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Amos Gift Brings Pair of Rare Washington Portraits to Columbus



Columbus, GA – The Columbus Museum announced today the acquisition of a pair of extraordinary portraits of George and Martha Washington by the important American artist Rembrandt Peale. The portraits are a gift from Dan and Kathelen Amos.

“From the moment we found these portraits, still in shipping crates in a New York gallery, we knew they belonged in a museum, in order to be fully appreciated,” the Amoses said. “In our hearts, there was a strong desire to give them a permanent home in the Columbus Museum.”

The Amoses cited the historical significance of the portraits and their educational value, particularly for children. The portraits reflect the significant roles played in our country’s founding by both George and Martha Washington.

“Students, and adults, of all ages can study and enjoy them,” the Amoses said. “It is our hope that they will inspire and inform many generations to come.”

Two-time Pulitzer Prize winning author David McCollough noted the rarity and historical significance of the paintings. “The more time passes, the greater our appreciation of George Washington -- and so the symbolic importance of these two masterworks will only grow,” said McCollough. “And they are, besides, the work of the brilliant Rembrandt Peale, of the celebrated family of brilliant painters who are themselves another great American story.” McCollough won Pulitzers for the biographies *Truman* and *John Adams*.

Having them in the permanent collection of the Columbus Museum represents an extraordinary gift for the community, said Museum Director Tom Butler. “We are deeply indebted to Dan and Kathelen for this thoughtful and generous gift on the eve of our Museum’s 60th Anniversary.

“This is one of those very rare opportunities for an acquisition to be institutionally transformative,” Butler said. “Our focus is collecting fine and decorative art made in America from the Pilgrim era to the present and the inclusion of these exceptional portraits by Peale helps us to better define the growth of our great nation to our school children, our community, and visitors, and also to the many soldiers and their families at nearby Fort Benning who are regular visitors to our museum.”

The acquisition of the pieces was aided significantly by Betty Krulik Fine Art Limited and Debra Force Fine Art, Inc.

Fact Sheet

The portraits were commissioned in 1855 by William Garraway Morehead (possibly Moorhead), a prominent Philadelphia businessman and man of state. Both works are presented in their original period frames, which were manufactured by Earles' Galleries of Philadelphia. The paintings represent the culmination of Peale's goal to produce the perfect likeness of the father of our nation.

Rembrandt Peale was the second son and pupil of Charles Willson Peale, who fought in the American Revolution at Washington's side and became the most prolific portrait painter of the nation's first president. In 1795, the elder Peale arranged a series of sittings at which several members of his artistic family painted the President at the same time. The seventeen-year-old Rembrandt Peale was present at the first sitting; the young man intended to use the resulting portrait to make multiple replicas. However, he was never happy with this portrait, and only made 10 copies. Twenty-five years later, Rembrandt Peale decided to revisit the subject matter, aiming to produce a portrait that would serve as the standard image of Washington. In doing so he used a composite of facial features as depicted on several portraits by other artists, including paintings by John Trumbull, Gilbert Stuart, and his father, and a sculpture by Jean-Antoine Houdon. Peale's composition blends portraiture with history painting in that the sitter is painted within a trompe l'oeil oval stone window, or "porthole," that is decorated with a garland of oak leaves and the head of Jupiter. This work, painted during the winter of 1823-24, became known as the *Patriæ Pater* portrait. In 1846, Peale started to paint copies of it, eventually producing almost 90 replicas or variants.

The Columbus Museum's portrait of Washington, showing him facing left and in military dress, is the version most frequently painted for Peale's patrons. The portrait of Martha is based on Charles Willson Peale's 1795 life portrait of her, with adaptations to make her more youthful and attractive and therefore more in keeping with the age of her husband in his portrait. The first *Martha Washington* of this type dates to 1853, and there are 13 documented copies. Only five additional pairs of George and Martha Washington of this porthole type are known to exist in public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the New York Historical Society, New York; National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC; the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; and the Morehead Planetarium and Science Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

The works will be featured in the recent acquisitions area in the Museum's Mezzanine and then afterwards in a special installation in the Museum's permanent collection galleries that will highlight works by the Peale family and depictions of Washington as the father of our nation.

As an American art and regional history museum, and the second largest general museum in Georgia, the Columbus Museum offers a diverse collection to the public. The Museum houses over 14,000 artifacts and objects that tell the story of the Chattahoochee River Valley's development, an American fine and decorative arts collection from a host of renowned American artists, a hands-on gallery for children, important traveling exhibitions from across the U.S, and the historic Olmsted Garden.

For more information about the Columbus Museum and our permanent collection, please visit www.columbusmuseum.com.