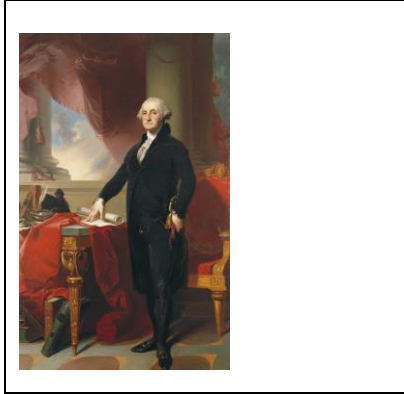

Title of Object

Portrait of George Washington

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Thomas Sully

Country: United States of America

Date of Object: c. 1820

File Created: 1/1/2017

Accession Number: 32.12

Author of File: Debbie Koller

Material/Medium: Oil on canvas

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Paintings

Last Updated/Reviewed: 2/1/2017

Culture: American

Tour Topics

Group 3, Highlights 1600-1850, History-people, American Revolution, Neoclassical, architecture, leaders, identity, power, status, symbolism, President

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

I think you might have recognize the man in this picture the moment you saw it. What did you see that told you who he is?

If you did not know who this man was, what symbols do you see that help identify him?

Philadelphia artist Thomas Sully painted this picture more than 20 years after George Washington's death. This is a copy of one of Gilbert Stuarts best-known portraits of George Washington painted in 1800. Why might Sully choose to copy his work?

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

Per Teaching the Arts: Since there were no photographs in George Washington's day, we cannot know exactly what he looked like. He had "a large and straight nose," wrote someone who knew him in 1760. "His face is long rather than broad, with high round cheek bones...His mouth is large and generally firmly closed."

Powerful image of George Washington became a symbol of the nation.

Painting includes objects symbolic of Washington's illustrious military and civil leadership (per Teaching the Arts):

Black suit - as opposed to a military uniform or royal robe like European Kings - different kind of leader - ordinary citizen elected by the people!

The sword at Washington's waist reminds us he was a military leader

Quill pen standing in the silver inkwell (dogs- ancient symbol for loyalty,) along with the paper on the table and books on the floor symbolize the laws of the new nation.

Weather - Storm clouds on the left, faint rainbow on right - Signifies the Revolutionary War giving way to peace and prosperity, the calm after a storm.

Furniture decorated with national symbols - Eagle on table leg, Medallion at top of chair red-white-blue colors of flag. The furniture, decorated with national symbols like the eagle, was probably invented by the artist.

Symbols from the Roman Republic - Doric columns, red tasseled drapes

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

After a 20 year career in England and Ireland Gilbert Stuart returned to the states to paint President Washington, a project that brought him international fame. There was a huge demand for his paintings of George to fill government buildings and Sully, who made his living painting portraits (completing over 2000 of them) was happy to help meet it. Thomas Sully never met George Washington.

Bio on Sully: "Thomas Sully was born in 1783 in Horncastle, Lincolnshire, England, the youngest son of nine children born to the actors Matthew and Sarah Chester Sully....the Sullys emigrated to the United States in 1792. Sully attended school in New York until his mother's death in 1794, when he returned to live with his family in Richmond. From there they moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where the future artist performed on the stage with his parents and siblings. Following the example of his older brother, the miniature painter Lawrence, Sully resolved to become an artist. He first received art lessons from his young schoolmate Charles Fraser. After an unsuccessful attempt to learn the business of insurance broking, Sully was apprenticed to his brother-in-law, a French emigrée miniaturist named Jean Belzons. In 1799, Sully left Charleston and joined his brother Lawrence in Richmond. Inspired by the sight of portraits by Henry Benbridge, he continued to study art and opened up his first studio at Richmond in 1804. When Lawrence died in September 1804 Sully assumed responsibility for the family and eventually married his brother's widow Sarah. In 1806 Sully accepted a commission to paint at a theater

in New York, where he met William Dunlap, John Wesley Jarvis, and John Trumbull. He invested one hundred dollars to have Trumbull paint a portrait of his wife so that he might learn something of the senior artist's technique. In 1807 he travelled to Boston and spent about three weeks studying with **Gilbert Stuart**, who encouraged his efforts to become a portraitist. Later that year Sully moved to Philadelphia, where he remained for the rest of his life.... His portrait practice flourished, and in May 1809 he entered into an agreement with a group of prominent citizens that enabled him to embark a year-long trip to study art in London. Sharing a room there with Charles Bird King, he studied under **Benjamin West** and Henry Fuseli, met the circle of British artists who were active at the Royal Academy of Art, and familiarized himself with collections of old master paintings. When Sully returned to Philadelphia in 1810 he quickly set about establishing his future reputation as one of America's foremost portraitists by painting a number of full-length commissions.

Sully was America's foremost exponent of the highly romanticized, painterly, and fluid style of portraiture practiced by the two contemporary British artists he had most admired during his year of study in England, Sir Henry Raeburn and Sir Thomas Lawrence....This aesthetic, however, appealed greatly to the elite social stratum from which Sully drew his patrons, and earned him the status of being the most successful American portrait painter following the death of Gilbert Stuart in 1828, until his gradual decline in the 1850s. Sully died in Philadelphia in 1872.”

“Artists also looked at other pictures to get ideas for portraits of their own. Like many artists, Gilbert Stuart had a collection of prints based on paintings by European artists. Art historians have found the same details, a column with curtains, a desk and chair, books on the floor, and sky in the background, in a French picture from 1723 (Teaching the Arts).

The painting that it was copied from: “Gilbert Stuart’s George Washington (The Munro-Lenox Portrait) has been known since the 1930s by the names of its two 19th century owners, Peter Jay Munro (1767-1833) and James Lenox (1800-1880). Though the circumstances surrounding the original commission are not entirely clear, its early provenance is known through an article in the August 2, 1817 Boston Intelligencer, which described the portrait as: “The copy done for an individual gentleman,...now in possession of Peter Jay Munro, Esq. who we understand purchased it in England. It was painted for a London banker by order of the British Consul General. The banker wished only a half-length; but by mistake it was made a full length” (“Stuart’s Picture of Washington”) and “Washington’s black velvet suit is the style he wore specifically on public occasions and it appears in all of Stuart’s full-length portraits of the President except one. His choice of this clothing announces his duty as civil servant, before all else.” (from Sotheby’s)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This painting is a copy of one of Gilbert Stuart's best-known portraits of George Washington, which was finished in 1800 and formerly owned by the New York Public Library. Sully made many copies of Stuart's portraits of President Washington for government buildings and historical societies because Stuart could not meet the astonishing demand for them.

In this portrait, Washington's right hand rests on a copy of the Constitution. The sword alludes to his military heroism.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Bio on Thomas Sully, National Gallery of Art: <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/artist-info.1914.html>

Teaching the Arts, Object in Focus, George Washington: <https://new.artsmia.org/teaching-the-arts/portrait-of-george-washington/>

Information of Stuart's painting of Washington, National Portrait Gallery: <http://www.georgewashington.si.edu/portrait/non-flash.html>

Information from Sotheby's:

<http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/lot.5.html/2005/american-paintings-drawings-sculpture-including-property-from-the-new-york-public-library-astor-lenox-and-tilden-foundations-n08134>

The Munro Lenox portrait

