four rows of bird cases below is a stylized gold and red fan pattern, which specifically echoes in two dimensions both the red and gold color and the lacy pattern of the curtain and its fringe. The other strong gold note in the picture is the Quaker lady, placed directly under the vertical line from which hangs a golden gas lamp. Color links her with the left side, though her hands are raised in a gesture of wonder at the vision across the room. She is looking at the mastodon.

Peale controls the viewer's perceptual experience by reorganizing the museum space. Through the conceptual patterning, the emblematic significance of the two sides of the picture, he found an appropriate pictorial language for expressing the meaning of the museum. This was indeed part of an ongoing process for Peale, and by no means an isolated pictorial problem. There is

considerable evidence that over the years, in the constant arrangement and rearrangement of the museum from one location to another and as new materials were added, Peale was especially sensitive to spatial arrangement as a mode of shaping meaning and—equally important—the visitor's perception of meaning. He took pride in the “elegant appearance” of the Long Room, the rows of gilt-framed portraits, the cases “neat without being gaudy,” the framed catalogue, which “makes a beautiful division” of the shelves from end to end of the room.²⁸

The significance of his aesthetic pride comes clear in his introductory lecture on natural history of 1799. He contrasts the modern awareness of the earth with that of the ancients, who “had to remember all creation as it were in a Mass; jumbled together.” The modern mind, in possessing a system of classification and arrangement, gains “possession of the master key of a grand Pallace by which we can step into each of the apartments, and open any of the Cabinets, to become acquainted with their contents.”²⁹ Peale's architectural metaphor here is not merely decorative. The linguistic equation of mental processes with spatial arrangement is a central clue to reading the architectural arrangement of Peale's Museum and its crystallization eventually in *The Artist in His Museum*. It is Peale's mode of using space as a language to replicate the parity he believed to exist between the order of the natural universe and that at least potentially within the human mind itself.

Hence the importance of reading the museum not merely as a collection of objects but as shaped space. Others have emphasized Peale's sense of pictorial design in the museum. Sellers links the museum to Peale's interest in moving pictures—“a new kind of painting,” in Peale's words. We may note that Peale's placement not only of identifying labels but of discursive statements, mottoes, and biblical injunctions at strategic points again bespeaks the visual-verbal emblematic habit. The words not only label or duplicate the visual; they offer a running counterpoint, and the musical metaphor becomes literal in the organ concerts held regularly in the Long Room or the anthems that became part of even the printed version of Peale's lectures, for the aim of learning is the recognition of the harmony of the universe. Even the 1802 admission ticket to the museum had an arrangement of birds on the left side, an American bison to the right, the paddlefish and crustaceans at the base and at the top, and, in the middle of a sunburst that looks back to centuries of pictorial icons of Deity, the open book, plainly inscribed “Nature,” with a scroll below: “explore the wondrous work.”³⁰

When Peale reopened the museum in its earlier Lombard Street location in the fall of 1797 after a recurrence of the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, he tried to reassure potential visitors of the salubrious location of the spot and emphasized how “the works of Nature” were “so well calculated to delight the

mind and enlarge the understanding,” as if these mental processes were needed, implicitly, as a bulwark against the irrational assault of diseased Nature.³¹ Three years later, at the University of Pennsylvania, in his introductory lecture to a series entitled “The Science of Nature,” he makes clear that the museum's purpose is “that of manifesting by those works the goodness and wisdom of the Creator, in making every being in the best form to ensure its happiness, obtaining its support, with its connections and dependence toward the support of other beings;—In short, to display by visible objects the harmony of the universe.”

Peale's teleological premises were, of course, not his alone but shared with his generation and all those who believed in the great chain of being. Not only do individual works give evidence of a benevolent creative power. We behold them in their interconnectedness, and that is made known to our consciousness not by an act of faith but through God's—and after Him, Peale's—“displaying” them to us.³² The elements of the design of both the museum and its avatar, the 1822 painting, are already there in his suppositions of 1800. The Long Room itself extended some hundred feet across the front of the State House, located at the spatial center of the urban civic core of Philadelphia, an experiential index of its conceptual centrality to human life. Within the museum the arrangement was to be governed by the need to order human perception and understanding. The epistemological model is Lockean. The Creator is known not through innate ideas or through faith, but through the mind's rational processing of the sensory data of visible objects presented in such a way as to ensure clear discrimination of the signs, without confusion or distraction.

Finally, as many have pointed out, Peale's insistence that the objects be “classically arranged” is his clue that the ordering principle is that of Linnaean biology. He acknowledged that indebtedness again and again in his lectures. Linnaeus (1707–78) had “opened the book of nature to a wondering world” and had traveled “to acquire knowledge, that knowledge be defused into classical arrangement, which will be admired for ages,” as he put it in 1813.³³ The arrangement is Linnaean “not because I have chosen it, but because the world has proved that Linnaeus had judiciously adopted it.”³⁴ The order exists in the world, it is not imposed upon it. Linnaeus's classificatory system of orders and genres, the classes of creation, is, in Peale's estimation, an observation and ordering of the truth of the visible universe. Lockean empiricism posited the reality of the phenomenal world, that things are not merely outward signs of the noumenal, or manifestations of the essential; but Lockean epistemology had also located the problem of knowing within the human mind, that tabula rasa registering and ordering the sensory data, “simple ideas,” which it received from the visible universe.

Linnaeus's Lockean premises are clear in the introduction of his *Systema*

Naturae: Man “is able to reason justly upon whatever discovers itself to his sense; and to look with reverence and wonder, upon the works of Him who created all things.”³⁵ “Sense” is the organ of perception; reason the discriminating power of the mind to sort and judge. The object in nature “discovers itself”—that is, it makes itself available through the senses—to that perceiving and reasoning mind which, once it has performed those acts, may “look with reverence and wonder, upon the works of Him who created all things.”³⁶ One must insist upon the specific dynamics of the Lockean epistemology here because it is ultimately recapitulated in Peale’s *Artist in His Museum* in the tiny figures in the background. The man sees, as the birds in the cases discover themselves to his sense; the father and son with a book reason justly upon the significance of the arrangement visually available in the cases and verbally ordered in rational sequences in the catalogue in the child’s hand, while the lady closest to us stands with hands raised in a gesture of wonder (her Quaker religion implies the “reverence”). The visual sign system in the picture is an exact replication of the underlying Lockean/Linnaean epistemology.

Linnaeus’s statement had gone on to make even clearer the theological implication: “That existence is surely contemptible, which regards only the gratification of instinctive wants, and the preservation of a body made to perish.” Mere sensory stimulation was not enough, though the emphasis is not on the traditional body-soul split but on the decay of nature. Linnaeus concludes: “It is therefore the business of a thinking being to look forward to the purposes of all things; and to remember that the end of creation is, that God may be glorified in all his works.” No Westminster catechism here, no decision, as Thoreau was to wryly put it, that men “have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to ‘glorify God and enjoy him forever.’”³⁷ The point of empiricism was not transcendence out of the natural world; it was circular, to know God through his works.³⁸

In the 1799 lecture Peale recorded for his audience a moment in his own experience that reinforces the point in these Lockean religious terms: “Never shall I forget my disagreeable sensations, when a naturalist, my friend, demanded of me, why I called a toad, ugly?—My conscience instantly smote me for presuming to depreciate the works of *Divine Wisdom*; and from that moment became convinced, that everything is beautiful in its kind; and I have now a continued pleasure in the contemplation of many things which once appeared disgusting and terrible to me.”³⁹ This is no ecstatic moment, no mystical awakening as a transparent eyeball, no transcendental longing of the moth for the star. Its closest analogue is not Emerson or Kant or Poe but Jonathan Edwards in his description of the effects of grace as a “new sense” upon the Lockean self in his “Personal Narrative”: “After this my sense of divine things gradually in-

creased . . . the appearance of every thing was altered. . . . And scarce any thing, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning; formerly, nothing had been so terrible to me.”⁴⁰ Edward’s sense of deity is more direct and powerful, and Peale’s more mediated, but it is a matter of the degree to which the movement from sense to understanding leads on to passionate feeling within a common set of Lockean premises, not of kind. They share the perceptual recognition of the order of God’s universe, the recording of feelings that move from disgust and terror to delight and pleasure in contemplation, from the perceptual to the conceptual and thence to an aesthetic recognition of the order and beauty of the visible creation. For Peale and his Quaker lady, this recognition has an aesthetic label not part of Edward’s theological vocabulary. It is the perception of “the sublime.”

But the perception of the sublime, located in the vision of the mastodon on the right side of the painting, can be fully understood only in the context of its counterpart in the beautiful order, “classically arranged,” on the left-hand side behind the Quaker lady. Peale’s usage of *classical* may seem at first rather odd to our ear, since the cases, portraits, and even the bench are notably lacking in pediments, triglyphs, Ionic pilasters, and the like, though such were the decor of the Assembly Room below, where the Declaration of Independence was signed.⁴¹ Peale is using the term adjectivally in a strict scientific sense, as pertaining to *classus*, the Linnaean mode of identifying objects through their relationships to others of a similar kind, according to sexual differentiation and observable characteristics. Linnaeus’s approach was empiricist, dependent upon clear seeing; but it was also based upon a static conception of the universe rather than a dynamic one. Linnaeus had regularized the species empirically into clearer groupings, though the idea of a fixed number of species, unvaried since the Creation, none added, none disappearing, goes back to Aristotle and was part of the heritage of eighteenth-century classifiers and theorists of species, in America as well as in Europe. In this sense, one may say that Peale’s notion of “classical” arrangement has not completely lost its ancient Greek connotations.⁴² Furthermore, insofar as “classical” is not aesthetically merely a matter of decorative orders but of an attitude toward space, an emphasis on harmonious proportion and balance, then this idea, especially in its Renaissance revival through vanishing point perspective, is clearly operative in the Peale Museum and the Peale picture, from the initial work of his “drawing machine” in the watercolor sketch of the room to its remaining elements in the final painting, especially in the deep perspective space to the left.

The regularity of the perspectival system on the left frames the cases of birds, visibly arranged in their Linnaean classes, thus pulling together the several senses of the term *classical*. Although only vaguely sketched in the painting, the

progression is readable to the viewer in the painting as well as in Titian's sketch: from the top rank of raptors (the vultures, hawks, owls—signalized for us in the eagle), to the colorful songbirds in the second rank, and on down to the ducks and the penguins and pelicans of the lower orders of birds on the bottom rank. In the museum, as we have earlier noted, the cases were distinguished with descriptive labels through a numbering system keyed to a printed guidebook (apparently largely ignored by most visitors). Brief perceptual recognition of the forms, taxonomic identification, is not enough; one needs a “closer view” (which obviously its static position in a museum case affords) that allows us to see and to understand the telos of each creature and its place in the great chain of being—its location in the grid of museum space.

Most of the birds are simply too small or too sketchily painted to operate for the viewer as individual emblems leading us through perception “to lift up our hearts and minds in love and admiration to the great first cause.”⁴³ Surely the problem of scale (in this second, more particular sense) was itself one reason why Peale eliminated the cases on the opposite wall from the final picture. The minerals and fossils and insects required at certain points mounted microscopes to see and hence to understand their significance, and if the “great scale of Nature” needs to be perceived from the lowest to the highest order, from the fossil past to the available present, from the tiniest insect to the largest carnivore, the painter who operates within these Lockean premises has still to define these relationships and make available their meanings within the visual capacities of paint on canvas and the perceptual capacities of the human viewer.

Peale's recognition of this restriction is available to us in his softened focus on some of the objects and his highlighting of others. The natural order of the birds is also knowable to us through his representative selection of the turkey boldly placed in the left foreground. The turkey, as a western expedition specimen, extends our understanding in complex ways. Alive it had roamed the woods, dead it will be aesthetically transformed, reborn through the magic and restored through the science of taxidermy, and funneled from the open space of our world into its place within the beautiful grid of the Linnaean system. But clearly the American wild turkey had further significance as Peale's 1822 choice for the avatar of the Linnaean world. It was already a national emblem, a clear alternative to the bald eagle placed conspicuously directly above it. Franklin, as is well known, preferred it to the rapacious eagle as the national bird; and there may be an unconscious irony, in the “great scale of Nature,” in placing above the raptors portraits of *Homo sapiens*—many of whom are military heroes. But the turkey was already identified with American rural experience. One year after the paintings, Fenimore Cooper would make the traditional “turkey shoot” an important scene in the Christmas festivities of Templeton in *The Pioneers*. In 1825 Titian's

drawing of the turkey, which he had brought to his father's museum, was engraved for inclusion in the Charles Lucien Bonaparte supplement to Alexander Wilson's *American Ornithology*, published in the same year. John James Audubon, who had also worked briefly on the Bonaparte supplement, went to Florida, where it is likely his own original painting of the wild turkey was completed. By the middle of 1826 Audubon was in England to arrange for the printing of his greatest contribution to American natural history and American nationalism, the elephant folio *Birds of America*. Audubon chose for the first plate of this serial publication the wild turkey and sent the first group of five plates to his wife in the United States in March 1827.⁴⁴ The point is clear enough: Charles Willson Peale's emblematic choice of the turkey in *The Artist in His Museum* was part of a nationalistic celebration of the vitality of the American wilderness.

Unlike the eagle placed above, which is assertive if not quite defiant, the turkey is not yet hierarchically posed within the painting. But even bowed in death, awaiting transformation, as an American species with rich connotations identifying it with American experience, it functions within the picture as part of the American nationalist's response to Buffon and those European naturalists who had underestimated North America's contributions to natural history, some in fact arguing that species degenerated in scale and longevity in the New World. The nationalistic argument in terms of species is well known. It was articulated and documented in the learned journals of the day; Jefferson had argued it in his 1785 *Notes on Virginia*; Peale's notes and lectures on natural history, including the “Walk with a Friend,” contain many passages contradicting Buffon's charges. Indeed, the argument was sufficiently well known that Washington Irving had used it as deadpan humor in the introductory chapter of *The Sketch Book* (1819).⁴⁵ One must not overstate Peale's own position. He was an internationalist, not a narrow or strident nationalist, and the museum included portraits of Humboldt, Cuvier, and Buffon, and specimens from the whole world. But the harmony of the universe that he sought obviously could not be understood by ignoring the special contributions of the new nation and the old earth of this hemisphere.

All of which points us inevitably toward the mastodon on the right side of *The Artist in His Museum*, which clarifies this argument in important ways. The jawbone and leaning leg bone in the right foreground pictorially balance the turkey to the left. They offer us an initial emblematic comparison—of the American past to the American present, a movement from the “beautiful” order of the classically lit cabinets and portraits to the dark and obscure “sublime” of the prehistoric past. Two highlights fall on the teeth of the jawbone and on the painter's palette, to which the leg bone directs our vision, and beyond the partially visible

mounted skeleton of the mastodon (itself a work of nature completed by art, the missing bones having been carved of wood by William Rush) we can make out a llama, a deer, an elk, and a bear dimly visible between the legs.⁴⁶

The function of the jawbone to the scientific community was clear. Osteological evidence had led Cuvier to define the American find as a "mastodonte," a prehistoric ruminant (like the deer and llama of the present?) rather than a carnivore, as Peale and others had originally thought.⁴⁷ Thus the bones locate meaning scientifically, temporally, nationally, and spatially within the picture.

Verbal evidence about the mastodon is scattered throughout the Peale papers. Peale's first exposure to the bones had been as Philadelphia artist, commissioned in 1783 to make drawings of the Morgan collection of bones for the visiting German physician Charles Frederick Michaelis. These drawings include one of a jawbone that Cuvier studied and reproduced in his 1806 *Annales*.⁴⁸ This experience has frequently been cited as another germ of Peale's Museum, and thus its appropriate foreground place in a painting depicting the "rise and progress" of the museum, with the palette placed strategically above. Among the wealth of verbal materials on the mastodon we may single out here the most complete account, Rembrandt Peale's *Historical Disquisition on the Mammoth, or Great American Incognitum*, published in London in 1803 when Peale's son was exhibiting there one of the two skeletons they had exhumed in the previous two years. Rembrandt's ninety-page pamphlet was available, for sale and in framed cases on the wall of the museum for all to read (if they had the energy!) while gazing in wonder at the original evidence. The pamphlet was dedicated to his father, who had placed the "Mammoth—the first of American animals, in the first of American Museums."

Rembrandt emphasized at the outset the violent agitation of the earth's surface and quoted Cuvier at length on the contrast between the order of present nature and the disorder and confusion of the fossil past: "These traces of desolation have always acted on the human mind." For Cuvier as well as for the Americans, it was not merely the facts but their effects upon the perceiving consciousness that were at issue. Rembrandt quoted, with obvious nationalistic relish, Buffon's earlier allusion to the "pretended MAMMOTH, a fabulous animal, supposed to inhabit the regions of the north where are frequently found bones, teeth, and tusks resembling those of the elephant," and then went on to point out Buffon's "several errors." To the abbé's distress at the idea that any race might become extinct, Rembrandt countered that "we are forced to submit to concurring facts as the voice of God—the bones exist—the animals do not!" He identified the word *mammoth* explicitly with the American finds "as a term well appropriate to express its quality of supereminent magnitude," and told his readers of the skeleton in the Philadelphia Museum, "where it will remain a

monument, not only of stupendous creation, and some wonderful revelation in nature, but of the scientific zeal, and indefatigable perseverance, of a man from whose private exertions a museum has been founded, surpassed by few in Europe, and likely to become a national establishment, on the most liberal plan." Taxonomy bends before the perception of sublime creation, the bones are identified with his father's scientific zeal, and both linked to the museum as an American national achievement.⁴⁹

The *Disquisition* moves on to describe narratively the exhumation of the bones, and then to engage questions of theory and comparative evidence, and ends by moving from scientific discourse to the legendary American Indian traditions concerning the mastodon. Fact gives way to myth, rational osteological discrimination to the sublime rhetoric of the Indian orators in the American wilderness. Noting that another form of Indian legend could be found in Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*, Rembrandt concludes that whatever caused the destruction of the species also destroyed "those inhabitants from whom there might have been transmitted some satisfactory account of these stupendous beings, which at all times must have filled the human mind with surprise and wonder."⁵⁰ Our background figures in *The Artist in His Museum* thus do more than replicate Lockean epistemology; they form part of the drama of historic time: the man examines the present directly, the father and son study the past through the achievement of a written system of classification, the Quaker lady reexperiences in the museum the "surprise and wonder" felt by those who lived in the prehistoric past.

One further visual-verbal constellation is needed to understand fully the place and function of the mastodon within the 1822 painting, and that is Peale's earlier pictorial celebration of the great event that brought it to the museum. The 1806–08 "Mammoth Picture," as Peale himself referred to it, is well known today as *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* (fig. 3.7). The work is familiar to students of American art and American culture more generally, though it is hard to categorize, for it is at one and the same time a history painting commemorating a great American event; a realistic genre piece of the digging up of the bones from John Masten's marl pit, with accurate depictions of the apparatus and the process, including such details as the tempting jug that held the reward to any besogged worker who came across a new bone; a group portrait of Peale's family and friends, not all of whom were there at the Masten farm (including Peale's dead second wife, Elizabeth, as well as his current third wife, Hannah); and, obviously, a landscape as well, with the threat of a thunderstorm that all feared would wipe out the scientific efforts. The work has also been perceptively discussed as a unique combination of all of these and more: a harnessing together of disparate elements to create a nontemporal unity that defines a relation between

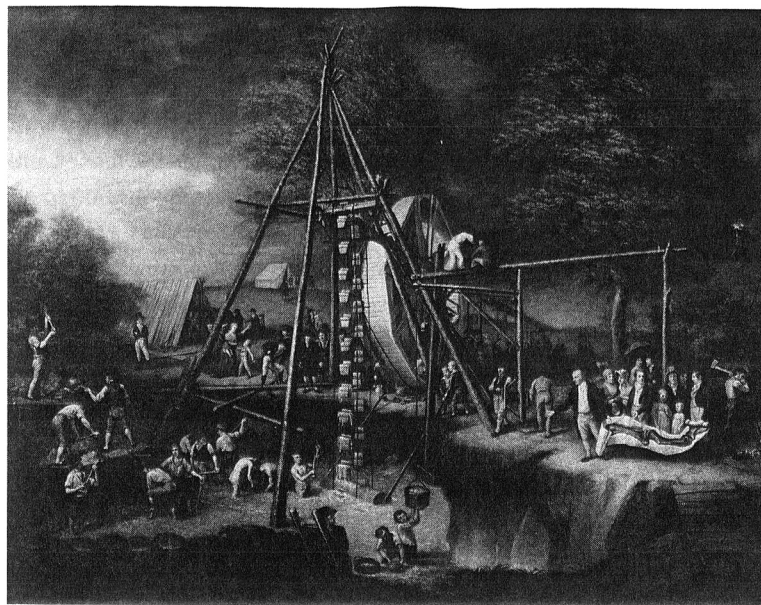


Figure 3.7 Charles Willson Peale, *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, 1806–8. Oil on canvas, 50 × 60½ inches. The Peale Museum, Baltimore City Life Museums.

the chain of being in nature (understood in terms of catastrophist geological theory) and in Peale's personal history (dramatized in the extended family portrait). Peale brought space and time together to create a conceptual unity of meaning.⁵¹

For our purposes, thus, it is important to recognize the “Mammoth Picture” as emblematic in both conception and execution. In a letter as early as 1804 Peale had described a “large historical, emblematical Picture, in which I shall introduce the Portraits of my children.”⁵² But it is equally important, in terms of *The Artist in His Museum*, to understand the contribution of the “Mammoth Picture” to the argument about the relation between pictorial design and natural history. If the role of the mastodon in Peale's intellectual universe and his museum was to excite wonder by its vast size, its obscure origins, its links to an earlier mythic past now disappeared, and yet at the same time to serve as a prehistoric link in the great chain of American being, it had multiple functions to perform. The American past was to be made available for the use of the present, our “heritage” in the American land clarified in this era of political experimentation. The structure and pattern of natural history were to be filled out, within which arguments about extinct versus still-existing species (as Thomas Jefferson

believed), or about Peale's “mammoths” versus Cuvier's “mastodontes,” could be argued by reasonable men.

At the same time this creature offered to viewers aesthetically the experience of the sublime—clarified increasingly in the eighteenth century as a term to describe overwhelming size, indefiniteness, obscurity, and evidence of the unmediated power of deity (the Noachic origins of catastrophist geological theory ensuring the harmony here of religion and science). As Edmund Burke had redefined the aesthetic of the sublime in Lockean terms more as a psychological process of perceivers than as a quality of objects, the sublime meant the experience of awe—with security (without such a security of vantage point, awe and wonder could turn into pure fear and terror). That point had been made clearly enough by Peale's friend Jefferson in his two early statements of the sublime in the *Notes on Virginia* (1785): the excursus on the Natural Bridge and that on the passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge Mountains at Harpers Ferry.⁵³

The great achievement of Peale's “Mammoth Picture” in these terms is the way in which it finds a pictorial design to express these very different implications of his natural history discoveries. In its place in the museum in the mammoth room, it offered answers to frequent visitors' questions about the process of the exhumation and how it was carried out. It also brought the outdoor world and the experience of “nature” indoors, as a necessarily scaled-down version of the habitat backgrounds that the Peales painted behind their other stuffed specimens. The painting organizes our understanding of nature in special ways. The dark and murky foreground puts us on the brink of the marl pit, where this recovery of the sublime past is taking place. The dark right-triangle to the lower left of the picture matches an equally dark one to the upper right, wherein the natural sublime is manifest in the present. The crack of lightning and the dark and turbulent skies (to which the second Mrs. Peale directs the attention of the child Titian) threaten the work in process, and on the hillside behind the scaffolding the two frightened horses run wild.⁵⁴

But the central point to be made about the “Mammoth Picture” is that our experience of the natural sublime—whether of the prehistoric past in the pit below or of the vital present in the landscape beyond—is controlled and ordered by the geometric and rational design of the well-lit middle distance, which binds the dark triangles and gives constructive unity to the composition. The scattered workers of the lower left crystallize into the near frieze of the Peale family and others in a band across the far side of the pit, and the great pyramidal construction of the waterwheel organizes and grids the whole, in easily read two- and three-dimensional geometric patterns. The formal design of the canvas is Peale's way of dramatizing the triumph of human rational order

over the sublime. As Peale wrote, his brother James stands with hands out "in an action of wonder at the exploring work,"⁵⁵ but James's gesture is carefully contained within two arms and a cross support of the central pyramid and contrasts to the quiet meditation of the isolated figure of Alexander Wilson to the left in front of the regular triangular prism of the wooden equipment tent.

As these figures indicating the range of human response foreshadow the figures in *The Artist in His Museum*, so does the design of the canvas express Peale's earlier sense of how to bring the sublimity of the mastodon and our sublime experience of nature within Enlightenment rational modes of thought, how to perceive and then to reconstruct pictorially the harmony and order of the universe. Peale believed that order existed, that the bones would contribute to rather than shatter our conceptual image of the great chain of being—a chain that the buckets and wheel, with their human motive force inside, make visually manifest. (The wit of this was surely not lost on Peale, however descriptively accurate his depiction may have been of the millwright's device.)⁵⁶ In an alternative expression of catastrophist theory, Peale would copy in 1819 Charles Catton's print *Noah and His Ark*⁵⁷ as an explicitly biblical statement, emphasizing again the harmony of created beings around the patriarch (Peale the museum director was himself seventy-eight at that time) rather than the catastrophic convulsion of the deluge that had buried the mastodon in the marl pit.

What finally needs emphasizing is that Peale's sense of design is ultimately pictorial. Within the exhumation scene Peale and his artist sons Rembrandt and Raphaele hold the life-size drawing of the bones; in a larger sense, the "Mammoth Picture" itself reduces the multiple functions of the mastodon to pictorial unity through the expressive design of a canvas of which he is at once creator and, inside it, the gesturing artist-director-scientist-entrepreneur. The lines from here to *The Artist in His Museum* are clear and direct. In their basic dynamics they are not, we may note, Peale's alone, for they echo those of his friend Jefferson in the sublime passages in the *Notes*. Jefferson had proceeded topographically from the ordered world of natural creation in Virginia to confront two sublime spectacles. Trying to bring these experiences under control, he had moved from rational statement and measurement through an agitated prose that dramatized the sudden "avulsions" of the earth under the effects of the deluge, which produce dizziness, strain, and headache upon the narrative consciousness. Order was restored through the aesthetic organization of the scene into "picture," as the eye moved from "fore-ground, . . . inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate in the calm below. Here," says Jefferson, in that crucially ambiguous phase, "the eye ultimately composes itself."⁵⁸ As with Peale in the "Mammoth Picture," the sublime is brought under control aesthetically through ordering the landscape

and giving it pictorial design. Peale's aesthetic strategy is thus part of a shared vision.⁵⁹

We return thus to the right side of *The Artist in His Museum* with a clearer sense of the implications of Peale's choices here: to dramatize "the sublime," by contrast to the ordered beautiful classification of the left side of the picture, as an obscure, partially glimpsed image of immensity. It is available for the wonder of the Quaker lady but only partially for us. The osteological evidence of jaw-bone and femur is visible in the foreground, but the fully reconstructed skeleton remains behind the half-lifted curtain under the control of the artist-director-entrepreneur of the museum. Natural history has been transformed into pictorial emblem in the new mode—not as Phrygian cap or garlanded statue or togaed gesturing figure; American natural history itself now serves emblematic purposes.

It was the function of the emblem to teach, to transform an image into an object of contemplation from which we were to learn. Peale's Museum was centrally didactic in intent. His lectures in 1799 and 1800 were part of that process. We may conclude our discussion of the role of natural history to Peale's universe and to his paintings by catching the formulation of his young colleague John Godman, Rembrandt Peale's son-in-law, who lectured at the museum in the 1820s.⁶⁰ In 1829 Godman argued thus to his audience:

We desire, as far as practicable, to solicit your attention to the study of nature through some of her most interesting works; to excite your wishes to become acquainted with the living beings scattered in rich profusion over the earth, to call forth your admiration at the endless variety of form, the singular contrivance, the beautiful adaptation, the wonderful perfection exhibited throughout animated nature, and thence to win your observation to their habits and manners, the benefits they confer upon mankind, their relations to each other, and their subordination in the system of the universe. . . . The enlightened student of nature can never forget the omnipresence of Deity—it is everywhere before his eyes, and in his heart—obvious and palpable;—it is a consciousness, not a doctrine; a reality, not an opinion, identified with his very being, and attested to his understanding by every circumstance of his existence.⁶¹

Godman's lecture deserves quoting at length, because it captures dramatically the didactic impulse of the museum and the perceptual process—so alive in the progression of verbs—which it asked of visitors. From soliciting the attention to exciting the wishes to calling forth their admiration and thence to winning their observation, the language is undiluted Locke. When in the second part Godman wants to insist upon the theological function of Enlightenment

knowing, he must make clear that it is not only “before his eyes”; it is “in his heart.” This is not yet the romantic triumph of heart over head, but rather an integration of knowing within the self: “a consciousness, not a doctrine.” What Godman’s rhetoric understands is that Lockean epistemology located the problem of knowing not in objects, however skillfully arranged and labeled and described, nor in some dogmatic credo, some “doctrine,” but in consciousness itself. It is this that Jefferson was grasping for in his Harpers Ferry passage when he said that “here the eye ultimately composes itself,” although his specific phrasing teeters on the edge of romantic solipsism. And it is in these terms that Peale’s *Artist in His Museum* needs finally to be understood, not merely as one of the last in a long series of emblematic portraits, nor as the exemplification of a doctrine or set of ideas about American natural history as it was gathered in the museum, but as a shaping of consciousness, a way of seeing, a mode of cognition.

The Picture as Aesthetic Strategy

The Artist in His Museum calls attention to itself as a picture, and we must come to terms with this, the ultimate shape of his expressive design. In this respect also, as with its role as portrait and as a visualization of his ideas on natural history, the operative context is important. *The Artist in His Museum* is a gallery picture, a type of painting with a long tradition, especially in northern Europe, in which is depicted a room filled with works of art, with various people posed in relation to one another and to the collection of art objects. Madlyn Millner Kahr, who has documented the genre, comments, “The most obvious effect of a gallery picture is to immortalize a collection as an expression of the personality of the collector. Since many of the pictures [in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works she discusses], however, do not reflect real collections at all, or else take liberties with collections that existed, the artist’s personality may have come into play more forcefully than the patron’s.”⁶² As Kahr points out, these paintings were commissioned as a means of ennobling the patron and emphasizing his status as an aristocratic lover of beauty and the liberal arts, for these works and the world depicted within the painting were to be appreciated not just for their craft, as the work of artisans, but as exemplifications of the arts of the mind. The painter, in carrying out the commission, was thus associated and concomitantly “ennobled,” his craft in copying and organizing the work (the *disegno esterno*) put to the higher purpose of celebrating art as an expression of nobility of mind (the *disegno interno*).

The utility of this pictorial tradition to Charles Willson Peale in carrying out the commission of the Philadelphia Museum trustees should be readily apparent. On the one hand, Peale immediately saw the task as a portrait of himself in

the museum displaying its exhibits, the “beauties of Nature and art.” It was the trustees’ clear intent to honor the collector; to Peale it offered an opportunity to display and to elevate the status of his collection. The unity of the painting is not simply descriptive, as a realistic view of a particular place, but conceptual, a selection and reorganization of elements of the collection to create a mental image of the order and harmony of the universe as Peale understood it. Peale’s palette and brush are visible on the table, and the taxidermist’s box suggests the craft involved in mounting the natural specimens; but the emphasis of the picture—visually focused for us by Peale’s careful backlighting of his head (an innovation in this portrait of which he was especially proud)—is on the mental harmony, the *disegno interno*, that the picture creates and emblemizes.

However, the limitations of the European tradition to the American painter are equally significant. Unlike Velázquez or Rubens and David Teniers II, Peale was not a dependent artisan seeking to ennoble his profession and himself through royal or aristocratic patronage, but a polymathic citizen seeking to engage the interests of the American public. Although institutional control of the museum had passed from Peale to a public board of trustees, Peale’s patron had always been the public. Unlike his European predecessors, the painter in the picture as well as the painter of the picture was the collector and not his servant or hireling. This is clear if we compare Peale to his artistic contemporary in England, Johann Zoffany. In *Tribuna of the Uffizi* (1772–78), Zoffany wittily brought together elegant aristocratic British cognoscenti around a selection of the artistic riches of Florence and placed them all in complex relation in one gallery of the Uffizi; in *Charles Townley and his Friends* (1782) he gathered into one ideal room the classical statuary that Townley had collected for his own contemplation and for the limited pleasure of a select group of connoisseurs.⁶³ By contrast, Peale’s efforts, in the museum and in the picture, were directed not at ennobling the collector at the expense of an envious populace but at bringing the beauties of nature and art into public view. The pictorial evidence is clear: the gesturing figure in *The Artist in His Museum* lifts the curtain and invites us in. We seem to have easy entrance into the picture.

And that carries us to the third consideration about the gallery painting and its significance for the Peale picture: It focuses our attention on Peale’s links to the Dutch and Flemish tradition of northern European painting. What particular access Peale had to this special kind of painting, in originals or copies or in engraved versions, is at present not fully clear. It is clear that seventeenth-century northern paintings were available in America during Peale’s lifetime and perhaps especially in the Philadelphia area. The Joseph Bonaparte collection in Bordentown, New Jersey, contained examples of Dutch and Flemish work; Robert Fulton’s collection included similar work, as did other contemporary

American collections like that of Robert Gilmore, Jr. in Baltimore, and exhibitions at the Pennsylvania Academy and elsewhere within Peale's circuit. The proliferation of still-life painting among the extended Peale family (including brother James and his progeny) for several generations clearly implies a familiarity with the Dutch and Flemish tradition, and Raphaele especially was a practitioner of *trompe l'oeil* or "deception" pieces in the Dutch manner. Other contemporary Philadelphia artists shared these interests. William Birch and his son Thomas, a specialist in seascapes, borrowed Dutch formulas in that mode, and in 1824 Charles Willson Peale visited the Washington studio of Charles Bird King, another practitioner of Dutch-inspired *trompe l'oeil* and *vanitas* still lifes, and commented on seeing there also landscapes and "emblematical" pieces. Although the story is still incomplete, the evidence of Philadelphia's familiarity with the seventeenth-century northern tradition is clear. Besides, the issue, with respect to *The Artist in His Museum*, is not of mechanical "influence" of one or more particular "sources" but of relationships of vision and affinities of intention and execution.⁶⁴

The aim of the Peale picture, like that of the Peale Museum, was public accessibility, but accessibility of a special kind: "that the Design should be expressive that I bring forth into public view, the beauties of Nature and art, the rise and progress of the Museum." The Lockean empiricist in him was convinced that the truth of the harmony and order of the universe was available to the rational mind through the experience of sense data as these are received and ordered by consciousness. Obviously for the painter in him as well, retinal impressions were primary, the necessary means for shaping within the mind through emblem, natural classification, and aesthetic theories of the sublime and beautiful some conceptual unity of meaning. But the pictorial strategy for bringing his material "into public view" was still an open question.

Peale's answer was to make the process of seeing self-consciously part of the expressive design of the canvas, to call our attention to our visual experience, rather than to make his picture a transparent window into the universe. In this respect, his work bespeaks its especially northern rather than Italian Renaissance heritage.⁶⁵ It is true that Peale developed his picture from a perspectival drawing worked out with his "machine," which his son Titian then filled in with narrative details; but at a later stage he altered the vanishing point perspective, bending it out awkwardly (by Italian Renaissance standards) to accommodate other needs of the picture and thus calling attention to both perspective and the painting itself as pictorial constructions. When contrasted to the huge figure of the artist, the diminutive scale of the background visitors—especially when these figures are placed against the bent perspectival grid of the cases—feels exaggerated to our eyes, more like looking through an optical instrument than a di-

rect experience of the world. Clearly the "actual" dimensions of the Long Room, one hundred feet from end to end, created the problem, but there were other possible ways to compensate; Peale's solution feels particularly northern. It is true that the lines of the floorboards carry the eye from our viewer's space through the picture to the background spectators, and the blurring of objects as we look back or into the murky shadows to the right reinforces the experience of perceptual movement into deep space, but Peale cuts against this through the device of the curtain, which forces us back to the surface of the canvas and makes us aware of the picture plane.

The curtain is central to an understanding of the painting, its meaning, and its significance as an experienced art object. The curtain's function is metonymic. It has lost its simple, essentially static function in countless portraits as "drapery" on one side of the figure offering contrast of texture and a suggestion of elegance (balancing sometimes a view on the other side), and becomes instead dramatic in several senses. Peale's lifting of the curtain places him in the pictorial role of director (the visual pun was surely intentional), admitting us the audience to a show in his theater, the Peale museum. The language is precise: Peale was the theatrical entrepreneur of his museum, and a master of special effects (transparencies, fireworks, organ interludes, lecture-demonstrations), and always had to tread a fine line between science and showmanship—between attracting audiences to the museum with oddities and instructing them in Linnaean classification.⁶⁶ The gesture of the director is not agitated or melodramatic but graceful and elegant, as we follow the line from his calf upward through the Hogarthian S-curve, the Line of Beauty that he so frequently employed.⁶⁷ It is a movement befitting an introduction to rational entertainment; and the drama he offers us here looks rather static (the figures, and perhaps especially the stylized Quaker lady, seem like parts of a tableau), for the drama that Peale offers us through the senses is finally acted out in the human mind.

Yet in a more immediate sense the curtain here, as in any theater, defines the boundary between inside and outside, between the constructed world of art and artifice, and life. Our stage language is not only responsive to the thespian side of Peale and to the rich theatrical life of urban Philadelphia, where Peale lived and worked through most of his adult life (rural Belfield was just an interlude). It is also responsive visually, both to the new popular genre of paintings of theatrical scenes in the eighteenth century throughout Europe (especially of the new bourgeois theater), and to the consequent emphasis, within these paintings on a relatively shallow stage on which the figures play their parts on the canvas. In *The Artist in His Museum*, Peale's stage is, at least theoretically, deep, but the curtain focuses our attention self-consciously on the picture plane behind which we are permitted to see certain staged tableaux or dramas.⁶⁸ One final point

about the curtain: Peale's explicitly dramatic image makes clear the other metonymic usage that he shares with his northern European forebears. In theatrical terms a stage curtain is also a "canvas," and although the deep red-flowered fabric here looks more like damask, the visual pun remains and its intent is clear: The curtain in the painting, now partially lifted, is parallel to and, at least at the top, ambiguously close to the picture plane. It thus doubles our awareness of "picture." It is not only the borderline between life and art; it is itself a painted replication of the canvas that is Peale's pictorial surface.

What, then, are the implications of this complex aesthetic and epistemological system of the Peale picture? *The Artist in His Museum* self-consciously transforms nature into art in and through the painting. Immediately contiguous to our space as viewers in the world lies the brilliantly lit untransformed jawbone of the prehistoric predecessor, a fragment of ancient "nature." Behind it are two other fragments with the light of the outside world separating them from the jawbone. On the other side lies inanimate dead present nature, the turkey awkwardly framing with its body the tools of taxidermic transformation, just as the socket curve of the mastodon femur echoes the painter's palette on the table above it. Between these emblems of nature and art, of past and present, near the surface of the canvas stands the artist-scientist-director, who has the capacity to transform nature into art: to reanimate the turkey into an artistically alive exhibit in a framed case, artfully to reconstruct the whole skeleton of the past out of the fragments available to us in "life." The artist and his curtain do indeed stand at the juncture of life and art, between the raw and the cooked, as it were.

Beyond the curtain we can see the effects of such transformation under the Enlightenment aesthetic of Peale: nature's creatures framed in cases by art for human visitors, outstanding examples of whose species are also arrayed in the row of portraits above, differences of scale carefully balanced right and left (missing from the picture on the far right, we have noted, are the smallest-scale objects with their attendant microscope). Differences of sex, age, and aesthetic response to the sublime and the beautiful are also carefully balanced, facing right and left, with the man educating the boy moving out toward us, the viewers, who are being educated by looking in. The formal patterning of the epistemological process has all the elegant order of an eighteenth-century dance—and all the quiet wit of the age of which *The Artist in His Museum* was one of the last expressions.

Charles Willson Peale was not a naturally humorous person and could be at times rather sententious and grave. As for "the word witt," he wrote to his daughter Angelica in 1813, "I have never loved the character of witty persons. . . . They do not always consider whether a saying might not hurt the feel-

ings of another, and in my opinion, one ounce of good nature is of more real value than a pound of witt, nay of 1000."⁶⁹ Such a statement speaks both to Peale's kindness and to his moral desire to assist his fellow human beings. Though it dissociates him from the age's propensity toward vicious and cutting wit, barbed humor, it does not deny that as artist he was capable of that verbal and visual play with reality, that enlightening twist of our vantage point on experience, which is a measure of true wit in the finest sense.

Peale's wit in *The Artist in His Museum* is a conscious exploration of the boundaries between life and art, between nature and science, between the visual and verbal, between the simple ideas of the senses and the complex organization of the mind. In the cognitive games he plays in the painting he continues and extends the epistemological inquiries not only of Locke and his philosophical followers but also of Leeuwenhoeck and his microscopes, Hoogstraten and his painted perspectival boxes, Jan de Heem and his extraordinary trompe l'oeil *natures mortes*, Vermeer and his pearly drops of partly focused sunlight on a blue gown. While West, Copley, Allston, and Vanderlyn explored the Italian and French heritage of the grand style, Peale the northerner wittily dramatized the complex dynamics of human consciousness. In this process, as Jefferson said, "the eye ultimately composes itself."⁷⁰

Notes

This is an abridged version of an essay published in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale: A 250th Anniversary Celebration*, ed. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh, 1991), 167–218. That version was in turn based on an article in *Prospects* 6 (1981): 139–85. Selected notes have been updated for the present publication.

Epigraph: Quoted in William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, ed. Frank W. Bayley and Charles Goodspeed (1834; Boston, 1918), 1: 92–93. See also Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, and David C. Ward, eds., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 2: *The Artist as Museum Keeper, 1791–1810* (New Haven, 1988) [cited hereinafter as *Selected Papers* 2], 1218–23.

1. See the full descriptive account in Charles Coleman Sellers, *Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale*, American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, n.s. 42, pt. 1 (Philadelphia, 1952) [cited hereinafter as *P&M*], 158–63.

2. Quoted in *ibid.*, 160.

3. Charles Willson Peale to Rembrandt Peale, July 23, 1822, in Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, David C. Ward, and Leslie Reinhardt, eds., *Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*; vol. 4: *His Last Years, 1821–1827* (New Haven, 1996) [cited hereinafter as *Selected Papers* 4], 164–65.

4. Charles Willson Peale to Rubens Peale, Aug. 4, 1822, *Selected Papers* 4: 170.
5. Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, Oct. 29, 1822, *Selected Papers* 4: 193.
6. This portrait (107 × 69½ inches) of Benjamin West was commissioned by the American Academy of Fine Arts. West is shown in his robes as president of the Royal Academy, standing full length with drapery behind and to the right of him and gesturing to the viewer's left at a small version of Raphael's *Death of Ananias* on an easel while lecturing on "the immutability of colors." Completed by Lawrence after West's death in 1820, it reached the AAFA in New York in 1822, where Rembrandt Peale saw it. It is now owned by the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Conn.
7. For the documentation of the turkey and the eagle, referred to subsequently, see the earlier version of this essay in *New Perspectives on Charles Willson Peale*, ed. Lillian B. Miller and David C. Ward (Pittsburgh, 1991), 167–219, nn. 8, 58, and 59.
8. Horace Sellers Transcript of Charles Willson Peale, Autobiography, in the Peale-Sellers Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 446.
9. For the Renaissance tradition of emblems, see Mario Praz, *Studies in Seventeenth Century Imagery*, 2d ed. (Rome, 1964); and Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London, 1948). For a critique from the point of view of German scholarship, which modifies Freeman's emphasis on the arbitrariness of the emblem, see Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of Emblem* (Toronto, 1979), esp. 1–102.
10. My own conviction is that the emblematic mode was a continuing one in American art, from the seventeenth century well into the nineteenth. See Roland Fleischer, "Emblems and Colonial American Painting," *American Art Journal* 20 (1988): 2–35; Roger B. Stein, "Thomas Smith's Self-Portrait: Image/Text as Artifact," *Art Journal* 44 (Winter 1984): 316–27, and Stein, "Picture and Text: The Literary World of Winslow Homer," in *Winslow Homer: A Symposium, Studies in the History of Art* 26 (Washington, D.C., 1990), 36–41.
11. Did Peale hear Reynolds's First Discourse before the new Royal Academy on Jan. 2, 1769, two months before he returned to America? Reynolds recommended to young students "an implicit obedience to the *Rules of Art*, as established by the practice of the great MASTERS. . . . That those models, which have passed through the approbation of ages, should be considered by them as perfect and infallible Guides, as subjects for their imitation, not their criticism" (*Seven Discourses Delivered in the Royal Academy by the President* [1778; London, 1971], 13). That Peale had listened to this or similar advice is clear from the "imitation" in the Pitt portrait discussed below. For Reynolds's use of the emblematic, see E. H. Gombrich, "Reynolds's Theory and Practice of Imitation," in his *Norm and Form: Studies in the Art of the Renaissance* (London, 1966), 129–34. Ronald Paulson, in his brilliant discussion of continuities and change in the emblematic tradition, locates Reynolds as a transitional figure, moving away from the manipulation of shared emblematic understanding and usage to a more generally associative expressive usage; see Paulson, *Emblem and Expression: Meaning in English Art of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1975), esp. 80–94. In what follows, I would want to locate Peale also within the transition, while insisting on his intermittent use of the specifically emblematic.
12. *P&M*, 172–73.
13. Peale had already noted that Pitt "makes a figure of Rhetoric"—that is, that even

- his posture stands emblematically for a specific traditional quality. In addition, Frank H. Sommers III has suggested that the figure is an allusion to Brutus, the Roman martyr, thus enriching its emblematic significance ("Thomas Hollis and the Arts of Dissent," in *Prints in and of America to 1850*, ed. John D. Morse [Charlottesville, Va., 1970], 151–55). For the classical pictorial context, see the Brown University exhibition catalogue *The Classical Spirit in American Portraiture* (Providence, 1976).
14. *P&M*, 273.
 15. Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale with Patron and Populace: A Supplement to Portraits and Miniatures by Charles Willson Peale with a Survey of His Work in Other Genres*, American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, n.s. 59, pt. 3 (Philadelphia, 1969) [cited hereinafter as *P&M Suppl.*], 55–56; Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (Philadelphia, 1969) [cited hereinafter as *CWP*], 83–86.
 16. *P&M Suppl.*, 55; *CWP*, 86; and Sidney Hart, "A Graphic Case of Transatlantic Republicanism," in Miller and Ward, *New Perspectives*, 73–81; for a discussion which demonstrates that the Schuylkill River background of Peale's portrait of John Dickinson, done in the same year as the Bordley portrait, is politically emblematic, see Karol Ann Peard Lawson, "Charles Willson Peale's *John Dickinson*: An American Landscape as Political Allegory," *American Philosophical Society, Proceedings* 136 (December 1992): 453–86.
 17. For two recent essays that helpfully modify this perspective, see David Steinberg, "The Portraitist as Divine," in Miller and Ward, *New Perspectives*, 131–43; and Ellen G. Miles and Leslie Reinhardt, "'Art Conceal'd': Peale's Double Portrait of Benjamin and Eleanor Ridgely Laming," *Art Bulletin* 78 (March 1996): 57–74.
 18. *P&M Suppl.*, 11, 14; *CWP*, 111; Charles Willson Peale to John Pinckney, January/February 25, 1775, in Lillian B. Miller, Sidney Hart, and Toby A. Appel, eds., *Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, vol. 1: *The Artist in Revolutionary America, 1735–1791* (New Haven, 1983) [hereinafter *Selected Papers* 1], 138–39; for an example, see *Selected Papers* 1: 369.
 19. See esp. *P&M Suppl.*, 9, 16–33, 40–41, 47–48.
 20. The exhibition *The Splendors of Dresden: Five Centuries of Art Collecting* (National Gallery of Art, Washington; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and San Francisco Art Museums, 1978–79) made the point by devoting one section to court activities; the section on the Electoral Kunstkammer, dated to 1560, with its combination of pictures, statues, tools for gardening and the chase, mineral specimens, and scientific instruments, suggests another distant source for the arrangements organized in the background of *The Artist in His Museum*; and more recently, Joy Kenseth, ed., *The Age of the Marvelous*, exh. cat. (Hanover, N.H., 1991).
 21. The newspaper accounts of Peale's transparent paintings, triumphal arches, and the like—in some cases our only sources for information about this occasional work, since it has disappeared, as it was intended to—are clear in their "emblematic" labeling of these activities. See the quotations cited by Sellers in *P&M Suppl.*; *Selected Papers* 1: 354, 361, 367, 370.
 22. For the sequence of Peale Washington portraits, see *P&M*, esp. 225. Peale had close intellectual and political connections at the time with President John Witherspoon and the astronomer David Rittenhouse of Princeton, whose portraits he took (*P&M*,

181–82, 252–53). Peale's 1783 revision of his 1779 *Washington*, in which he includes also the death of General Mercer (Princeton University; *P&M*, 234–35), echoes in some ways his former teacher Benjamin West's *Death of Wolfe* (1771). Copley's *Death of Chatham* and *Death of Major Peirson* (1782–84), completed just as Peale was finishing his new *Washington*, also focus on the death of a hero, as do John Trumbull's slightly later *Death of General Warren* and *Death of Montgomery* (1786).

23. *P&M*, 86; *CWP*, 175–77. The view of Independence Hall in the background of the Gérard portrait made it inevitably part of an inside-outside game for visitors to the Long Room.

24. *Historical Catalogue of the Paintings in the Philadelphia Museum, Consisting Chiefly of Portraits of Revolutionary Patriots and Other Distinguished Characters* (1813).

25. *P&M*, 160, 162, 163.

26. *P&M Suppl.*, 33–34; eight of them are reproduced in *CWP*, pls. VIII–IX; see also *Selected Papers* 2: 323–27.

27. The description of Peale's Germantown farm may be found in Jessie J. Poesch, "Mr. Peale's 'Farm Persevere': Some Documentary Views," *American Philosophical Society, Proceedings* 100 (December 1956): 545–56; see also Jessie J. Poesch, "Germantown Landscapes: A Peale Family Amusement," *Antiques* 72 (November 1957): 434–39. Peale's manuscript letterbooks, Belfield Daybook, and autobiography contain the records of the estate. See also *Selected Papers* 3. For a recent discussion of the garden in its American context, see Therese O'Malley, "Charles Willson Peale's Belfield: Its Place in American Garden History," in Miller and Ward, *New Perspectives*, 267–82; for the English context, see Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, esp. 19–34.

28. Charles Willson Peale, "Walk with a Friend in the Philadelphia Museum," MS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; for a recent extended study of this subject, see David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and Its Audience* (Washington and London, 1995), and the older Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural History and Art* (New York, 1980).

29. MS lecture, "The Theory of the Earth: Linnaean System of Animals and Moral Reflections on Man," Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia.

30. This is one version; variants exist. See the reproductions in Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (Philadelphia, 1947), 2: 270. Sellers, in *Mr. Peale's Museum*, discusses the organ (p. 196), the tickets, and the source of the Book of Nature emblem (pp. 15, 154, 218); biblical mottoes (pp. 216–20) were apparently—at least in part—the deist's strategy to draw into the museum a sectarian Christian audience.

31. Quoted in *CWP*, 284. Charles Brockden Brown made Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic the setting for his *Arthur Mervyn; or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (Philadelphia, 1798).

32. *Discourse Introductory to a Course of Lectures on the Science of Nature . . . Delivered . . . November 8, 1800* (Philadelphia, 1800), 48, 32.

33. Peale, "Walk with a Friend," cited in Clive Bush, *The Dream of Reason: American Consciousness and Cultural Achievement from Independence to the Civil War* (London, 1977), 79.

34. *Discourse*, 1800, 48.

35. Linnaeus's work was translated by William Turton and published in seven volumes between 1802 and 1807 as *A General System of Nature*. This passage is quoted in Bush, *Dream of Reason*, 196. See *Selected Papers* 2: 630n for Peale's ownership of Turton's work.

36. Quoted in Bush, *Dream of Reason*, 197.

37. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, chap. 2.

38. Cf. Emerson in *Nature*: "A fact is the end or last issue of spirit. The visible creation is the terminus or circumference of the invisible world" (chap. 4, "Language"). One should not overemphasize the differences between Locke and the transcendentalist strain. It is Edgar Allan Poe who is the real enemy of Lockean empiricism.

39. *Introduction to a Course of Lectures on Natural History Delivered . . . November 15, 1799* (Philadelphia, 1800), 14.; in *Selected Papers* 2: 266.

40. *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, ed. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York, 1962), 60–61.

41. See Irma B. Jaffe, *Trumbull: The Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1976), 67–73 and plates. Note also that the specifically classical forms of the busts in the Long Room, visible in the Titian Peale sketch, have been eliminated from the final painting. They are identified in Poesch, "Precise View," 344–45.

42. On Linnaeus, see esp. James L. Larson, *Reason and Experience: The Representation of Natural Order in the Work of Carl von Linné* (Berkeley, Calif., 1971), and Frans A. Stafleu, *Linnaeus and the Linnaeans: The Spreading of Their Ideas in Systematic Botany, 1735–1789* (Utrecht, 1971). On the American scene, Daniel Boorstin, *The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, 1948) is still useful. See esp. chap. 1, "Nature as the Work of Art."

43. The language here follows Peale, "Walk with a Friend."

44. See n. 8 above.

45. For a useful summary of the early national argument, see Ralph N. Miller, "American Nationalism as a Theory of Nature," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser. 12 (1955): 74–95; for Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*, see the well-indexed edition of William Peden (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1955). Irving speaks, in "The Author's Account of Himself," of his delight in going to Europe to see "the gigantic race from which I am degenerated."

46. In the MS "Walk with a Friend," Peale drew special attention to the American elk, "not known by Buffon" and to be differentiated from the moose, and also to the *Cervus virginianus*: "Its well turned and delicate limbs, stately carriage and smooth skin, render it the Admiration of most foreigners that visit the Museum." (Look at the "well turned and delicate limbs" of Peale himself in the picture!)

47. Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., "A Box of Old Bones: A Note on the Identification of the Mastodon, 1766–1806," *American Philosophical Society, Proceedings* 93 (May 1949): 177.

48. *Ibid.*, 169–77.

49. Rembrandt Peale, *An Historical Disquisition on the Mammoth, or Great American Incognitum, an Extinct, Immense, Carnivorous Animal, Whose Fossil Remains Have Been Found in America* (London, 1803), iv–v, 4, 9, 10, 15–16; also in *Selected Papers* 2: 544–81.

50. Ibid., 91.

51. For this earlier unified view of the painting, see Abraham Davidson, "Charles Willson Peale's Exhuming the First American Mastodon: An Interpretation," in *Art Studies for an Editor: Twenty-five Essays in Memory of Milton S. Fox* (New York, 1976), 61–70; for other views, see Lillian B. Miller, "Charles Willson Peale as History Painter: *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*," in Miller and Ward, *New Perspectives*, 145–67; and Laura Rigal, "Peale's Mammoth," in David C. Miller, ed., *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (New Haven, 1993), 18–38.

52. Charles Willson Peale to Mrs. Nathaniel Ramsay, Sept. 7, 1804, in *Selected Papers* 2: 753; see also *P&M Suppl.*, 37.

53. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, 19, 24–25. These passages were well known to Americans and to foreign visitors such as Brissot de Warville, the comte de Volney, Richard Cobden, and Augustus John Foster. George Washington had an oil painting of Harpers Ferry by George Beck at Mount Vernon by 1797; Rembrandt Peale did a watercolor sketch of Harpers Ferry (ca. 1811; Peale Museum, Baltimore), then turned it into an oil painting and a lithograph for public consumption about 1827. Herman Melville could count on general public knowledge of the reference, when he likened the leap of the great white whale to the Natural Bridge (*Moby-Dick*, chap. 133). See Wilbur H. Hunter, "The Peale Family and Peale's Baltimore Museum," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 1965: 318.

54. The wild steed motif as index of the sublime was to become familiar. George Stubbs had already used it frequently in England in his horse-lion confrontations (see Basil Taylor, "George Stubbs: 'The Lion and Horse' Theme," *Burlington Magazine* 107 (1965): 81–86. Thomas Cole used it in his otherwise bucolic *View of the Catskills: Early Autumn* (1837, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). It became a popular folkloric image as well; see George Kendall, "A Superb Wild Horse," in *Humor of the Old Southwest*, ed. Hennig Cohen and William B. Dillingham, 2d ed. (Athens, Ga., 1975), 92–93. Melville captures it in his image of the white steed of the prairies, land alternative to *Moby-Dick* in the famous "Whiteness of the Whale," chap. 42. It has of course biblical origins in Revelations 6, which Benjamin West explored in a variety of pictorial ways (and continues in popular culture as, for example, the Lone Ranger's "Silver").

55. Sellers Transcript of Peale, Autobiography, quoted in Davidson, "Peale's Exhuming," 62; the autobiography also has an extended account of the exhumation process.

56. It is worth noting in this respect that both the technology of the wheel pump and the artistry of the picture have precursors, extending back at least to the woodcuts of the sixteenth-century metallurgist Agricola. See Herbert C. Hoover and Lou H. Hoover, trans., *De Re Metallica, from First Latin Edition of 1556* (rpt. New York, 1950), esp. book 6 with its plates. I am grateful to my former colleague Bert Hansen, who called this to my attention.

57. The image is reproduced in *P&M Suppl.*, 44–45, 102.

58. Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia*, 19.

59. It needs to be compared with the pyramidal order in the middle ground that John Singleton Copley establishes in *Watson and the Shark* (1778), equally an imposition of human geometric control over the experience of the sublime confrontation between shark and helpless Watson in the foreground—though there are differences, especially

in the background. See my "Copley's *Watson and the Shark* and Aesthetics in the 1770s," in *Discoveries and Considerations: Essays in Early American Literature and Aesthetics Presented to Harold Jantz*, ed. Calvin Israel (Albany, 1976), 85–130; for a different reading of the social meaning of *Watson* but also based upon the assumption that meaning is encoded in pictorial structure, see Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1990), chap. 2, "Triangular Trade and Triangular Compositions."

60. See Sellers, *Peale* (1947), 2: 355–56; for Godman's discussion of the mastodon, see John Godman, *American Natural History* (Philadelphia, 1826), 2: 204–52.

61. John Godman, *Addresses Delivered on Various Public Occasions* (Philadelphia, 1829), 110, 128–29. I quote it from the suggestive chapter "Philadelphia Science and the Artist-Naturalist" in William H. Truettner, *The Natural Man Observed: A Study of Catlin's Indian Gallery* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 68. Truettner's study is helpful in locating Peale in relation to the next—and finally very different—generation.

62. Madlyn Millner Kahr, "Velázquez and *Las Meninas*," *Art Bulletin* 57 (June 1975): 225–46, at 239. Kahr's essay includes a wealth of illustrations of the northern European gallery pictures with which Velázquez's work is linked.

63. Both works are discussed and illustrated, with special reference to emblematic strategies, in Paulson, *Emblem and Expression*, 138–48, 152–58.

64. The Bonaparte collection is frequently noted in the literature of American art history; Peale's sketch of the academy walls displaying Fulton's collection, in a letter of Nov. 13, 1807, is reproduced in *P&M Suppl.*, 107. Lillian B. Miller, *Patrons and Patriotism: The Encouragement of the Fine Arts in the United States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1966), mentions numerous northern European works in collections; and the published catalogues of the American Academy of Fine Arts, the National Academy of Design, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts contain considerable raw data. A guide to these materials is *The National Museum of American Art's Index to American Art Exhibition Catalogues: From the Beginning through the 1876 Centennial Year*, compiled by James L. Yarnall and William H. Gerdts et al., 6 vols. (Boston, 1986)—though of course attributions to particular artists are open to question. For the Peale Family and still life, see Lillian B. Miller, ed., *The Peale Family: Creation of a Legacy, 1770–1870* (New York, 1996), and William H. Gerdts and Russell Burke, *American Still-Life Painting* (New York, 1971), chap. 2; for Peale's comment on King, see Andrew J. Cosentino, *The Paintings of Charles Bird King* (Washington, D.C., 1977), 80. Lance Humphries's work on Robert Gilmor is forthcoming. Three works that emphasize the Dutch influence are H. Nichols B. Clark, "A Taste for the Netherlands: The Impact of Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Genre Painting on American Art, 1800–1860," *American Art Journal* 14 (Spring 1982): 23–38; H. Nichols B. Clark, *Francis W. Edmonds: American Master in the Dutch Tradition* (Washington, D.C., 1988); and Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia, 1989).

65. The boldest—and perhaps exaggerated—statement of this distinction is Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago, 1983).

66. This process was acted out in the movement of the museum itself from the Lombard Street residence to Philosophical Hall, with a great parade (CWP, 264–65), from