

## **New York Painting Begins: Eighteenth-Century Portraits at the New-York Historical Society**

The New-York Historical Society holds one of the nation's premiere collections of eighteenth-century American portraits. During this formative century a small group of native-born painters and European émigrés created images that represent a broad swath of elite colonial New York society -- landowners and tradesmen, and later Revolutionaries and Loyalists -- while reflecting the area's Dutch roots and its strong ties with England.

In the past these paintings were valued for their insights into the lives of the sitters, and they include distinguished New Yorkers who played leading roles in its history. However, the focus here is placed on the paintings themselves and their own histories as domestic objects, often passed through generations of family members. They are encoded with social signals, conveyed through dress, pose, and background devices. Eighteenth-century viewers would have easily understood their meanings, but they are often unfamiliar to twenty-first century eyes.

These works raise many questions, and given the sparse documentation from the period, not all of them can be definitively answered: why were these paintings made, and who were the artists who made them? How did they learn their craft? How were the paintings displayed? How has their appearance changed over time, and why? And how did they make their way to the Historical Society?

The state of knowledge about these paintings has evolved over time, and continues to do so as new discoveries are made. This exhibition does not provide final answers, but presents

what is currently known, and invites the viewer to share the sense of mystery and discovery that accompanies the study of these fascinating works.

**John Hesselius (1728-1778)**

**Mrs. Abraham Keteltas, 1758**

**Oil on canvas**

**Bequest of Edith Malvina Keteltas Wetmore, 1966.11**

In the early eighteenth century very few artists had access to European training or even European paintings to serve as models. John Hesselius was an exception; he may have emulated his Swedish-trained father, the painter Gustavus Hesselius, or he might have benefited from the example of English émigré painters like John Wollaston, whose work hangs to the right. The result is a lovely portrait that conveys a sophisticated sense of volume and subtle flesh tones.

Hesselius reveled in rendering his sitter's dress of shimmering silk and painstakingly detailed lace, and the lyrical drapery around her shoulders. Most artists did not sign their paintings during this period, but fortunately this portrait can be securely attributed to Hesselius because he signed and dated it at lower left. As is often the case, this portrait was given to the N-YHS by a descendant, the sitter's great-granddaughter.

Sarah Smith Keteltas (1732-1815) was the daughter of William Henry Smith and Hannah (Cooper) Smith, whose ancestors founded Smithtown, Long Island.

**John Wollaston (1710-1775)**

**Mrs. William Axtell, ca. 1751**

**Oil on canvas**

**Bequest of Catharine Augusta De Peyster, 1911.9**

The English painter John Wollaston arrived in New York in 1749 and during a short stay of three years became a sought-

after practitioner of the latest rococo style. His paintings are distinctive for the almond-shaped eyes that every sitter seems to share, in keeping with English portrait conventions of the period. This impressive painting shows his first-hand familiarity with fashionable portraiture in the play of light on the fabric; the free, confident brushwork in the background landscape; and in the accomplished rendering of the sitter's hands. His polished technique is a sharp contrast to the hard-edged linear style of the self-taught artists in these galleries.

Wollaston also painted Mr. Axtell, and both portraits no doubt hung together for many years at the family's country home of Melrose Hall in Flatbush, Brooklyn. The pair was divided between descendants, and Mr. Axtell's portrait now resides at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Margareta De Peyster (1728-1780) married the wealthy landowner William Axtell. A Loyalist, Axtell was a colonel in the New York Tories during the American Revolution. Mrs. Axtell died in 1780 and her husband left New York for Nova Scotia three years later when the British evacuated New York, and then emigrated to England.

Credit line for illustration: John Wollaston, William Axtell, ca. 1749-52. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976.23.1.

**Nehemiah Partridge (1683-ca. 1737)**

**Johannes De Peyster III, 1718**

**Oil on bed ticking**

**Bequest of Waldron Phoenix Belknap, Jr., 1950.236**

This splendid painting depicts a proud member of one of New York's leading Dutch families. Partridge took his sitter's aristocratic pose from a mezzotint after a portrait by Godfrey

Kneller, the foremost English portraitist of the late seventeenth century. These prints were available in New York beginning around 1710, and were often consulted by local artists as models. Partridge imitated the lordly pose, the background architecture, and the sumptuous drapery that cascades across the foreground. While most paintings are executed on canvas or linen, here the artist used bed ticking, perhaps because a large canvas was not readily available. The painting was given to the Historical Society by Phoenix Waldron Belknap, an avid scholar of colonial portraiture who discovered the picture's English print origins.

Johannes De Peyster (1694-1789) was born in New York, the son of Johannes (1666-1711) and Anna (Bancker) De Peyster. He served as a lieutenant in the militia and as a captain in the troop of horse, and was three times the mayor of Albany between the late 1720s and early 1740s. He was a commissioner of Indian affairs and paymaster of the New York regiments in the French and Indian Wars. Toward the end of his life he was surrogate judge of Albany County.

Credit line for illustration: John Smith after Godfrey Kneller, Sir John Perceval, 1708. Mezzotint.

**Nehemiah Partridge (1683-ca. 1737)**

**Mrs. Thomas Van Alstyne, 1721**

**Thomas Van Alstyne, 1721**

**Oil on canvas**

**Gift of Brigadier General and Mrs. John Ross Delafield, 1930.7, 1930.6**

The identity of this portraitist was a mystery for many years. His paintings are often inscribed in a lower corner with the Latin phrase "Aetatis Suae" indicating the age of the sitter, as is seen here. His name was not discovered until the 1970s,

when N-YHS curator Mary Black found in a sitter's day book a payment to the painter Nehemiah Partridge.

It is clear that Partridge had no opportunity to learn to paint the human anatomy; the bodies are somewhat stiff and Mrs. Van Alstyne appears to have two right hands. Below her "left" hand (on your right) is a pentimento: the shadowy form of her hand dangles off the table. The artist changed the composition and painted over the first hand, but it has become visible over time as the pigment has lost some of its opacity. Mr. Van Alstyne is portrayed as an active man about town; with one glove on and his hat under his arm, he is ready to exit on some important business. Mrs. Van Alstyne conforms to models of feminine beauty, daintily holding a delicate flower and silhouetted against a tree. Her pose was probably taken from a mezzotint of a portrait by the English painter Peter Lely.

Thomas Van Alstyne (1688-1765) was the grandson of Jan Martense Van Alstyne, who settled in New Amsterdam between 1651 and 1654; he acquired a large tract of land around Kinderhook, south of Albany. Thomas's father Lambert Janse Van Alstyne emigrated from Holland in 1665 and bought adjoining land. Thomas inherited his father's lands when he was fifteen years old, and in 1718 he married Maria Van Alen (b. 1695). Van Alstyne prospered and became a prominent figure in the Dutch community along the Hudson River.

Credit line for illustration: Paul Van Somer after Sir Peter Lely, Louise, Duchess of Portsmouth, 1679. Mezzotint.

**John Watson (1685-1768)**

**Arent Schuyler, ca. 1725**

**Oil on linen**

**Purchase, Thomas Jefferson Bryan Fund, 1979.75**

In his depiction of Schuyler and his easy, commanding air, Watson used devices that would signal the sitter's prosperity to eighteenth-century viewers. A fashionable periwig cascades down his shoulders, and the exaggerated curve of his belly shows that he was wealthy enough to eat heartily in a period when food was not always abundant. Over his shoulder out the window is the home he built on the Passaic River in the fashionable Georgian style, nestled in an orchard and augmented by various outbuildings. On the river sits a sloop, a common form of conveyance up and down the river.

However, Schuyler's face has a green tint that Watson did not intend. He employed an artist's technique of painting a layer beneath his portrait called underpainting, to create greater depth of color in the skin tones. Over time the upper layer has become translucent and the underpainting is now detectable in the sitter's face.

Arent Schuyler (1662-1730) took part in several campaigns of the French and Indian Wars. He was a fur trader in the Albany area, and by 1695 he was working as a merchant in New York City. In 1710 he purchased a large farm on New Barbadoes Neck on the east side of the Passaic River in New Jersey. He mined copper there and parlayed it into great wealth.

**Koenraet Ten Eyck**

**Mug, ca. 1700**

**Silver**

**Gift of Miss Elizabeth Harison and William Harison,  
1941.296**

**Kiliaen (possibly) Van Rensselaer**

**Salver, 1700-1725**

**Silver**

## **Gift of Mrs. Nathaniel McLean Sage, 1974.5**

It is believed that this mug and salver (tray) belonged to Johannes and Elizabeth Staats Schuyler, whose portrait is at right. Their initials "S/ I \* E" appear on both objects. The Schuyler family crest is engraved in the center of the salver.

## **John Watson (1685-1768)**

### **Captain and Mrs. Johannes Schuyler, ca. 1725-35**

#### **Oil on canvas**

## **Bequest of Philip Schuyler, 1915.8**

The Scottish immigrant painter John Watson executed a number of portraits of New York, New Jersey, and Albany residents. His careful attention to the Schuylers' clothing and the sheen of their rich fabrics reflects the prosperity that allowed them to purchase elegant silver, and some examples are at left. This portrait is remarkable both in its size and its double format; the seam down the middle indicates that one large-width canvas was not available, so two pieces were stitched together.

The painting was passed down through generations of Schuylers before it was given to the N-YHS in 1915. Natural aging processes and previous conservation treatments have changed the appearance of the painting. Original paint layers have been damaged, leaving an abraded surface. In keeping with modern standards of conservation, the canvas has been left relatively untouched so the viewer can see as much as possible of the original artist's hand.

Johannes Schuyler (1668-1747) was the sixth son of Philip Pieterse Schuyler, founder of the Schuyler family in America. In 1695 he married Elizabeth Staats Wendel (ca. 1662-1737), daughter of Major Abraham Staats and widow of Johannes Wendel (1649-1691). Schuyler was a skilled fur trader and a

captain of the colonial militia of Albany County. From 1703 to 1706 he served as mayor of Albany.

**Gerardus Duyckinck (1695-1746)**

**Elizabeth van Brugh, ca. 1730**

**Oil on canvas**

**Gift of Dunkin H. Sill, 1924.5**

The attribution of this painting has changed over time, but documentary evidence and stylistic similarity make a strong case that the painter is New York artist Gerardus Duyckinck. The technique is similar to a rare signed painting by Duyckinck, The Naming of John the Baptist of 1713 (private collection). In addition, the sitter was the artist's sister-in-law.

Duyckinck based van Brugh's pose and fashionable hairstyle on an English mezzotint of Queen Caroline. However, he wisely did not imitate the print entirely, but made changes to suit his American sitter. She wears a simple open garment called a mantua, and rather than a grand palace in the background, over her shoulder is a conventionalized landscape. She stands in a strangely shallow and unarticulated space that creates an unintended sense of dislocation, perhaps because the artist had little experience rendering interiors.

Elizabeth van Brugh (1712-1753) was the daughter of Johannes and Margaret (Provoost) van Brugh. Her father was a prosperous shipper and trader in New York City. In 1735 she married her cousin Henry Van Rensselaer. They had seven sons and two daughters and lived in Claverack, New York.

Credit line for illustration: John Faber, Jr. after Joseph Highmore, Queen Caroline, ca. 1727. Mezzotint.

**Unidentified Artist**

**De Peyster Girl, with a Lamb, ca. 1730-35**

**Oil on canvas**

**Bequest of Catherine Augusta De Peyster, 1911.5**

**Unidentified Artist**

**De Peyster Boy, with a Deer, ca. 1730-35**

**Oil on canvas**

**Bequest of Catherine Augusta De Peyster, 1911.6**

This painting and the one directly across from it have long been the subject of speculation and even controversy, since neither the artist nor the sitters have yet been securely identified. They are the children of Abraham, Jr. and Margareta (Van Cordtlandt) De Peyster. The girl is either Margareta (1728-1780) or Catherine (1724-1804). If the latter, then the sitter may be seen as an adult in John Wollaston's sumptuous portrait Mrs. William Axtell near the entrance to this gallery. The boy is also unidentified, but may be Jacobus (1726-1799). The painter might possibly be Gerardus Duyckinck, and these works can be compared with his portrait of Elizabeth van Brugh to your left.

In both portraits the artist used animals as symbols of desirable characteristics for his young sitters. The boy with the deer suggests the discipline and diligence learned through domesticating animals (for another example see James Beekman's pet squirrel in the next gallery). This common convention was taken from a mezzotint of a portrait by Godfrey Kneller. The lamb at the girl's feet models feminine innocence and docility, and the elaborate architectural settings in both portraits derive from English prints as well.

Credit line for illustration: John Smith after Godfrey Kneller, Lionel, Lord Buckhurst, and Lady Mary Sackville, 1695. Mezzotint.

## **The Beekman Family and the N-YHS**

The first Beekmans emigrated from Holland to New Amsterdam in the mid-seventeenth century and quickly became prominent members of the colony's mercantile community. As a result of generations of care and generosity, the Historical Society holds a remarkable group of Beekman family possessions that illuminate the life of a well-to-do eighteenth century New York family.

The paintings in this gallery comprise the largest known ensemble of portraits of a single American family, depicting James and Jane Keteltas Beekman and six of their ten children. In 1763-64 James Beekman built a country house known as "Mount Pleasant" at what is now Beekman Place, overlooking the East River at 51<sup>st</sup> Street. Some of their household goods in the Society's collection can be seen at your right, including a ceramic plate bearing the images of William of Orange and his wife Mary, an elaborate looking glass that adorned their house in the later eighteenth century, and tiles decorated with biblical scenes.

More Beekman family objects can be found in the Luce Center on the fourth floor, including an imposing kas (a Dutch wardrobe), their elegant eighteenth-century coach, and the mantle from their parlor. In addition, James Beekman's business papers are in the N-YHS Library collection and they document Beekman's payments to the artists and framers he engaged for these portraits.

Image credit lines:

Abram Hosier (active 1856-1877)

Mount Pleasant (Beekman Mansion), New York City, c. 1874,  
facsimile

Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper

Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1947.602.

**Unidentified maker, England**

**Coach, ca. 1770**

**Wood, iron, paint**

**Gift of Gerard Beekman, 1911.25**

**Unidentified maker**

**Chimney breast, 1763-64**

**White pine**

**Gift of James W. Beekman, 1874.8**

**Unidentified Dutch maker**

**Kas, 1675-1700**

**Walnut, walnut veneer, elm, oak, ebony**

**Gift of Dr. Fenwick Beekman, 1941.914**

**Abraham Delanoy (1742-1795)**

**Magdalena Beekman, ca. 1767**

**Oil on canvas**

**Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1962.67**

This portrait and the one directly across the gallery are likely a pendant pair commissioned by James Beekman (whose portrait hangs to your right) of two of his sisters; they are the same size, painted by the same artist, and their compositions are similar. Beekman may have chosen Delanoy because their mother, Catharine Peters Delanoy Beekman, was related to the artist. New York painter Abraham Delanoy was one of the

first native-born artists to travel to London to study painting with the successful American émigré Benjamin West. However, when Delanoy returned to New York in 1767 he reverted to his distinctly American style of painting with its flattened forms and clearly delineated lines, perhaps in response to his sitters' tastes. His knowledge of English portraiture can be seen in the red drapery at the sitter's right and the delicate flower in her hand, but these sprightly ornamental devices seem at odds with her austere, watchful gaze.

Magdalena Beekman (1714-1784), daughter of Dr. William and Catharine Peters (Delanoy) Beekman, was the second child to bear that name. The first died at a young age in 1711. Magdalena, who never married, was the sister of James, Catharine, and Maria Beekman.

### **Lawrence Kilburn (1720-1775)**

#### **James Beekman, 1761**

#### **Oil on canvas**

#### **Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1962.64**

James Beekman commissioned Lawrence Kilburn to paint portraits of himself and his wife (across the mantle to your right) in 1761. Kilburn emigrated from England in 1754 and followed many of the conventions of fashionable London portraiture, but rather than depicting Beekman against an elaborate architectural background adorned with swags of drapery, Kilburn portrayed his subject engaged at the work that was the source of his wealth. Beekman has just turned from his account book and his quill, ink pot and seal are nearby. His account books are preserved in the N-YHS library and they show that he paid Kilburn 20 pounds for the pair of paintings (around a mere \$400 today), and also that he purchased their elaborate rococo style frames from carver Stephen Dwight for

the slightly higher price of 11.10 pounds each, for a total of 22.20 pounds.

James Beekman (1732-1807) entered the family mercantile business when he was about eighteen years old. Through his business acumen and inheritances from his own and his wife's families, he was a wealthy man by the time he was thirty-five years old. He was a member of the Committee of One Hundred in 1775 and served in New York's Provincial Congress from 1775 to 1777.

### **Unidentified maker**

#### **Looking glass, 1770-1800**

**Wood, glass, gesso, gilding**

**Gift of Mrs. Scribner Schieffelin, 1951.424b**

Lawrence Kilburn (1720-1775)

Mrs. James Beekman, 1761

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1962.65

Given the scarcity of records from this period it is not often that a painting commission is documented, but James Beekman's account books in the N-YHS Library show that he paid the English émigré Lawrence Kilburn to paint portraits of himself and his wife (his is across the mantel on the left). Kilburn's firsthand knowledge of English portrait conventions can be seen in the swag of drapery at the upper right, and the delicate flower she holds symbolizes her feminine virtues. A careful examination of the two portraits shows that Mrs. Beekman's face seems sharper and more stylized, compared to the characteristically English softness of Mr. Beekman's face. His account books show that, for reasons unknown, he asked the native-born portrait painter John Durand (who painted the portraits of his children across the room) to retouch the

painting, and Durand's harder, more linear manner is unmistakable.

Jane Keteltas was the daughter of Jeanne and Abraham Keteltas; her father was a prominent Dutch merchant in New York. She married James Beekman in 1752 and was the mother of ten children. She was reportedly a valued advisor to her husband on business matters, and it is said that she made the family residence called Mount Pleasant (depicted nearby) one of the city's most elegant and refined homes.

**Unidentified maker**

**Tiles, 1725-75**

**Earthenware**

**Permanent Loan from the Beekman Family Association,  
Z.770g, Z.770j, Z.770p**

**Unidentified maker**

**Plate, 1750-1800**

**Earthenware**

**Gift of Mrs. Arthur T. Sutcliffe, 1950.215**

**Abraham Delanoy (1742-1795)**

**Catharine Beekman or Maria Beekman, ca. 1767**

**Oil on canvas**

**Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1962.76**

James Beekman, whose portrait is on the left side of the mantle, probably commissioned this portrait and the one directly across the gallery from it as pendant images of two of his sisters, as is evidenced by their similar size and composition. Beekman may have chosen the artist because he was related to their mother, Catharine Peters Delanoy Beekman. New York painter Abraham Delanoy was one of the first native-born artists to travel to London to study painting

with the successful American expatriate Benjamin West. However, when Delanoy returned to New York in 1767 he seems to have reverted to his American style of painting with its careful lines and clearly delineated masses, perhaps in response to his sitters' tastes.

It is known that this is one of James Beekman's sisters, but it is not clear exactly which one. It seems that she is unmarried since, though she is wearing three rings, none is on the traditional ring finger. She holds a small box with initials that might represent "CB," but they are partially obscured, and no documentary evidence has yet been found that would definitively identify her.

**John Durand (1731-1805)**

***Left to right:***

**William Beekman (1754-1808), 1766**

**Catharine Beekman (1762-1839), 1766**

**Mary Beekman (1765-1831), 1766**

**James Beekman (1758-1837), 1766**

**Jane Beekman (1760-1841), 1766**

**Abraham Keteltas Beekman (1756-1816), 1766**

**Oil on linen**

**Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1962.69, 1962.73, 1962.74, 1962.71, 1962.72, 1962.70**

This stunning group of portraits depicts six of the children of James and Jane Beekman (four more children followed). Beekman's account books record that on November 12, 1767 he "paid Monsier Duran for drawing my Six Childrens Pictures –19 pounds" (less than \$400 today). He referred to John Durand, who painted a number of portraits in New York in the late 1760s, but whose origins and training are still unclear. Durand's hard, linear technique and doll-like forms suggest that he was not trained in Europe, but his poses and

compositions indicate that he was familiar with English conventions, which he used to good advantage in these charming images. Beekman's entry also noted that he paid the London-trained carver James Strachan 22.4 pounds for the boldly exuberant rococo frames that adorn the portraits.

The children are elegantly dressed in sumptuous fabrics and each appears with flowering plants, animals, or books. Some of these elements were standard portrait conventions and some were actual objects, but all were meant to convey the virtues that their parents wished to cultivate in their family. Mary's lamb evokes innocence and docility, and James' pet squirrel demonstrates the diligence and perseverance required to train his pet. William and Jane both hold books that evidence their parents' keen interest in their education.

**John Durand (1731-1805)**

***Left to right:***

**Abraham Keteltas Beekman (1756-1816), 1766**

**Jane Beekman (1760-1841), 1766**

**James Beekman (1758-1837), 1766**

**Mary Beekman (1765-1831), 1766**

**Catharine Beekman (1762-1839), 1766**

**William Beekman (1754-1808), 1766**

**Oil on linen**

**Gift of the Beekman Family Association, 1962.70, 1962.72, 1962.71, 1962.74, 1962.73, 1962.69**

See text above

### **American Identity and the Dialogue with Europe**

At mid-century European artists had come to America to ply their trade, but by the late eighteenth century the flow was reversed as well, as more Americans traveled to London for

training. Certain artists such as Benjamin West remained in England and became highly successful, but most eventually returned, including Charles Willson Peale and William Dunlap.

Some brought home with them a sophisticated European manner, while others adapted their newfound skills to meet the nascent country's desire for a frank, unpretentious, earnest style of portraiture. This "plain" style, as modern scholars have called it, does not reflect a lack of talent or ambition. In fact, it often demonstrates the development of a distinctly American cultural identity, particularly with the approach of the Revolutionary War.

As their skills grew, artists were eager to distinguish their work as a profession, rather than a trade. They portrayed themselves and their colleagues as gentlemen, while proudly displaying the tools of their vocation. Just a few years into the next century portraiture would continue to evolve. Groups formed for the purpose of displaying artworks, such as the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, and New York's National Academy of Design. Portraiture emerged from its accustomed seclusion in family homes and "went public." Among these organizations was the New-York Historical Society, founded in 1804 to collect evidences of early Americans and their culture, and it soon began to build the portrait collection that remains one of its great treasures.

**John Durand (1731-1805)**

**Adriaan Bancker, ca. 1775**

**Mrs. Adriaan Bancker, ca. 1775**

**Oil on canvas**

**Bequest of Dr. George Sheldon de Groot, 1934.1, 1934.2**

These paintings by the prolific portraitist John Durand demonstrate the ingenuity of New York artists who struggled to learn their craft in a period when there were no schools to attend, and scant few paintings to emulate. The clear, careful outlines show that Durand had not learned the bold brushwork and artistic theory of European artists, and he may have looked instead to engravings, which demarcated forms through the use of line, not color. The bodies of the sitters appear stiff, since Durand probably did not have the opportunity to study anatomy, but he attempted to convey their volume through the bold shading that marks the folds of the fabric. The sitters' faces show a sense of roundness and individuality that was no doubt the result of careful observation and concentrated effort.

Adriaan Bancker (1724-1792) was a representative from Staten Island to the Provincial Congress in 1775-76, and a member of the New York Assembly in 1784. He belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, and from 1787 until his death he was surrogate judge of Richmond County. He married Anna Bolen (1733-1792) in 1753, and the two raised four sons and five daughters.

**Benjamin West (1738-1820)**

**Charles Willson Peale, 1767-69**

**Oil on canvas**

**Gift of Thomas Jefferson Bryan, 1867.293**

The aspiring artist Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827) traveled to London in 1767 to study with the successful American expatriate painter Benjamin West, who was known for his generous hospitality to American artists. Below is one student's homage to West, who stands at left with a group of unidentified students. West's affectionate portrait of Peale shows a mastery of European technique in the subtle brushwork, sophisticated color, and the dramatic use of light and shadow on Peale's

face. In West's image Peale is transformed from a naïve provincial into a cultured gentleman artist whose profession is proudly indicated by the brush in his hand.

Peale returned to America in 1769, later serving in the Continental Army and becoming a successful portraitist. He kept this painting throughout his life and displayed it in his Philadelphia Museum, as he did the monumental family portrait to the right. After the museum closed, West's portrait of Peale was purchased in 1854 by Thomas Jefferson Bryan, who later gave his collection to the N-YHS.

Image credit line: Matthew Pratt, The American School, 1765. Oil on canvas, 36 x 50 ¼ in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 97.29.3

### **Unidentified Artist**

**Martha "Patty" Pintard (1769-1837), late 18th century**

**Oil on linen**

**Gift of Mrs. Mary Stevens, 1987.11**

In this unusual portrait, a young unclothed child in a pastoral landscape looks knowingly at the viewer while releasing a dove. Infant mortality was far higher in the eighteenth century than it is today, and deceased children were sometimes included in portraits as a gesture of remembrance, though they were set apart from their living siblings or parents. The paradisiacal landscape and the dove with its spiritual connotations strongly suggest this as a mourning picture. However, the sitter associated with the portrait is Martha Pintard (cousin of N-YHS founder John Pintard), who lived to the ripe age of 68. Another possible sitter may be uncovered in the future, but very little is known about the painting's history. At this time it remains a mysterious, but remarkably

accomplished rendering of infant anatomy in a period when children were often portrayed as miniaturized adults.

## **Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827)**

### **The Peale Family, 1773-1809**

#### **Oil on canvas**

#### **Gift of Thomas Jefferson Bryan, 1867.298**

Charles Willson Peale's depiction of his family is the most ambitious group portrait undertaken by an American artist up to that time. The artist stands at left holding his palette and supervising the drawing made by his brother St. George. To his right is his brother James. Seated in the middle is Rachel Brewer Peale, the artist's first wife, and their daughter Margaret. To the right are his sister Elizabeth, his mother Margaret, and his daughter Eleanor. Standing behind the table are the artist's sister Margaret Jane and the family nurse Peggy Durgan. The table bears a still life with an apple peel, intended as a pun on the artist's name. Decades later Peale retouched the painting and added his beloved dog Argus, who sits in front of the table.

Peale conceived the work not only as a family portrait, but also as an allegory of his artistic life. The three portrait busts at the upper right depict his teacher Benjamin West, Peale himself, and one of his earliest patrons, the Virginia-born lawyer Edmund Jennings. On the left is a painting of three maidens that signifies "Concordia Animae" or "agreements of the spirits." The family portrait remained in Peale's possession throughout his life and it no doubt served as an effective advertisement of his skills to potential clients. By 1813 it was installed in the Peale Museum in Philadelphia where it remained on view into the 1840s. It was purchased by Thomas Jefferson Bryan, who gave his entire collection to the N-YHS.

Peale Museum

**Early American token: Peale's Museum & Gallery of the Fine Arts 1825, 1825**

**Copper**

**Gift of Daniel Parish, Jr., 1903, INV.13725**

**Unidentified artist, Peale Museum**

**Cornelia Johnstone Verplanck: Silhouette, c. 1770-90**

**Hollow-cut beige paper with black textile underlay, laid on beige paper**

**Z.2395**

Unidentified artists, owned by Maria P. Hazard

Silhouette Album, ca. 1803-1810

Album sewn binding: leather, board, marbled paper, gold tooling and coated black paper.

Gift of an Anonymous Donor, 1948, Z.2564

In 1784 Charles Willson Peale opened the Philadelphia Museum, familiarly known as Peale's Museum. The collection included natural history specimens and Peale's own portraits of Revolutionary War heroes, as well as his monumental portrait The Peale Family, displayed at left. In The Artist in His Museum, Peale raises the curtain on his cabinet of wonders. His sons later opened similar Museums in Baltimore and New York; at left is a token of admission for the New York Gallery from 1825, its opening year.

In 1802 Peale installed a machine called a physiognotrace that quickly produced small silhouette portraits operated by Peale's former slave Moses Williams. For just one cent the sitter received four likenesses that could be exchanged with family and friends. Some were framed and displayed, while others were collected and mounted into books. Silhouettes made an

affordable form of likeness available to a large population and presaged the introduction of photography in the United States in 1839, which would quickly change the face of portraiture. By displaying his pantheon of heroes in public, and offering small, inexpensive silhouettes to a broad audience, Peale led the way in making portraiture increasingly democratic, and an instrument of public education.

Image credit line: Charles Willson Peale, The Artist in His Museum, 1822. Oil on canvas, 103 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 79 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1878.1.2

### **William Dunlap (1766-1839)**

#### **The Dunlap Family, 1788**

**Oil on canvas**

#### **Gift of John Crumby, 1858.87**

By the end of the eighteenth century some native-born artists began to study painting in London, and attempted ambitious subjects that reached beyond conventional portraiture. In 1788 William Dunlap had just returned from three years of study with Benjamin West (whose portrait of another student, Charles Willson Peale, is directly across the gallery). Here Dunlap incorporated portraiture into the popular English “conversation piece” format that showed family or friends in an informal setting. Dunlap displays his painting of the ghost scene from Hamlet to his mother and father; he proudly displays the tools of his trade, his brush and palette, and he even shows the raw tacking edge of the unframed painting. It is fitting that Dunlap chose a theater subject for his painting within a painting, since he was active in the New York theatrical world as a playwright and manager. He was also a chronicler, writing one of the first histories of the American theater, and the first history of American art. Examples of his work can be seen at right.

**William Dunlap (1766-1839)**

**History of the Rise and Progress of the Art of Design in the United States**

**New York: Printed by G.P. Scott and Co., 1834  
Library Collection**

**William Dunlap (1766-1839)**

**Tell Truth and shame the Devil: A Comedy, in two acts, as Performed by the Old American Company, New-York, January, 1797**

**New York: Printed by T. & J. Swords, 1797  
Library Collection**

**John Durand (1731-1805)**

**Garret Rapalje, 1768**

**The Rapalje Children, 1768**

**Oil on canvas**

**Gifts of Mrs. Eliza J. Watson in memory of her husband, John Jay Watson, 1946.200, 1946.201**

John Durand painted portraits of Garret Rapalje (left) and of his sons and daughter (right) in 1768. His charming portrayal of the children is regarded as his finest and most ambitious work. Durand moved to New York City by 1766 and stayed through 1768. During his brief tenure he became one of the city's most celebrated painters. He also opened a drawing school in 1767, probably to supplement his income, since most artists could not earn their living from portraits alone.

Both paintings convey Durand's grasp of the bright decorative colors and sinuous curves of rococo design. The artist presented Garret Rapalje as a commanding presence standing before a shelf of books and a decorative, probably fictional, column. He showed the familial connection among the children

through their overlapping figures, and created an engaging rhythm with their hands and postures.

The painting of Garret Rapalje is severely abraded, which may be due to a previous restoration treatment. The portrait of his children appears to be in more complete condition as the result of “inpainting,” compensating for the abraded surface with pigments that can be distinguished from the original paint film.

Garret Rapalje (b. 1730), the son of George Janse Rapalje and Diana (Middagh) Rapalje, married Helena De Nyse (b. 1732) and lived and worked as an importer in New York. He was an assistant alderman in the city during the 1760s. He and Helena had four children, from left to right Garret II (b. 1757), George (b. 1759), Anne (b. 1762), and Jacques (b. 1752).