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**A Glimpse Behind the Curtain: Understanding Charles Willson Peale's  
Use of Allegorical Forms in Museum Education**

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**A Glimpse Behind the Curtain: Understanding Charles Willson Peale's  
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**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **A Glimpse Behind the Curtain: Understanding Charles Willson Peale's Use of Allegorical Forms in Museum Education**

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This thesis examines Charles Willson Peale's utilization of visual metaphors within his founding institution, The Philadelphia Museum. After establishing himself as a portrait painter, it became second nature for Peale to employ an aesthetic approach when developing museum exhibits and programs. Throughout his practices he continuously used imagery and objects to represent broader fields of research, along with his views as a naturalist and American patriot. By using these allegorical forms to arouse the public's curiosity, he was able to attract more visitors to his museum and subsequently draw them into the learning process.

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## **Chapter 1: *Introduction to the Study***

By establishing the first popular art and science museum in the United States, Charles Willson Peale set out to build a stronger nation through his own educational initiatives. Throughout his expansive career as the founder of the Philadelphia Museum, he developed innovative programs, in addition to a voluminous museum collection. By presenting exhibitions that showcased American flora and fauna, he recognized the abundance of his nation's natural resources. Furthermore, he educated the public on various species by exemplifying their positive attributes and demonstrating their connectivity within nature. Through these exhibits, he hoped to evoke citizens to become more engaged with their natural surroundings. In doing so, he validated national sentiment and his own calling for labor, ethics, and educational reform.

Not only was Peale's sense of patriotism ingrained within his museum practices, but it could also be interpreted as the guiding principle within his artistic career. By presenting images of America's most prominent men through his portrait paintings, he was able to celebrate their role as optimal citizens. In addition to portraying these figures as moral, industrious and well-educated individuals, he positioned them within their extravagant surroundings. Through these compositional arrangements, Peale was able to present narratives in a manner that reflected his own museum practices.

By observing the correlations between his output as an artist and a museum professional, it can be readily seen how Peale cross-referenced different fields of interest. As a visual thinker, it would have been impossible for Peale not to consider the presentation of his collection materials. Most of his museum exhibits utilized pictorial

elements that he, himself, painted, in addition to specific environments that he designed and built. This desire to mimic reality exemplified Peale's intention of promoting scientific research while offering an accurate depiction of the world around him. Despite the critical outlook regarding his artistic skills, it was evident that his goal was to represent his subjects as accurately as possible. With this intention, he aimed to portray the truth and beauty that was inherent in all forms of life.

Through this research, I analyzed how Peale's interest in material culture and natural curiosities was manifested through his understanding of visual literacy. I believe that his perspective as an artist benefitted the manner in which he utilized visual metaphors within his museum. By recognizing the power of symbolism as a communicative tool, he was able to promote his own philosophies as a patriot and naturalist while providing educational benefits to the public.

### **CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION**

This research focused on the following question: In what manner did Charles Willson Peale's interpretation of visual literacy inform his presentation of information within the Philadelphia Museum? How were his methodologies of teaching through allegories beneficial to the learning process?

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Even though there is a significant amount of literature available on Charles Willson Peale, my goal here was to compile research that aids the field of museum education. By focusing on Peale's presentation of visual metaphors, I explored how his utilization of symbolism guided his pedagogical practices. Within these teachings, he



provoked public interest by presenting portraits and museum exhibits that required further investigation. Through this form of engagement, Peale believed audience members would be more likely to become engaged in the learning process.

While many institutions still utilize textual information in their teachings, it is important to demonstrate the value of employing visual literacy. This is especially the case since we live in a society that relies on signage and iconographic images as communicative tools. By presenting information through pictorial forms, viewers begin to develop a better methodology for identifying and interpreting visual signifiers. Not only does this process enhance each individual's comprehension of symbols, but it also facilitates their ability to communicate visually.

Through conducting research on Peale, and his use and understanding of visual literacy, I explored and discuss the value of incorporating these methodologies into museum education today. Since most patrons have varying degrees of knowledge regarding the content in museums, relying too heavily on the presentation of textual research can limit the accessibility of information within a broader audience. When these concepts are presented through visual aids, patrons are more likely to contextualize an object's meaning according to its specific physical characteristics. This has proven to be beneficial for the learning process since it allows viewers to form more personal and enduring associations.

## **MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH**

Due to my own interest in natural history repositories, I felt compelled to learn more about Peale's own acquisitions and how they were indicative of his ideologies.

Upon further investigation, I became interested in his manner of utilizing natural curiosities to promote museum exhibits and programs. Since Peale recognized the allure of *the esoteric*, he showcased artifacts and specimens in a manner that evoked curiosity from the public.

Through this research, my intension was to examine how revealing information through symbolism impacted Peale's museum exhibits and public programs at the Philadelphia Museum. By decoding the compositional arrangements in his portraits, my intension was to gain evidence regarding his utilization of a symbolism within these paintings and how this could have impacted his development of a pictorial language.

### **SPECULATION ABOUT THIS INVESTIGATION**

I believe this research supports the theory that Peale's assimilation of visual literacy into his museum practices proved beneficial to patrons and to his museum. As an artist, he was able to develop a greater sensibility for depicting subject matter through pictures. This was reflected within his paintings of elite individuals amidst landscapes and iconic imagery, which denoted their role in society. Once Peale established the Philadelphia Museum, he continued to utilize visual metaphors as a means for concealing hidden meaning within his exhibits.

Through examining Peale's use of symbolism within his presentation of collection materials, visitors were able to learn through the process of self-discovery. This pedagogical practice helped Peale broaden his museum audience and reinvent the field of museum education. By uncovering Peale's use of visual literacy, I believe his vast ideologies begin to emerge. Inherent within this dogma is a fervent national sentiment,

which instigated his desire to improve American political and social standards. With this as a focal point, he set out to empower his fellow citizens.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

By conducting historical research on Peale, I examined apparent associations between his professional output and his perspectives as a patriot and naturalist. Fortunately, there is an abundance of primary source material pertaining to Peale and the Philadelphia Museum. This includes Peale's own autobiography, along with countless documents and letters that have been archived and published. In addition, there are many written works by scholars that offer varying analysis of Peale's personal and professional life.

In order to establish a connection between Peale's use of narratives within his artistic and museum practices, I first conducted a visual analysis of selected portraits. Through the examination of his compositions, along with the individuals and environments that he portrayed, Peale's ideologies and experiences become more transparent. By studying the aesthetic nature of these paintings, I was able to present my interpretation of the allegories that reside in each portrait.

When conducting research on Peale's museum work, I knew it was imperative to observe original collection materials since they would be indicative of his display techniques and preservation methods. By evaluating these items in person, I set out to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their utility and aesthetic value. Even though most of these objects have since perished, some are still housed at The Museum of Comparative Zoology and The Peabody Museum of American Archaeology, which are

both located at Harvard University. When visiting these archives, I examined Peale's mounted specimens and the artifacts he received from the Lewis and Clark expedition. By noting their tactile qualities and use as didactic tools, I was able to observe them in a somewhat similar way that Peale's audience would have encountered them during his lifetime.

### **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

- The Book of Nature: Peale offered a literal representation of this concept through his museum's logo, which consisted of an open book with the word "Nature" written across the pages. According to Hindle (1983), this model "held that the truth of science was not restricted to those who read Latin or understood fluxions, but was more accessible to all who would observe and study nature directly" (p. 123).
- Colonial Science: A period of scientific pursuit in America when Westernized methodologies and concepts began to emerge. While many of these research practices had a huge impact on the American scholars, it also instilled a competitive spirit amongst nations. These standards also emphasized contesting presentations of native resources and species.
- The Great Chain of Being: The belief that harmony and order exist within nature through the division of natural elements in a hierarchical order. Many scholars during Peale's lifetime supported this concept of a complete and perfect natural world by claiming that the Great Chain of Being could not be broken. This further validated their dispute against the theory of extinction.

- **Material Culture:** Tangible objects that derive from members of a society.
- **Natural Curiosities:** Natural history objects that arouse interest and speculation due to their obtuse attributes. Peale believed that displaying these items in his museum would attract more visitors.
- **Object-Centered Learning:** A pedagogical method that enables participants to gain knowledge by handling objects. In doing so, individuals can formulate their own observations, leading to cognitive and conceptual growth.
- **Rational Entertainment:** A form of pedagogy that Peale established through the Philadelphia Museum. He believed that providing patrons with an experience that was both educational and entertaining would provoke them to become more engaged with the learning process.
- **A World in Miniature:** A term that Peale used to exemplify his goal of representing the world in its entirety by exhibiting a variety of natural and manufactured items in his museum.
- **Visual Literacy:** The use of developmental senses to decipher and communicate meaning through visual forms.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

While many historians offer a thorough depiction of Peale's biography within the larger scope of his family's background, this research pertains to his own, individual life story. Examining Peale's personal journey, which he subtly unveiled through his autobiography and letters, helped me establish the framework for discussing his creative output and professional endeavors.

In order to fully explore his presentation of imagery, I examined the many publications he produced for the Philadelphia Museum, along with written and illustrated depictions of this institution. I also researched his conceptual and technical training as an artist. Even though he was well versed in several mediums, my analysis focuses on his use of visual narratives within his work as a portrait painter.

### **BENEFITS TO THE FIELD OF ART EDUCATION**

I believe that art educators will benefit from this research since Peale's pedagogical practices help exemplify forms of community advocacy and public programs. As an artist, Peale believed that self-expression was an important component in the learning process. Therefore, his mission was to provide the public with educational opportunities that provoked personal reflection and self-discovery. With this philosophy in mind, he organized interactive museum exhibits and hands-on activities in his museum, which allowed patrons to formulate their own observations. By utilizing these techniques, Peale encouraged individuals to become engaged in the learning process while promoting the exchange of ideas.

In addition to these innovations, he also helped establish the guiding principle that museums could benefit the entire community. Due to Peale's belief that all species served an important role in nature, it would have been contradictory for him to disregard any member of society. By making his museum collection and programs accessible to the public, he championed for education to be granted to all individuals. With this in mind, this research presents Peale's philosophies and practices as an educator, in hopes that these methodologies will resonate within the field of art education today.

## **Chapter 2: *Review of Pertinent Literature***

In order to fully understand Charles Willson Peale's output as an artist and museum professional, I found it imperative to explore all facets of his life. Given the extensive amount of scholarly texts and archived materials pertaining to Peale, I was able to learn more about the experiences and ideologies that defined him. In addition to these resources, I also referenced writings that had influenced Peale's philosophies and academic research as seen in this chapter.

### **PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL**

By examining the numerous letters and documents that Peale wrote, I was able to better comprehend what his goals were within his many fields of expertise. As primary source material, these items served as the basis of my research and helped inform my understanding of Peale's character. Throughout all his personal correspondences, it is apparent that Peale's sense of patriotism was a guiding force within his pursuits.

Fortunately, most of these materials have been archived and published in *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*. This six-volume set was compiled under the guidance of editor, Lillian B. Miller who has written many works on Peale and his portraits. In addition to reestablishing the unique relationships he had with other individuals, Miller also offers extensive footnotes that denote bibliographic resources and information that are key to conducting research on Peale.

Included, as the last volume in this set, is Peale's own autobiography, which he produced later in life. Within this text, Peale presents his life story through the rigorous documentation of daily tasks. This presentation of *the self* validates claims that Peale

lived within the constraints of being a morally upright citizen while obtaining professional success. Even though he was reluctant to discuss certain aspects of his personal life, the autobiography does offer a factual timeline of Peale's existence and the people and places he encountered.

### **CHARLES WILLSON PEALE'S PERSPECTIVE AS AN ARTIST AND MUSEUM PROFESSIONAL**

Since the main objective of this thesis was to explore Peale's use of visual literacy within the fields of art and museology, a majority of my research focuses on his professional endeavors. Given the extent of time that has lapsed since Peale's lifetime, many historians have been faced with the challenge of interpreting his biographical information.

Within *Charles Willson Peale and His World* (1983), the three contributing scholars offer their own perspectives on the impact that Peale's interest in politics, nature, and science had on his goals in life. Through their own analysis, each writer dissects Peale's professional endeavors, relating them back to his ideologies and past experiences. Furthermore, they present Peale's life story within a larger scope of American colonialism, which gives readers a better sense of the local and international affairs that affected him.

While these three essays establish the connection between Peale's conceptual thinking and his output, I wanted to find writings that were more pertinent to his work within the Philadelphia Museum. One such source was *Mr. Peale's Museum* (1980), which was written by Charles Coleman Sellers who has published many works on Peale



and his family. Within this text, he discusses the establishment of the Philadelphia Museum, while focusing on Peale's own interest in objects and his objectives as a museum professional. Sellers also provides detailed depictions of the exhibits, collection materials and programs that composed this institution. By validating Peale's museum practices, Sellers imparts his own belief that the Philadelphia Museum served a significant function within early nineteenth century society. Furthermore, Sellers demonstrates how the challenge of raising money, while maintaining public interest, plagued Peale throughout his career.

Likewise, *Mermaids, Mummies and Mastodons: The Emergence of the American Museum* also focuses on Peale's museum and how this institution benefitted the community. William T. Alderson produced this catalogue in correlation with the self-titled exhibition, which ran from December 1, 1990 to June 30, 1992 at the Peale Museum in Baltimore (Alexander, 1992, p. 17). The curator, Richard Flint, along with the museum's staff, spent four years compiling items from over 40 lenders, with the intension of helping the public understand the early role of natural history museums in American life (p. 17).

Due to the extensive amount of research that went into this retrospective, staff members were able to replicate display methods that were readily used during Peale's lifetime. In doing so, they mimicked Peale's typified manner of exhibiting specimens along with a minimal amount of text. The curators also reinstated many of the educational activities that were originally used in the Philadelphia museum. This included interactive displays, such as an organ, magic mirrors and other machinery that required

patron reciprocation. By discussing these procedures, Alderson provides sufficient reasons for utilizing rational entertainment within the field of Museum Education today.

Given the impact these programs had on Peale's museum patrons, I wanted to conduct further research on the societal standards of the early nineteenth century. One source that concentrated on the political and social changes that were occurring during this period was *Public Culture in The Early Republic*. Within this text, David R. Brigham (1995) offers an unhindered account of Peale's work within the community and how the public's response filtered into his museum practices. This information is pertinent because it shows how American society often dictated the role that museums played in everyday life. Since Peale's main objective was to personify "A World in Miniature," the people around him became an integral influence on his museum programs and exhibits.

In order to better understand how Peale communicated effectively to the public, I wanted to explore his methodology for conveying meaning through museum exhibits and programs. This, in turn, led me to establish my thesis topic, which required an examination of Peale's interpretation and implementation of visual literacy. By conducting research on Peale's work as an artist, I was able to find many correlations between his use of imagery throughout his art and museum practices. The two writings that I chose to reference, both offered a methodical survey of Peale's portraits.

In David C. Ward's book (2004), *Charles Willson Peale: Art and Selfhood in the Early Republic*, he evaluates Peale's paintings by dissecting their compositional meaning. By offering an in-depth analysis of the people and places being depicted in each scene, Ward presents his own investigation on Peale's visual metaphors. Although Ward's

response is highly subjective, his propositions offer many valid connections between Peale's imagery and beliefs.

Likewise, Lillian B. Miller's (1991) essay, "Charles Willson Peale as History Painter: The Exhumation of the Mastodon," also provides a scholarly interpretation of Peale's visual metaphors. Instead of discussing Peale's extensive body of portraiture, Miller focuses her evaluation on *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, which portrays Peale and a crew of workers unearthing the remains of a mammoth. By contextualizing this portrait as a "historical painting," Miller examines Peale's recollection of this significant moment and how he chose to translate it through visual representation. Furthermore, she assesses the importance of this event and what it meant to the American public and the scientific community.

## **REFERENCES TO CHARLES WILLSON PEALE'S OWN RESEARCH**

In order to better understand the motivation behind Peale's professional output, it is essential to recognize the fields of study that were influential to him. Given his interest in philosophy, science, and art, Peale looked to the work being conducted by other scholars to aid his own research. This included writings from novelists of the French Enlightenment and members of the scientific community.

Within this thesis, I chose to examine many of these same written works. By referring to Richard Pulteney's *A General View of the Writings of Linnaeus* (1781), I was able to gain a better comprehension of Carl Linnaeus's research, which had an immense impact on the field of biology. Within Peale's own practices, Linnaeus's system of taxonomy served as a model for the classification of the specimens within the

Philadelphia Museum. Since Peale was not adept at interpreting many scientific names, he often relied on Pulteney's book, which reproduced Linnaeus's findings without referring heavily to Latin terminology.

In addition to Linnaeus, Peale was also deeply inspired by the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Even though there is a wide selection of works pertaining to Rousseau's work, I chose to reference *Autobiography and Natural Science in the Age of Romanticism: Rousseau, Goethe, Thoreau*. Written by Bernhard Kuhn (2009), this text provides a unique look at some of the writings produced during the Romantic period. Through his own interest in science, Bernhard discusses the connections between Rousseau's autobiography and his studies in botany. Since Peale based many of his pedagogical practices on this discourse, it was imperative for me to fully understand Rousseau's theories as a naturalist.

Within his work at the Philadelphia Museum, Peale's methodologies were deeply inspired by a wide breadth of interests and influences. Given the impact that Westernized museum standards had on Peale, I found it beneficial to study the development of these practices in European institutions. In *Museums of Influence*, author Kenneth Hudson (1987) discusses the different approaches museum professionals have utilized for representing ethnographic studies. By presenting these case studies through a historical lens, he exemplifies the impact that social and political influences had within the field of museology.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Utilizing sources that pertain to qualitative and historical research helped me formulate a more comprehensive and rich methodology for exploring my thesis topic. In order to establish the parameters of this investigation, I referred to the book, *Research Design*. Within this text, author John W. Creswell (1994) offers specific guidelines for obtaining source material, organizing information and developing theories based on personal narratives. Likewise, *Historical Research in Educational Settings* also offers methods for coordinating studies, while concentrating on techniques for conducting historical research. Written by Gary McCulloch and William Richardson (2000), this book examines various approaches for presenting historical interpretations. Since it also pertains to the field of education, I was able to relate the case studies to my own thesis topic.

Given the extent of research that derived from archives, it was essential for me to understand how to evaluate collection materials. *Working in the Archives*, which consists of essays written by various scholars, discusses beneficial practices for working within institutional repositories. This book provides “both the theoretical and practical aspects of archival research methods” (Ramsey, 2010, p. 4) by dividing the process into three components. These different sectors relate to accessing archives, working with archives, and creating archives. Within this book, I benefitted the most from Lynee Lewis Gaillet’s essay, which lists step-by-step procedures for examining collection materials. As a novice to archival research, this made the process seem much more manageable.

## **CONCLUSION**

By observing letters and documents that were written by Peale, I was able to formulate a better representation of his objectives as an artist and museum professional. In addition to these items, I also referenced the written works of numerous scholars who offered new insight into Peale's life and career.

With a wide variety of source material, I begin my own analysis of Peale's use and understanding of visual literacy by exploring the development of his museum practices. This entails research on Peale's methods of displaying collection materials, in addition to his integration of educational programs within the Philadelphia Museum. In order to provide an accurate historical context, I present information on the state of museology and American standards of living during Peale's lifetime.

### **Chapter 3: *Charles Willson Peale and His Museum Practices***

Charles Willson Peale first developed an interest in collecting objects after Dr. Christian Friedrich Michaelis asked him to complete a set of life drawings from bones found at Big Bone Lick in Kentucky (Richardson, 1983, p. 80). These remains, belonging to Dr. John Morgan, had already evoked much speculation amongst members of the academic community. Once Peale had these bones in his possession and was able to observe their physical characteristics, he became beset by the idea of studying other objects from nature. Recognizing the profundity of this experience, Peale set out to develop a repository of useful and curious items.

Through reading Peale's autobiography and personal correspondences, it is evidenced that he had a strong attraction to both natural and manufactured objects. As a visual artist, he was often drawn to the aesthetic nature of his acquisitions, but once these objects were integrated into his museum exhibits, they became part of a much greater conceptual presentation. According to David R. Brigham (1995), "Peale primarily addressed his audience through images and displays of artifacts and natural history specimens, rather than with words" (p. 36). By allowing the public to observe these items in person, Peale was accepting the fact that the visual trademarks and arrangement of an object helped define it. He believed that within these moments of scrutiny, individuals would learn how to associate visual signifiers with a greater meaning.

In order to fully comprehend the symbolic references within Peale's presentation of collection materials, it is crucial to examine the manner in which he handled these

objects. Throughout this chapter, I present research on Peale's methodologies as a collector, curator, and educator at the Philadelphia Museum. In doing so, I establish the framework for conducting an analysis of his use and understanding of visual literacy.

## **IN PURSUIT OF COLLECTING**

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Peale's preoccupation with acquiring objects was primarily common amongst the elite. By showcasing an accumulation of rare and unusual artifacts, they were able to represent their elevated place in society. Through these arrangements that focused on the abundance and differentiation of their holdings, curios soon became more valued. With the onslaught of privately owned collections, commonly referred to as Cabinets of Curiosity, a person's status would grant them increased access to the outside world.

Given the veneration of these uncommon objects, many European museums had long been consumed with collecting them. Guided by a competitive spirit, institutions focused primarily on obtaining rarities that could be incorporated into their extensive repositories. Once these items were placed on display, visitors could view a plethora of natural history specimens and cultural artifacts. Even though museums were providing educational resources that were considered valuable, they were not accessible to all individuals. According to Edgar P. Richardson (1983), "The museums appearing in Europe reflected the more socially stratified structure of that society. The European Museum was directed toward artists, savants, and amateurs of science and art, not toward the populace" (p. 87). The British Museum, which operated under the law that their collections had to be open to the public, still made it difficult to obtain entry. Individuals



had to be granted permission in advance and approval was usually given only to those with scholarly intentions.

## **ESTABLISHING THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM**

After years of relying on his portrait business as a source of income, Peale was faced with economic hardships. Due to the lack of demand for portraiture in Philadelphia, and the fact that most commissions were going to English portrait painter, Robert Edge Pine, Peale was forced to seek out new ventures (Miller, 2000, p. 111). It was at this point that Peale decided to convert his portrait gallery into a museum. Unlike most museums in Europe, his goal was to make the museum accessible to all members of his community, despite race or class affiliations. By charging a low admission fee of twenty-five cents per person, Peale believed he could earn enough money to support his family while providing an affordable leisurely activity for the general public.

In an advertisement that was used to solicit visitors, Peale stated that his intentions were, “To collect and preserve all the variety of animals and fossils that could be acquired, and exhibit these publicly.... [So] in the end it might become the basis of a great national magazine of those subjects in nature” (*Charles Willson Peale: Broadside* “my design in forming this Museum” Philadelphia. 1792). With this in mind, Peale opened the Nation’s first popular art and science museum on July 18, 1786. It was in these small confines on Third and Lombard Street, that Peale displayed his paintings of Revolutionary War heroes, amongst his growing collection of objects. The stark contrast between the natural and human-made objects exemplified Peale’s contrasting ideologies as a naturalist and a proud supporter of an evolving society.

Throughout its operational years, the museum was relocated to the hall of the American Philosophical Society, where it later expanded onto the upper floors of the Statehouse (Richardson, 1983, p. 81). The reason for these augmentations was due in large part to Peale's crusade to collect and preserve more specimens and artifacts. Since his goal was to represent "A world in miniature," he found it imperative to portray all forms of life within one universal system.

During his lifetime, Peale was able to develop an extensive collection while inventing new preservation techniques and integrating himself into the academic community. Even though he sought out patronage from scholars and the elite, he designed museum exhibits and programs that were suitable for the whole community. This practice demonstrated his belief that the museum should be an extension of the real world, where patrons are an essential component to its success.

### **APPEALING TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH COLLECTIONS**

Due to the competitive procedures that drove American and European institutions to make headway within the field of science, museum professionals placed added importance on enriching their own collections. By displaying objects that aroused curiosity, they believed such speculation would increase attendance rates. With this in mind, Peale often walked the fine line between obtaining objects that were valued for their sentiment and those highly regarded for their sensational appeal.

Within much of his discourse, it is evidenced that there were several factors that piqued Peale's interest when it came to acquiring items for his museum collection. While his goal was to promote useful knowledge, he was also well aware of the public's

attraction to amusements. Through the implementation of what he referred to as “rational entertainment,” his goal was to collect objects that would evoke wonder while providing an academic or moral lesson.

Unlike the collectors of later years who became popular by presenting fictitious displays of mounted animals with features such as artificial appendages, Peale wanted to take a more scientific approach to displaying specimens. Peale, who appreciated mysteries that were inherent within nature, found it unnecessary to misrepresent these forms. Instead, he appealed to the public by showcasing natural curiosities, which were highly regarded for their rare and unusual attributes. In a letter to William DePeyster, Peale described a newly-acquired hammerhead shark as “being curious because of having its eyes placed at the Extremities of the projecting ends of the head,” and he also noted, “the Body looks like the handle and the head like the hammer” (*Charles Willson Peale to William DePeyster, Jr.*, Philadelphia, January 12, 1792). This description exemplifies Peale’s attraction to the specimens in his collection, which he appreciated based on their unusual aesthetic.

Peale’s concerns for entertaining the public through his presentation of oddities is reminiscent to Donald Barthelme’s (1972) short story titled, *The Flight of Pigeons from the Palace*:

The development of new wonders is not like the production of canned goods. Some things appear to be wonders in the beginning, but when you become familiar with them, are not wonderful at all. Sometimes a seventy-five foot highly paid cacodemon will raise only the tiniest frisson. (p. 139)

In order to attract a larger audience, Peale started publishing advertisements, along with lists of his most recent acquisitions, in local newspapers that offered a glimpse of his unusual collection materials. His advertisements often featured illustrious descriptions with drawings of the oddities on display. One of these featured an engraving of the “Great Ant-Eater,” along with a brief article promoting its value to the public: “[This] extraordinary and wonderfully formed creature now offered to the inspection of the public, makes an interesting addition to many other curious objects that have lately been deposited in the museum” (“The Jubata; Or, Great Ant-Eater,” *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*, October 28, 1799).

Peale also offered a dramatic reenactment of this creature’s behavior: “Armed with claws of uncommon size and strength, and possessing great muscular powers, this curious animal, tho’ naturally inoffensive, when undisturbed, is terrible in his wrath” (“The Jubata; Or, Great Ant-Eater,” *Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*, October 28, 1799). Since the public had never been exposed to an animal of this kind, Peale was able to go to great lengths to embellish its savage behavior. This use of storytelling, which was reminiscent of traditional folklore, embodied his belief in the effectiveness of rational entertainment. By appealing to an audience that was provoked by curiosities, Peale could maintain their interest while providing educational initiatives.

## **UNCHARTERED TERRITORIES**

Due to the significance that was placed on the exploration of uncharted territories, it is understandable why the general populace became intrigued by the concept of *the unknown*. With the influx of expeditions occurring throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

American and European citizens were becoming more aware of unexplored civilizations of people. The items collected during these voyages soon became highly sought after due to their perceived perverse nature.

Seeing the inherent value in unveiling these mysteries, Peale became invested with the idea of collecting natural curiosities and artifacts from these remote regions. Through frequent correspondence with local sea captains, he was able to solicit their assistance with obtaining new specimens (Miller, 1988, p. 344). In hopes of acquiring animal skins, mollusks, fish, and shells, Peale wrote a letter to Commodore David Porter stating his desire to enhance his museum collection:

Indeed it appears to me that by the aid of liberal minded men, fond of developing these extensive productions of the sea's, and giving their assistance to naturalists capable of displaying a world in Miniature, that a new view of the wisdom and power of the Creator will be made manifest, and also have a tendency to make men wiser & better. (*Charles Willson Peale to Commodore David Porter, Philadelphia, November 30, 1823*)

Throughout his career, Peale also benefitted from the donation of objects from many federally funded expeditions, beginning with Lewis and Clark in 1804 (Hindle, 1983, p. 158). Meriwether Lewis, who was a close friend of Peale, acquired many objects from Native American tribes he encountered during exploration. Later, Titian Peale also donated specimens, along with sketches from the Long Expedition of 1818-21, which he had participated in (p. 159).

As private collectors and museums became consumed with the acquisition of objects deemed as “primitive,” they began to display them in an orderly manner that emphasized their physical differences. According to David R. Brigham (1995), “Because

museums, theaters, and circuses catered to white audiences, the representation of race at these sites provides a meaningful context for conceptualizing racial differences in early national America” (p. 31). By presenting objects that were considered exotic to the American public, museum professionals were held less accountable for their portrayal of these items and their cultural relevance. This allowed curators to offer their own interpretation of racial differences in museums that had long accepted a Westernized perspective of the world.

Similar to most of these institutions, The Philadelphia Museum showcased many objects that had utilitarian or spiritual significance within indigenous cultures. Peale featured these items on life size figurines he made from wax. These waxworks were positioned in scenes that mimicked the natural settings and customs of the cultures being represented. Within these presentations, Peale offered his own interpretation of tribal relations while using them as platforms to express moral sentiments.

One scene in particular depicted Meriwether Lewis holding a peace pipe and wearing a stole that was given to him by a Cameahwait Chief of the Shoshone Nation. Peale then accompanied this exhibit with a label that offered a reenactment of Lewis’s speech to the Shoshones:

This mantle, composed of 140 Ermine Skins was put on Captn. Lewis by Comeahwait their Chief. Lewis is suppose to say, Brother, I accept your dress--It is the object of my heart to promote amongst you, our Neighbours, Peace and good will--that you may bury the Hatchet deep in the ground never to be taken up again. (*Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, Philadelphia, January 29, 1808*)

Due to his disdain for war and violence, Peale used this exhibit to show Native

American tribes engaged in kinship. Since becoming a devote pacifist after the turbulent years he spent as a member of the Philadelphia Militia, he promoted the value of peaceful interactions. Therefore, Peale was drawn to objects that could “afford a moral sentiment to the Visitors of the Museum” (*Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson*, Philadelphia, January 29, 1808). In a lecture, he claimed that these scenes were “calculated to inspire the most perfect harmony” (Charles Willson Peale, *Discourse Introductory to a Course of Lectures on the Science of Nature*, Philadelphia, 1800). Even though these exhibits were not informed by a high level of scholarship (Hindle, 1983, p. 134), they had a profound effect on visitors. In fact, Peale attributed the signing of a treaty between hostile Native American tribal leaders to the chance meeting they had at his Museum (Brigham, 1995, p. 30).

## **BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE NATION**

Since Peale hoped to elevate society by promoting the value of educational and moral principles, he developed programs and exhibits with this in mind. Believing that all species possessed positive attributes, he speculated that every American citizen, despite their demographic background, would benefit from a visit to the Philadelphia Museum. He also assumed that the museum would profit and develop from the support of the community as a whole:

Should [the museum] happily receive the smiles of the Public, the progress will be proportionably great; whereas, if it is to depend only upon his solitary efforts, the progress must be slow, that the whole may fall through, not for want of men [of] so superior abilities, but for a successor equally zealous in building up and enlarging the noble fabric, for the emolument of mankind--a fabric which, with due attention, must be continually improving to the end of time. (*Broadside: Peale's Museum Philadelphia*, February 1, 1790)

With this in mind, Peale decided to make the public an integral part of his museum by broadening his audience and enlisting patron support.

In order to maintain popular interest, he tried to appeal to different sectors of the community. By encouraging more women to attend his lectures on natural history he hoped to broaden the museum's female demographic (Brigham, 1995, p. 29). Therefore, he emphasized this form of amusement by promoting it as an opportunity to discuss issues pertaining to morality and romanticism. Peale also encouraged economic diversity by welcoming the attendance of workers from all three sectors of the economy:

agriculture, commerce, and manufacture (p. 5). According to David R. Brigham (1995):

Both the media and public ritual defined a healthy economy as one that maintained a balance among these three realms. Moreover, it was commonly argued that a republic maintained its political freedom by developing economic independence in all three areas. (p. 5)

Peale conceived that all three divisions served an important function and were needed to sustain the American financial system. Similar to the classification structure used to categorize different species, he believed that compartmentalizing various economic classes would benefit American society because it implied order, which he believed was an essential component of nature.

Within many of the exhibitions at the Philadelphia Museum, Peale's goal was to represent the ebb and flow of American society. Due to his devout interest in nature and his desire to promote national sentiment, he chose to stimulate public interest by representing the nation's unique flora and fauna. Peale's goal was to unify his fellow



citizens through exhibits that would evoke a sense of patriotism while proving the strength of America's natural resources. As he once stated,

All knowledge is valuable when properly directed. Of more than common value is that knowledge which presents to the enquiring mind nature in all her boundless varieties, as modified by climate, culture and innumerable other cause; knowledge which carries us into the remotest periods of our own, and other, countries; which levels the barriers of nations and presents, at one view, an interesting epitome of the world. ("A Memorial to The Pennsylvania Legislature," *Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, December 26, 1795)

With this in mind, he gradually accessioned a wide variety of specimens from the United States. One such item was the White-headed eagle (Illustration One), which was distinguished as the national bird on June 20, 1782, soon becoming an iconographic image of American liberty. Given its inherent symbolism as a bird of strength and power, Benjamin Latrobe used a mounted eagle from Peale's collection as a model for a decorative carving he designed for the South Wing of the Capitol Building.

## **COLLECTING THROUGH THE COMMUNITY**

Peale's recognition of public interest also transposed through his collection practices at the Philadelphia Museum. He often solicited the public to donate items through advertisements that recognized the vast amount of untouched resources in America:

With harmony little things become great: all the splendid Museums of the great European nations have risen from the foundations laid by individuals. America has in this a conspicuous advantage over all other countries, *from the novelty of its vast territories*. But a small number is yet known of the amazing variety of animal, vegetable and mineral productions, in our forests of 1000 miles, our inland seas, our many rivers, that roll through several states and mingle with the ocean. ("To the Citizens of the United States of America," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, January 13, 1792)

In June 1784, Dr. Robert Patterson, professor of mathematics at the University of Pennsylvania, donated the first specimen, establishing Peale's collection (Sellers, 1980, p. 12). Patterson's offering of a paddlefish was placed in a case with the words, "With this article the Museum commenced, June, 1784. Presented by Mr. R. Patterson" (p. 12), inscribed on it.

Once Peale amassed a wide array of items, he would display each one, along with a label featuring the donor's name. Like most community art projects, Peale's exhibits provoked popular interest because they offered individuals an opportunity to participate in a public forum. Since donors were represented by their unique offerings, they felt empowered by a sense of ownership and participation.

Given the culmination of British rule in 1783, it is easy to understand why American citizens would have been inspired by this opportunity to engage in a public process. Through a devout national sentiment, most individuals wanted to become involved in social and political issues that would help define their country. Recognizing these movements, Peale urged patrons to contribute their own discoveries to the academic community. By donating objects, they were able to participate in the curatorial process, while representing their place in American society.

In addition to promoting patron involvement in the museum's collection process, Peale also offered lectures, concerts, and a sales desk where visitors could purchase *The Guide to the Philadelphia Museum*, which offered a detailed description of the objects in each room of the museum (Richardson, 1983, p. 87). Through his interest in storytelling, Peale also presented natural history lectures at the museum, which were open to the

whole community. By using objects from his own collection, Peale was able to use them to give more direct demonstrations and lessons.

## **DISPLAYING OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM**

By studying Titian Peale's watercolor painting, *The Long Room*, housed in the Philadelphia Museum, the vast amount of objects in this institution's collection becomes apparent. It documents the rows of glass cases that held mounted specimens, with Peale's portraits featuring America's "Great Men" placed above them. There is also a wide array of minerals and fossils on display, which are organized in glass cabinets with portrait busts of George Washington, Benjamin Rush, and Dr. Philip Syng Physick placed on top (Richardson, 1983, p. 83).

In *The Guide To The Philadelphia Museum*, Peale noted that The Quadruped Room contained "190 Quadrupeds, mounted in their natural attitudes," accompanied by framed numerical catalogues, listing their names in Latin, English, and French (1804, p. 2). Meanwhile, The Marine Room featured classical arrangements of fish and amphibians, along with cases full of shells and coral; the Mammoth Room contained the skeletal frame of Peale's prized Mastodon. Most of the collection materials other than these specimens, such as utilitarian and ceremonial objects, were displayed, along with Peale's waxworks, in the Model Room and the Antique Room.

Peale often had concerns with the museum collection being organized according to the Linnaean order because it worked against an attractive method of presentation (Sellers, 1980, p. 77). Eventually, Peale chose to display the animals and birds with labels that simply stated their name because,

it was found that very few visitors among the multitude that came to view the museum, would take the trouble to read the classical arrangement and then refer to the numbers within the case. It is much better on the whole to simplify, and the name with the bird seen at the same moment is undoubtedly an improvement. (Miller, 2000, p. 413)

Many of these cases depicted various natural environments, which showcased mounted specimens placed in front of landscape paintings that were representative of their surroundings. This aesthetic differed greatly from the museums of Europe, which opted for a more scientific approach to displaying their specimens by organizing them in orderly rows with white backdrops (Sellers, 1980, p. 28).

In contrast to these exhibits that showcased Peale's prized possessions in their stagnant nature, he also had live animals on display. This offered him a chance to study these creatures up close, so he could note their daily habits and behaviors. At one point, there was even a live grizzly bear exhibited in a cage: "It was the first time such an animal had been seen in Philadelphia, and its ferocity made it a notable attraction" (Hindle, 1983, p. 134).

Peale installed many interactive exhibits featuring microscopes and lenses so patrons could observe the smaller specimens in his collection. He also placed an organ in the Long Room, which was used for evening concerts, in addition to several mechanical inventions that were representative of America's technological achievements. One of these devices was the physiognotrace, a machine that captured silhouettes by projecting an individual's profile onto a piece of paper, which could then be cut out for display. After he bought the rights for this invention from John Isaac Hawkins, who designed it in 1802, Peale placed it in his museum so each visitor could take home their own composite.

## DEVELOPING COLLECTION PRACTICES

As Peale's collection increased, he became consumed with the process of preserving, displaying, and categorizing each accessioned item. In order to improve his techniques, he looked to the research being conducted by other scholars, in addition to conducting his own studies. With a newfound interest in science, Peale soon became efficient at mounting specimens in his collection. This process, which is reminiscent of the taxidermy methods used today, required the removal of the specimen's skin, which would then be stretched around a model. Once it was in tact, Peale would add any original appendages, along with glass eyes, to recreate the specimen's physical attributes.

In order to preserve these items, Peale would prevent further deterioration of specimens by coating them in arsenic, which he was also accustomed to utilizing as a painter. The use of this potent substance rendered the mounted specimens extremely toxic, which made Peale weary after he noticed visitors touching some of the birds on display. This warranted Peale to create a sign stating, *Do not touch the birds for they are covered with Arsenic Poison*. When this warning failed to deter patrons, Peale decided to place all hazardous objects in glass cases to prevent exposure. While most scientists questioned Peale's preservation techniques, it can be said that a significant number of his mounted birds and artifacts remain in excellent condition today.

Another timely pursuit for Peale consisted of identifying each specimen he acquired for the museum. At a time when many scholars were still uncovering new forms of life, Peale was faced with conflicting research and a lack of proven information. Despite the amount of scrutiny involved in this process, Peale was determined to offer an

accurate description of each item in his collection. With this in mind, he produced a catalogue titled, *A Scientific and Descriptive Catalogue of Peale's Museum*, which offered detailed descriptions and observations of various species, along with their scientific classification. His goal was,

not only [to] facilitate an acquaintance with the subjects of Natural History in his repository, by putting into the hands of the visitor an accurate description of the object of his attention; but also present to the American, as well as the European world, an evidence of our progress in a department of science, whose cultivation has always been characteristic mark of an advanced civilization. ("Charles Willson Peale: Advertisement for Subscription to A Scientific and Descriptive Catalogue of Peale's Museum," *Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, November 14, 1795)

While Beauvois did most of the scholarly work, Peale did offer many of his own "observations and anecdotes," in addition to designing the cover illustration, which featured the Book of Nature (Miller, 1988, p. 130).

To organize his vast holdings, Peale utilized Carl Linnaeus's method of categorizing animals and plants (Illustration Two), and Richard Kirwan's system of classifying minerals. In keeping with his doctrine that all information in his museum should be assessible to the public, he titled each specimen using his own descriptive words instead of the typified Latin terminology. As Peale stated in one of his lectures,

How much better it is to give a name which is descriptive of the subject, and if possible in our common language, not in Greek or even Latten [sic], which very few persons understand, even among the many pretenders to classical learning. Hard names almost totally destroy the good effects which the study of Botony might be to mankind. They deter many from attempting a knowledge of the classification of Plants – and with many of those persons who pretend to make a study of this pleasing science, their heads get so filled with those abominable long and difficult names, that there is no room left to contain anything about the qualities. (Lectures, 1799-1800, no. 31, pp. 9-10)

By creating a naming convention that incorporated the physical trademarks of each animal and plant, Peale was able to promote their aesthetic value while making the information accessible to every individual.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given Peale's desire to strengthen the nation, he was determined to promote moral and labor initiatives amongst all members of society. By establishing The Philadelphia Museum, he was able to foster these values, while providing educational resources to the public. In order to attract more visitors, Peale designed exhibits and programs that were informative, yet appealing as recreational activities. By implementing what he deemed as "rational entertainment," he believed that museum patrons would become more engaged with the learning process.

Through this methodology, he displayed natural and manufactured objects that evoked interest by arousing curiosity. The minimal amount of text that accompanied these exhibits exemplified Peale's desire to showcase the physical trademarks of each item. When text was incorporated into a display, or Peale was giving a lecture pertaining to these objects, it was within the context of vivid narratives.

Since the objective of this thesis was to explore Peale's use of visual metaphors within his museum, it is imperative to understand how he demonstrated his scholarly research through the presentation of collection materials. By studying the semblance of objects within the exhibits and programs at the Philadelphia Museum, Peale's perspectives begin to emerge through a methodology that was deeply rooted in symbolism.

Additionally, this same utilization of allegorical forms can be observed throughout his artistic practices. Therefore, in the next chapter, I discuss Peale's conceptual and technical processes as a painter, doing so while surveying his portraiture. By examining this imagery, in correlation to Peale's personal history and beliefs, my goal is to establish connections that clarify Peale's approach to visual storytelling.



## **Chapter 4: *Charles Willson Peale's Career as a Portrait Artist***

Charles Willson Peale's "fondness for pictures" developed during his youth when he often spent time copying artist's prints using pen and ink (Miller, 2000, p. 15). This hobby progressed further after his grandmother encouraged him to paint a portrait of his deceased uncle lying on his deathbed. By witnessing her "desire to obtain any, or the most distant shadow of a likeness" of the subject, Peale began to understand the value of capturing the true character of an individual (p. 15).

With an interest in depicting realism, he chose to represent his own ideologies by creating "pictures." Through his devotion to improving national standards, Peale created a large body of work that referenced social and political issues through the use of symbolism. Like his museum exhibits, which encouraged viewer interpretation, Peale's paintings also contain visual signifiers that reference a greater meaning. In order to understand these correlations, I conducted a visual analysis of the compositional and representational aspects of some of Peale's portraits. Throughout this chapter, I present my own interpretation of these works, while revealing background information pertaining to his sitters.

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTS**

Peale initially decided to pursue a career as a portrait painter after many failed ventures had left him with induced debt. His financial worries began after years of apprenticing to a saddler in Annapolis, and then opening his own shop. Since Peale felt somewhat confident with his artistic abilities, he sought out commissions for his portraits,

and received his first in 1763. His initial success in this field was due, in part, to the lack of artists that lived in Maryland at the time, in addition to the onslaught of the “consumer revolution” that developed during this era (Ward, 2004, p. 17). According to Ward (2004), “The 1760s saw an exceptional jump in the consumption of imported, and especially luxury, goods as Americans began to fashion and emphasize a national identity, in part by purchasing novel, ornamental, and luxury products” (p. 17).

Even though Peale saw immense opportunities in this career, he was soon faced with the pressures of providing for a new wife and a rapidly growing family. In order to evade creditors, he left for Virginia and then absconded to Boston where he would soon visit the studios of John Smibert and John Singleton Copley. This experience had a profound effect on Peale, which motivated him to focus diligently on improving his artistic craft. Still without work, he spent the next year practicing by copying one of Copley’s paintings and completing a group of miniatures (Ward, 2004, p. 23). He also visited Philadelphia where he purchased several instructional painting books, along with art supplies to further his skills.

After arriving back in Annapolis in 1766 he was once again faced with the impending circumstance of paying off his accumulated debt. Amidst this moment of crisis, he was fortunate enough to gain patronage from John Beale Bordley who spent “near 2 hours” (Miller, 2000, p. 30) viewing a painting Peale had left for him. In hopes of providing Peale with the means necessary to flourish as an artist, Bordley arranged for him to study in London. By contacting other members of Maryland’s wealthy class, Bordley was able to obtain enough financial support to fund this excursion: “While this

patronage benefited a single individual, it had a psychological ripple effect among the community as the grantees were seen to act munificently and yet appropriately for their class” (Ward, 2004, p. 28). With this reinforcement, Peale set off for London where he would study under accomplished artist Benjamin West.

As King George III’s court painter West who was originally from Pennsylvania, had already established himself through his portraits and historical reenactments. Once again, Peale took on the role of an apprentice as he worked under the mentorship of West. Recognizing the popularity of portraiture in the American art market, he remained focused on painting miniatures. After two years and one month in London, he obtained passage back to Maryland. Sailing into the Chesapeake Bay, where the shores were “covered with Nature’s richest clothing” (p. 39), Peale felt a new sense of confidence as an artist.

When Peale returned to Annapolis he immediately delved into a career as a portrait artist. Due to the success he found in this field, he was able to pay off his debts by 1775 (Miller, 2000, p. 40). With his finances secured Peale decided to move, along with his family, to Philadelphia. Since he had already established himself as a prominent artist in this town, he believed this transition would prove to be prosperous.

## **PORTRAITS OF AMERICA’S GREAT MEN**

Upon arrival, Peale and his family were faced with the calamities of war at the commencement of the American Revolution. During this period, “both Washington’s continental troops and William Howe’s British army moved their hostilities southward from New York and New Jersey to Pennsylvania, making the capital of the young

republic, Philadelphia, pivotal to their strategies” (Miller, 2000, p. 40). Peale, who supported the Republican ideologies associated with the Whig party, reacted to the impending circumstances by joining the Philadelphia Militia. After enlisting he was soon promoted as Lieutenant of his troop.

Through his devotion to obtaining national independence Peale eagerly accepted the position, which led him to participate in the battle at Princeton. It was during this period that Peale once again became engaged with the process of painting miniatures. Due to the ease in which they could be transported and hidden from potential enemies, this format aided Peale in maintaining his artistic practices. It also enabled him to paint historical reenactments that captured the intensity of being immersed in combat.

Once New England, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania seceded from the British forces, and the political powers had been reconstituted, Philadelphia was faced with new changes (Richardson, 1983, p. 58). It was during this period that Peale was asked by the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania to paint a portrait of General Washington for display in the council chamber (p. 58). After a formal request was made on January 18, 1779, Peale commenced work on the painting, *George Washington at Princeton* (Illustration Three).

Due to Peale’s own involvement in this battle, he was able to offer an accurate depiction of the historic event. In addition to revisiting the battle site where he did sketches of the landscape, he had the General pose for him on two separate occasions. Since the portrait became widely popular, Peale was commissioned to paint multiple copies of it. In one of them he signifies Washington’s image as a national hero by

showing him wearing a blue sash that bears his rank as Commander in Chief. The General dominates the scene as he leans against a cannon, symbolizing his desire to protect America's natural and manufactured resources.

By placing Washington in the foreground, his figure consumes most of the composition, which was typical of Peale's portraits of "Great Men." Peale also chose to exaggerate the General's proportions by depicting him with narrow shoulders and broad hips (Ward, 2004, p. 54). According to David C. Ward (2004), Peale's characteristic depiction of the human body as an oval shape "has always been taken as a sign of harmony, tranquility, and order. Peale's standard format was designed to fit his sitters in a template of the virtues, in which stability of the features, and thus the emotions, was primary" (p. 54).

Unlike his earlier portraits, which consisted of arbitrary arrangements, this painting offers a more simplified, yet natural, composition. In the background, which features the landscapes of Princeton engulfed by black clouds, the closing scene of the battle takes place. Although Washington's Continental Army was able to defeat the British forces, this portrait presents a moment of victory as a somber occasion, showing the United Kingdom's flag lying abandoned on the ground while troops exit the field. Since Peale was present when the battle took place, it was easier for him to represent the atrocities of war. Given his exodus from politics and the militia soon after, it is likely that this experience had a despondent effect on him.

## **REPRESENTING THE ELITE**

By 1779 Peale decided to resume a career in portraiture. After spending years involved with local and national affairs, he had become disenchanted with the system, noting his desire to pursue “a profession in which he could not make any Enemies, and which [would be] most probable as well as most satisfactory to his feelings” (Miller, 2000, p. 83). By reading Peale’s autobiography it becomes apparent that he was plagued by his own involvement in the war and earlier political protests. With this in mind, Peale decided to reestablish himself as a portrait artist. One reason for this shift was that as a pacifist his ideologies had become more in tune with the peaceful nature of portrait painting. In addition, Peale had been able to use his political affiliations to purchase a house, along with five lots (p. 84), so he would now have the space necessary for showcasing his works.

Once the renovations to his house were completed, Peale opened his painting gallery where he displayed his portraits of “Great Men” (p. 85). By presenting this exhibition to the public, Peale was able to promote himself as an artist amongst Philadelphia’s elite. Due to the exorbitant cost of commissioning a portrait, only wealthy individuals could afford to purchase them, making portraits a commodity often associated with prosperity. These portraits often depicted the sitter’s elite status by showing him or her immersed in a lavish setting that was representative of their own surroundings and lifestyle. According to Ward (2004), “A commissioned portrait was a display of conspicuous consumption in which the artist’s depiction of the sitter’s possessions and luxurious surroundings was perhaps as important as his skilled draftsmanship” (p. 17).

Even dating back to his earlier years as an artist, Peale had received most of his business from Maryland gentry who owned illustrious plantations in the countryside. Since many of them still had ties to family members in London, they were accustomed to operating both aesthetically and politically under the same rules of their motherland (Ward, 2004, p. 29). It was during this period that the English conversation piece had become popular amongst Marylanders. These large, full-length portraits showed the sitters bonding through congenial activities, surrounded by their domestic settings in England. Even as a student in London, Peale had been influenced by this style of portraiture, using it as a model for his own paintings.

As Maryland's "court" painter, Peale was often conflicted by his social status due to his earlier disposition against British rule and the years he spent dealing with financial burdens. When his father died Peale, age eight, and his family were faced with many economic hardships, which led his mother to seek aid from relatives. Soon after Peale, who was determined to earn a living as a member of the merchant class, began his apprenticeship as a saddle maker. By accepting this position he was forced to abide by his "masters" teachings, which left him feeling exploited through the labor process. Peale later wrote about this experience in his autobiography, stating:

Let Masters who have Apprentices, reflect on the feelings of the apprentice, and make that bondage as light as possible, let the Parents who have children forbear to beat them, who are also in bondage to them, one third of their lives. Let love and not fear be the mover to good works. Shame if properly seasoned, is a greater scourge than the Birch. (Miller, 2000, p. 10)

Even though this opportunity allowed him to “acquire knowledge in [a] more advantageous Profession” (p. 12), it also predisposed him to the corruption often associated with people of hierarchy.

Although Peale’s earlier writings often suggest the tension he felt against the wealthy class, it is important to note his own dedication to gaining fame and financial reward. While Peale did find success through his many professional endeavors, he still found himself requesting assistance from the elite. As a portrait artist, his business depended on their patronage, and once the Peale Museum was established he still needed their support as donors and board members.

#### **A VIEW OF NATURE**

The portrait titled *Mr. and Mrs. James Gittings and Granddaughter* (1791) (Illustration Four) exemplifies the richness of American flora and fauna. This painting, which was commissioned by Colonel Gittings’ son (Miller, 1983, p. 204), depicts James Gittings and his wife sitting next to each other while their young granddaughter is seated in Mrs. Gittings lap petting a squirrel. The convivial couple appears poised as they relax in the comfort of their estate, *Long Green*, which resided on the Gunpowder River in Baltimore (p. 204). The room where they are settled offers a pleasing view of the wheat fields residing in the “rich valley, where [they] enjoy all the blessings a country life [could] afford” (Miller, 2000, p. 175).

Within this scene, Mr. Gittings appears to be holding a bundle of wheat stalks as he leans on a book about husbandry, signifying his achievements as a planter, state legislator, and judge (Miller, 1983, p. 204). Even though this portrait exemplifies Peale’s



version of the American dream, it also depicts a society divided by race and class. The Gittings are prominently placed within the composition, immersed in the fields behind them are laborers gathering wheat, which actually took place while Peale was painting that portion of the scene (Miller, 2000, p. 175).

Peale was commissioned to do this portrait soon after the death of his wife Rachel Brewer, and prior to his next marriage to Elizabeth DePeyster. Given his initial loss, it is easy to understand why Peale was so touched by Mr. and Mrs. Gittings' strong union. This sentiment is revealed through Peale's depiction of Mrs. Gittings affectionately glancing towards her husband while they hold hands. Their relationship adhered to Peale's belief in the importance of courtship and familial relations, which similarly existed in his own household:

As the head, the male supervised major family functions and activities involving household finances and the upbringing of children.... The woman's role was subordinate to her husband's; she directed the day-to-day household activities and was confined almost exclusively to her immediate family. (Miller, 1991, pp. 127-128)

By defining each spouse's role within what he considered to be a unit, Peale further exemplified his belief in order and harmony.

## **SCIENTIFIC PURSUITS IN AMERICA**

The opening of Peale's museum marked a shift in American culture. This act contributed to "the breakdown of elite culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and [led to] the emergence of a more democratic popular culture" (Miller, 2000, p. 112). As citizens tried to rebuild their lives after the American Revolution, eminence was placed on the country's ability to compete with its Western predecessors. Therefore,

new academic interests began to emerge within the fields of science and technology in the United States. In addition to improving the marketability of the nation, Peale believed that these areas of study would strengthen communities, stating: “The general interest of science demands in all civilized countries aid and patronage, because it exalts mankind to the dignity and felicity of her destination” (“Lover of Nature” to *Dunlap and Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, March 27, 1794).

Peale’s pursuit to ratify America’s role in the field of science was fueled by his condemnation of Comte de Buffon, a French naturalist, who implied that American species were degenerating while the greater variety of European species continued to thrive. Through Peale’s desire to separate the national ideologies from colonial standards, he wanted to show the inherent differences between the species in these disparate regions. By collecting objects from outside the country Peale hoped to show the contrast between local and foreign species:

I am more interested to get the various Animals of the old World to compare them with those of this country, as in several Instances, comparing some species which Authors have said are common to both continents, I have found them to differ.  
(*CWP to Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire*, Philadelphia July 13, 1802)

In order to maintain a strong foothold in the scientific community he knew it was important to maintain the same academic standards that were apparent in these Western institutions. Even though European scholars had already identified many animals, plants, and minerals from their region, the specimens in the United States were unfamiliar to them.

By engaging with other scholars, in addition to conducting his own research and experiments, Peale was able to pioneer many new scientific advances within the United States. Unfortunately, within Europe, these findings were often overlooked due to his insufficient background and knowledge within the field of science. By recognizing this issue Peale instead promoted the value and abundance of his acquisitions. According to Brooke Hindle (1983), “the most enduring contribution [Peale’s] museum made to the advancement of science was through the encouragement its specimens and activities gave to study” (p. 126). Since Peale pursued his collection process by accessioning objects from the public, he was able to amass a wide variety of natural curiosities.

### **THE GREAT INCOGNITUM**

One of Peale’s greatest accomplishments dates back to the year 1801 when he recovered and mounted the first skeletal remains of a mastodon in America (Miller, 1988, p. 311). After learning about the discovery of fossils found in Newburgh, New York, Peale embarked on a journey up the Hudson River to complete drawings of these remains. Upon arriving at John Masten’s farm Peale was awestruck when Masten granted him permission to retrieve the remainder of the bones, which were submerged in a swampy morass on his property. Once Peale informed the members of the American Philosophical Society about this find, they ardently agreed to loan him five hundred dollars so he could return to Newburgh to excavate the entire skeleton.

Although Peale’s interest in obtaining and displaying these remains was mostly pragmatic, since he knew it would be a popular attraction in the museum, he also hoped it would fill a void in the Great Chain of Being (Miller, 2000, p. 279). Within the scientific

community during the eighteenth century scholars were grappling with the concept of evolution, which contradicted the theory that species remained unaltered through time. Like Peale, most individuals believed that harmony and order prevailed in nature, which made this concept difficult to accept. Therefore, the popular belief was that the skeleton came from an existing animal, such as an elephant, or it emerged from an undiscovered species, which led to its classification as “The Great Incognitum” (Miller, 1988, p. 308).

With a crew of workers and his son Rembrandt, Peale once again traveled to Masten’s farm where they established an excavation site at the location of the skeletal remains. Peale’s portrait, *The Exhumation of The Mastodon* (1806-8) (Illustration Five) commemorates this historic event and the group’s perseverance for scientific pursuits. While it does not offer a completely accurate depiction of the occasion, it does memorialize a monumental discovery. This landscape painting presents the excavation process as its central motif while the rustic environment of Masten’s farm defines the setting. In the center of this composition is the wheel with the chain and buckets, which the laborers used to empty out the water from the morass. As an essential component to the exhumation, the wheel consumes a majority of the painting, signifying the effects of technological engagement.

As the laborers work steadfastly to uncover the skeleton, Peale, along with his family, look down in observance. Over the two-year period that Peale spent working on this painting, he incorporated seventy-five people into the scene. Even though some of the family members and friends that are depicted were not actually present, Peale still wanted to pay tribute to them in this considerable moment (Richardson, 1982, p. 85). He

also chose to include fellow naturalist Alexander Willson standing to his left with his arms crossed.

Through the utilization of storytelling elements, Peale intensified this scene by depicting the impending doom of a thunderstorm fast approaching the excavation site. By recreating this calamity, which actually did threaten the exhumation process, Peale was reminding the viewer of the heroism and dedication that was involved in such a venture. He also decided not to show the skeleton in its entirety, so he could further adduce this moment of suspense. Remarkably, the only reference of the Great Incognitum that exists in the entire composition is a large drawing of a single bone that Peale holds in his hand.

Even though the Newburgh site yielded few remains, Peale was able to obtain mastodon bones from two other sites, which enabled him to build and suspend two complete Mastodon skeletal structures. The first one was displayed for the American Philosophical Society at the Philosophical Hall as a sign of gratitude for the organization's support. It was comprised of many repaired bones in addition to a skull, which was refashioned from a cranium made of paper mache and a jawbone carved from wood. The second Mastodon was exhibited in New York, then London and its surrounding counties, where it received little recognition and proved to be a financial failure (Miller, 2000, p. 307).

Unlike the European tour, the exhibition at the Philosophical Hall was much more advantageous for Peale. As of 1811, when it was incorporated into a group exhibit, the Mastodon had brought in \$7000 as a solo exhibit (Miller, 1988, p. 378). It was

accompanied by one of the most extensive written labels, which was Rembrandt's ninety-two page *Historical Disquisition* with each page individually framed for the display.

## **A WORLD IN MINIATURE**

Approaching the end of life Peale decided to relinquish ownership of the Philadelphia Museum transferring it to his son Rubens. On January 1, 1810, Peale entered into retirement by moving to Belfield, a 104-acre farm outside Philadelphia (Miller, 2000, p. 371). He soon took up farming, an activity that would bring him closer to nature, while providing an opportunity for him to learn about various agricultural methods. Although this venture was unprofitable due to excessive expenditures, Peale did acquire enough knowledge to design machinery and a garden that was modeled from his aesthetic vision.

After spending over a decade at Belfield, Peale was forced to sell his farm because of a banking crisis that inflicted the entire nation. With the intention of immersing himself back into the community, Peale decided to once again resume management of his beloved museum. Soon he was engaged with the presentation of natural history lectures while advocating for more funding. It was during this period that the board of trustees at the museum asked him to complete a full-length portrait for display at the museum. In beginning this monumental task, he was determined to create a work unlike any done before (p. 441), one that would represent his life's accomplishments and ideologies.

The finished piece, which was appropriately titled *The Artist in His Museum* (Illustration Six), was one of the many self-portraits Peale completed during this period

of reflection. Similar to the dramatic rendering of *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, Peale is pictured in front of a curtain, which is being held up with his left hand to reveal the contents of his museum. By considering the importance of his life's work Peale chose to portray himself as the central component in this scene. In doing so, he appears front and center as light is "received from behind him" (p. 441), an effect he was determined to recreate. Within this scene Peale is depicted emerging from the darkness of the curtain with the light hitting his face and his right hand, which is opened as a gesture to the visitors he is expecting (Miller, 1996, p. 166).

The background features the Long Room, which offers an excellent example of Peale's collection materials and his display methods. Unfortunately, the viewer is not able to see the room in its entirety because the curtain consumes the top half of the portrait. While Peale's exhibits of mounted animals and portraits can be seen on the left side of the room, the other half remains concealed. Upon further observation, a small portion of the mastodon's skeletal torso becomes distinguishable as a profile of jagged bones emerges from underneath the curtain.

Within the visible portion of the Long Room a man and his son engage in a discussion while a "Quaker lady" holds her hands up in astonishment as she looks up at the mastodon that is nearly hidden from the viewer's perspective (Miller, 1996, p. 166). According to David C. Ward (2004), "She is reacting to the mastodon skeleton as monstrous in two senses, literal and epistemological... [as] the mastodon was shocking to early nineteenth-century spectators both in its physical appearance and in its mysterious

origins” (p. 185). Depicting visitors captivated by these exhibits embodied Peale’s belief that his collection materials had the power to capture and entertain visitors.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout his portraits Peale always utilized a narrative scheme to illuminate his interests and ideas. Inherent within these images was a voice shaped by the political and social conditions of the American Revolution. By depicting his subjects immersed in natural environments while engaging with local specimens, Peale was able to promote his message as a naturalist and patriot.

Even though Peale’s use of figurative representation is not uncommon within the field of painting, what makes his practices unique is the manner in which his artistic perspective correlated with his vision as a collector, curator, and educator. Through his professional endeavors, he became accustomed to utilizing his canvas in a manner that was similar to his presentation of objects at the Philadelphia Museum. In the next chapter, I examine the relationship between Peale’s output as an artist and museum professional. By establishing these connections my goal is to demonstrate how his ideologies surfaced as visual metaphors throughout these endeavors.



## **Chapter 5: *The Merging of Art and Science through Symbolism***

With a devout interest in art and science, Peale developed his professional practices by integrating his studies within these two fields. As a portrait artist he utilized his curatorial skills to inform the placement of objects within each composition. Likewise, Peale substantiated his scientific research with illustrations of specimens, which he created by referencing his past artistic training. By recognizing the profundity of visual communication, it became an integral component within Peale's presentation of information at the Philadelphia Museum.

### **UNDERSTANDING VISUAL LITERACY**

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was marked by society's appeal to the mechanical arts and subsequent advances in technology, an ability to depict realism through images was considered highly valuable. According to Miller (1983),

Everyone has the capacity to think visually; we now know that it is one of only two modes of human thought, the other being the mode cultivated in the three R's and in the schools generally: verbal, linear, arithmetic, and analytical. By contrast, visual thinking interprets simultaneous, complex images. It is the basis for the recognition of people and places and orienting ourselves in space. (p. 108)

After years of artistic training, which were often spent studying other artists' works, Peale could understand the value of presenting meaning through paintings. According to David C. Ward (2004), "The connection between the visual and the verbal [was] arguably stronger in Peale than in any other artist in any era" (p. xvii). By observing his portraits in chronology, they evidence his transition from a novice painter

who communicated through the literal use of symbolism to a more astute conceptual artist.

As a budding artist Peale's national sentiment was the driving force behind his theoretical and technical practices. From his desire to remain free from British Forces and the shackles of upper class Marylanders, Peale developed a greater sense of romanticism. After seeing how artists such as Benjamin West and Cesare Ripa were using visual metaphors to proclaim their political and societal views, Peale was compelled to do the same.

During the social upheaval brought about by the American Revolution Peale's involvement in political protests influenced him to start constructing propaganda pieces. One of these items was an effigy of Benedict Arnold he built for a demonstration organized by the Furious Whigs (Ward, 2004, p. 85). Peale's literal personification of Arnold as being "two-faced," represented the animosity he felt regarding his "traitorous conduct" and support for the Loyalists (p. 85). As the effigy of Benedict Arnold (situated in front of a devil) was paraded down the street a crowd of citizens followed close behind chanting protests against Tories and other conservatives. This use of symbolism was apparent throughout Peale's earlier works, which consisted of battle flags, painted transparencies, and sculptural pieces that he used to incite political action. By using metaphors that were potent in meaning, often referring to the values of liberty and democracy, Peale learned how to promote his message through images that evoked reaction.

Several years later when he became immersed in building moving pictures, Peale utilized his presentation of images as a form of entertainment. These theatrical stages were used to depict stories through changing landscapes and special effects. Modeled after Philippe De Loutherbourg's moving pictures, which were widely celebrated in London, Peale's dramatic presentations instead portrayed tranquil scenes of life in America. In one he offered a rendition of *Adam and Eve* from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which he hoped would provide a moral sentiment for viewers. By developing linear narratives that incorporated multiple images, Peale was able to advance as a visual storyteller.

## **REPRESENTING THE NATURAL WORLD**

The emblem that Peale designed and engraved for the Philadelphia Museum's admission ticket attests to his devotion for the Natural world. Essential to this composition is the Book of Nature, which Peale recreated consistently within his catalogues and pamphlets to represent the museum's mission. He also referenced this ideology on a sign that hung above one of the entrance doors to the Philadelphia Statehouse, which read:

The Book of Nature open-  
Explore the wond'rous work.  
A solemn Institute of laws eternal  
Whose unaltered page no time can change,  
No copier can corrupt.

Within this emblem the opened book appears at the top of the composition where it radiates light ushering the clouds away. Hanging from two trees underneath it is a banner that states: “The Birds & Beasts will teach thee! Admit the Bearer to Peale’s Museum, Containing the Wonderful works of NATURE! And CURIOUS works of ART.” Surrounding this indoctrination are a few of the many species that represent nature’s creation. As these animals engage with their outdoor surroundings, each one looks to the banner as a testament of truth. The emblem as a whole exemplifies the harmony that exists in nature through its symmetrical composition while offering an aesthetically pleasing rendition of Peale’s museum as “A World in Miniature.”

In addition to providing lessons the Book of Nature also exemplifies the presentation of the natural world through storytelling. Since Peale knew that the public was provoked by entertainment he personified these narratives within his paintings, exhibits, and programs. In each portrait Peale incorporated lush vegetation and specimens that aided his interpretation of the individuals he depicted. Likewise, his museum tours also offered vivid reenactments of animals engaged with their surroundings. This method of storytelling proved influential since it heightened visitors’ senses while evoking wonder through the depiction of curious specimens.

By reading Manasseh Cutler’s journal entry, which captures his visitor experience at The Philadelphia Museum, it affirms the positive effects of Peale’s educational narratives. Cutler, who was a clergyman from Massachusetts, noted the abundance of different species in Peale’s collection that reminded him of *Noah’s Ark*. By remembering this tale, which Peale later depicted in his painting *Noah and His Ark*, Cutler was able to

form an association between the storybook elements in Noah's Ark and the numerous mounted species on display. He also indicated that the reason why he was enticed by these objects was because they were "all real--either the substance--or skins finely preserved" (*Life, Journals, and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler*, 1888, p 1:219). This response helps to validate Peale's ideology that patrons were more responsive to exhibits that mimicked real life through the correct rendering of specimens.

### **DIDACTIC MATERIALS IN THE MUSEUM**

Since Peale's goal was to represent the wealth of nature's resources within his own museum, he worked with several artists and naturalists to create scientific illustrations of specimens in his collection. Dating back to his earlier days of artistic training Peale had developed an appreciation for drawing directly from nature:

In art, one of the reigning dicta called for the artist to copy nature directly. Paintings by masters were to be observed and used as models--but ultimately the supreme model was nature itself. Portraits, as well as landscapes, had to be based upon the living original as the model. (Hindle, 1993, p. 123)

Within Peale's museum, this idea flourished through his exhibits that incorporated paintings of natural landscapes as backgrounds and the illustrations of different species he created for his publications.

After befriending Alexander Wilson, Peale granted him access to the museum's ornithology collection so Wilson could use the mounted birds as models for illustrations (Illustration Seven) for his publication titled *American Ornithology*. In exchange, Wilson donated many birds to Peale's collection while offering assistance with the classification process. Together they also completed a study on the relationship between a bird's wing

structure and flight movement. Like Wilson, many American scholars used Peale's collection materials to aid with their research and illustrations. Through the various publications that reproduced this research, Peale was able to promote his specimens within the field of natural history. Since most of his collection materials have perished these documents are considered valuable because they contain some of the only surviving pieces of information pertaining to these items.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when innovations in photography were still in a developmental phase, naturalists had to rely on scientific illustrations for documenting various forms of life. With the advancements that were occurring within the field of science and technology, it was imperative for these drawings to reflect the research that informed them. Furthermore, since they served didactic purposes, they also had to operate sufficiently as communication tools. In order to promote the form and function of each specimen, they are often composed of simplified line drawings, which allowed the illustrator to control exactly what the user saw (p. xx).

In keeping with his vindication from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Peale was driven by his belief that teachers should "never to substitute representation for reality, shadow for substance--[they should] to teach, in short, from actual objects" (Sellers, 1980, p. 101). With an emphasis on depicting realism Peale aimed to represent truth and accuracy through his many endeavors. Since he had a genuine interest in science, it became an effectual component within his representation of "A World in Miniature."

Through his validation of realism, Peale believed all forms of life should "be seen in natural attitudes and groups and with the natural environment of each" (p. 19).

Likewise, the compositions within his paintings were often assembled from the use of a painter's quadrant, which delineated correct proportions and angles. These valiant efforts came at a time when society was enticed by the authenticity of objects and images that were derived from their original source. Since most individuals were in search of a relatable experience, the public placed an added emphasis on emulating the outside world.

### **DEPICTING SOCIETY AS IMAGES**

Since the goal in portraiture was to offer an accurate representation of the sitter while commemorating his or her achievements, it was vital to create paintings that were pleasing to both the patron and artist. Through Peale's depiction of each individual he aimed to recreate the "general proportions of the features" but concluded "that expression may be considered the most difficult part of the art" (Miller, 2000, p. 327). Given the hardships Peale faced when developing as a technically proficient artist it is likely that he could have been more consumed by the conceptualization process.

Despite Peale's belief that his portraits were rooted in realism most of these images delineated a romanticized depiction of the individual. Through his goal of "represent[ing] the mind, through the features of the man" (Miller, 1983, p. 431), Peale could not avoid incorporating his own assessment of the sitter's character into his personification of them. According to Ward (2004), "That Peale never did the muscular or skeletal drawings that were a staple of an artist's training may indicate his not wanting to look too closely at the corporeal body, preferring to represent the idealized external appearance that a sitter presented to the public" (p. 59).

Even though Peale's paintings were always defined by his idealism, as opposed to an aesthetic accuracy that he desired to achieve, they do evidence his advancement as a visual thinker. At the beginning of his career Peale's portraits featured the same semiology that was found within his propaganda works. By adopting this sense of radicalisms Peale was unable to offer a naturalized depiction of people, places, and objects. Once his involvement with protests diminished, Peale's paintings became less consumed with overt symbolism. Unlike his earlier compositions that featured arbitrarily placed allegorical forms, Peale began to contextualize the arrangement of these symbols in relation to the subject matter they informed. By learning how to depict people handling both natural and manufactured objects Peale was able to represent each sitter without relying on sufficient technical abilities.

Similar to his portraiture, Peale also utilized objects as a means for personifying individuals throughout his museum practices. By inviting members of his community to donate natural curiosities to the Philadelphia Museum, he was able to represent their voices through exhibits. Since most individuals chose to present items that were indicative of their own interests or values, the museum soon became an extension of the outside world. In addition to displaying these objective correlatives, Peale also installed the physiognotrace (Illustration Eight and Nine), which allowed museum patrons to have their silhouette captured on paper. These profiles further exemplified the presence of patrons within his museum.



## PROMOTING ETHICS THROUGH OBJECTS

The silhouettes produced by the physiognotrace offer a striking comparison to Peale's portraits of the elite, which contain visual narratives alluding to the sitter's accomplishments. Instead, these profiles present a vague representation of people, making them undistinguishable and homogenous in form. Given the impending development of modernization these images marked the replacement of manual labor with technological advances. This metaphor "reflected the shift in the economy from handiwork to machine production, defused [by] the dangers of individualism by making the body, not a site of individual will, but an automatic mechanism" (Ward, 2004, pp. 122-123). Furthermore, through depicting each patron as a dark silhouette Peale alluded to the notion that these individuals were initially a blank canvas in need of guidance.

Since Peale valued the lessons that were inherent within his museum it is likely that he perceived the visitor's experience as being transformative. This is evidenced by his portrayal of patrons standing in the background of his self-portrait, *The Artist in his Museum*. By picturing a man and his son conferring as they investigate one of the exhibits, Peale was paying homage to Rousseau's encouragement of parental guidance through teaching. With regards to his interest in Rousseau, Peale discussed human development in relation to the natural world:

To shew harmony of Creation, Manifested in the particular construction of such a variety of Creatures, so wonderfully and happily adapted to their several stations in life, and to draw them and their economy, such moral reflections as may help to correct our errors is certainly deserving the countenance and aid of every denomination of Men--political and religious. (Charles Willson Peale, Lecture 39, 1799-1800, American Philosophical Society)

Peale promoted these values throughout his museum exhibits, such as his wax works, which depicted the friendly exchange between Native American tribal members. In another display he presented a bow and quiver that he had received from General Williams. Peale valued this object because it had been utilized in two separate battles, both for the preservation of freedom. He substantiated it through his own words:

The misfortunes of a prince, and Heroism of a Lady are not uncommon. The novelty is *the Bow* - - a stem of genuine Bamboa - - which destined for the defense of liberty in Africa, served the same cause in America, was preserved by an American officer, and is preserved in [the] museum. (Miller, 2000, p. 158)

Through his own self-validation, Peale portrayed himself in a manner reminiscent of his depiction of the Gittings' family in *Mr. and Mrs. James Gittings and Granddaughter*. By positioning himself amongst collection materials at the Philadelphia Museum, Peale embodied his achievements in the field of science. Given the placement of these objects Peale was able to vindicate his own merits while alluding to the benefits of his ethic and labor initiatives. These same ideologies later influenced him to produce self-help books that would teach readers how to maintain adequate health and happiness.

## **HIERARCHIES AS METAPHORS**

Since Peale believed every individual served a vital function within their community, he personified these roles through his paintings and museum exhibits. In portraits Peale utilized visual metaphors to delineate the hierarchies and ranks that were apparent in society. This is demonstrated in *George Washington at Princeton*, in which Washington's accomplishments as General are glorified through his decorated uniform that bears the insignia of his rank. Since Peale held soldiers in such high regard, he put an

extensive effort into depicting each one according to their rank and duties, and when copies or replicas were ordered of a portrait he would make sure to update the insignia (Richardson, 1983, p. 57).

Within many of these paintings, Peale represented the individual's status through their placement in the composition. This is apparent in *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, where the denotation of rank is symbolized by the vertical arrangement of figures. As the laborers appear at the bottom of the morass, Peale and his family stand above them in a directorial manner alluding to their advantageous position in life. This same use of linear delineation was also employed in *Mr. and Mrs. James Gittings and Granddaughter*, in which the Gittings family remains prominently positioned in the foreground of the scene. Meanwhile, in the distance behind them the reapers are depicted as foreshortened figures. By featuring them in the background of this portrait obscured by their natural surroundings, Peale testifies visually to the separation that existed between servants and their masters. Furthermore, since the reapers are portrayed as black and white painted dots, they appear to be removed from their identity (Miller, 2000, p. 175).

Similar to Peale's other works the portrait of the Gittings family "depicts nature as an organizing principle that connected human society to natural laws" (Ward, 2004, p. 59), as affirmed by the orientation of the squirrel in the granddaughter's lap. This positioning acts as a "gesture to the master class's habit of command" (Ward, 2004, p. 59). While this representation reveals the young girl's fondness for natural life forms, it also symbolizes the power of mankind. Likewise, these natural hierarchies were also emphasized within the exhibits at the Philadelphia Museum, which showcased vertical

arrangements of mounted specimens displayed underneath his portraits of “Great Men.” By placing these paintings on top, Peale referenced the superiority of the primate family over all of the other species. According to Richard Pultney (1781),

However the pride of man may be offended at the idea of being ranked with the beasts that perish, he nevertheless stands as *an animal*, in the system of nature, at the head of this order; and as such is here described with his several varieties observable in the different quarters of the globe. (p. 64)

Even though this juxtaposition epitomized Peale’s belief in the dominating presence of the human species, it also exemplified the elite status associated with the individuals in his portraits. Furthermore, the display cases that featured specimens separated according to typology alluded to the class distinctions apparent in society. All together these exhibits, like his portraits, reinstated Peale’s ideology that all forms of life were organized within the Great Chain of Being through harmony and order.

## **A WINDOW IN TIME**

The intent behind most of Peale’s museum practices was to maintain control over the lasting physical state of the objects in his repository. This was apparent within his preservation efforts, which pushed him to develop new scientific procedures for preventing materials from deteriorating. Once these specimens had been embalmed and placed in cases that offered an authentic representation of their environments, the reconstructed scenes would encapsulate a moment frozen in time.

Comparable to these exhibits Peale’s portraits also mimicked reality through the depiction of a single event unaltered by time. According to Ward (2004), “Peale’s paintings were anti-history paintings because they made actions and events appear

inevitable and preordained; they stopped time. His gallery homogenized history, creating a necessary myth of national unity by bringing together disparate subjects” (p. 88). Given his idealistic nature, it is evident that Peale’s portraits presented images that mirrored his own value system. Portraying scenes that strayed away from reality affirmed Peale’s desire to offer his own historic perspective.

Due to his devout national sentiment most of these images served as commemorative paintings, documenting events that Peale believed were important in the development of his country. As confirmed by *George Washington at Princeton*, in which Peale portrayed George Washington in the aftermath of war, the artist displayed a definitive moment of victory for the colonies. Since “history painting was beyond his reach technically, Peale turned his portraits of Washington into quasi-historical works by including symbolic details and landscape backgrounds which added historicity and scope” (Miller, 2000, p. 412). Like his other paintings, this one was indicative of neoclassical portraiture, “which took the classical view, selecting permanent, the enduring, and making a clear political statement of character” (Richardson, 1983, p. 68). By depicting this event through a clearly defined style of portraiture, Peale was able to validate Washington’s achievements from a more objective stance.

In contrast to the final scene that was captured in *George Washington at Princeton* Peale’s painting *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, presents the moments leading up to the unearthing of the first mastodon in America. By focusing on the events prior to this monumental discovery, he was able to emphasize the escalating suspense. Considering that Peale and the laborers were unaware of what type of animal remains

they were going to find, this point in the expedition would have had a greater significance. This is especially true since there were so many scientific inquiries regarding how these skeletal remains would help define emerging theories of evolution.

Through Peale's attraction to documenting lived experiences it was inevitable that he would write an autobiography. This written work, which dated back to his youth, demonstrates an obsessive interest in reproducing events in minute detail. According to Ward (2004),

Peale's writing, neither reflective nor analytical, tracks his life so closely that it flattens the account to a repetition of day-to-day detail.... His primary purpose in writing was instrumental--to convey information. But writing was also necessary to Peale as a way to signpost his progress, record his activities, and affirm his very existence. The writings prove that Peale did not "kill" time. (p. 115)

Similar to his portraits that provide a surface-oriented depiction of each sitter, Peale wrote his autobiography in third person, often "treating himself as a subject for scientific scrutiny" (Ward, 2004, p. xxiii).

## **THE OUTCOME OF TECHNOLOGY**

The impact of modernization in a developing society had an immense impact on Peale. Even though he advocated for scientific pursuits, he also found great significance in conserving natural resources. Within his paintings and museum exhibits, these dueling ideologies were often exemplified in relation to human development. Even though he was a devote naturalist, Peale still advocated for technical and educational advancements in America. This ideology clearly stood in contradiction to the devotion he had for Rousseau, who disavowed societal progress since he perceived it to be corrupt and inauthentic to human nature.

These opposing stances are apparent in *George Washington at Princeton*, in which the beauty of nature is shown being compromised by the tendencies of war. As figures exit the field, dispersed across a region that has inherently been conquered, the landscapes bear the devastating effects of colonization. Since Peale saw value in the development of the nation, he glorified the achievements of this battle through his iconographic depiction of Washington leaning against a cannon, a sign of threat. This representation reveals Peale's true desire to help the colonies advance, even though it went against his beliefs as a naturalist.

These same conflicting ideologies are depicted in *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, which utilizes the wheel's placement to exemplify the impact of modernization. Through this technological advancement, Peale and the laborers were able to uncover the remains of the mastodon. By depicting the movement and tension in each figure, Peale made it easier to comprehend the wheel's technical use and strength. The revolving chain and buckets "emphasize the routinized work of the laborers and show how industrial organization facilitates human progress" (Ward, 2004, p. 148). While they work to unearth this extinct animal, the dark clouds in the background stand as a reminder of nature's dominating presence.

These events took place at a time when Peale, along with his fellow citizens, aspired to be in control of their environments. Through his own preservation processes, Peale was able to fulfill his role at the top of the Great Chain of Being by placing lower forms of life in a state of permanence. These approaches, consisting of mounting and displaying specimens, allowed anyone with scientific knowledge to control an object's

appearance and meaning. Since Peale recognized the societal need to dominate one's own surroundings, he employed this ideology throughout his endeavors. As indicated by his presentation of innovative machinery in his museum, patrons were given an opportunity to engage in innovative mechanical processes. In addition to these hands-on experiences, Peale's portraits also gained him notoriety because they enabled individuals to govern their own appearance.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding Charles Willson Peale's use of symbolism in *The Artist in His Museum* provides a glimpse into his role as an artist, collector, and educator. Even though he emphasized his work as a museum professional, one cannot help but notice the placement of paintbrushes, along with a pallet, in the foreground of the composition. Since Peale's only reason for taking a hiatus from portraiture was due to economic hardships, it is likely that he maintained a passion for the arts throughout his lifetime. This is further evidenced in the self-portraits he painted at an elderly age, which personify him in character as a painter.

By reading Peale's own personal writings, it becomes more discernable that he longed to succeed as an artist. Although he received little recognition within this field, Peale went on to use his conceptual and technical capabilities as an artist to benefit his museum practices. In doing so, he established a methodology of presenting collection materials so visitors would be attracted to the unique trademarks of each object. By utilizing this aesthetic approach, the Philadelphia Museum was always consumed with



vivid arrangements of specimens, installations that recreated lavish environments and models adorned in relics.

Through these visionary displays, Peale demonstrated his perspective as an artist within the competitively driven field of science. While this angle resonates within the philosophical debate between the benefits of “knowing” and “feeling,” Peale tried to maintain a foothold on both sides. Even though he utilized museum exhibits and programs to represent his scholarly research, it was inevitable that his own convictions would emerge. When they did, it happened through the presentation of allegorical forms, which reflected his innate sense of visual thinking.

## **Chapter 6: *Promoting Self Discovery through Allegorical Forms***

After enduring years of apprenticeships, artistic training, and scientific studies, Charles Willson Peale had a new valuation for the field of pedagogy. This feeling of achievement proved to him that anyone who was a novice could advance in his or her chosen profession through adequate conceptual and technical training. According to Peale,

It has been said, and generally is an adopted opinion that Genius for the fine arts, is a particular gift, and not an acquirement. That Poets, Painters & c are born such. Now there are proofs of men, that shew an equal readiness to acquire knowledge in what ever may be thought difficult: perhaps their minds may be compared to a fine Soil, in which every thing will grow, that is sown therein. But remember cultivation is absolutely necessary. Application will overcome the greatest difficulties, but there must be a stimulus to produce a continued exertion. but too often the difficulties arise from the person beginning in a wrong part, a clue necessary to find the way through a labarinth. (Miller, 2000, p. 41)

With this in mind Peale set out to implement educational programs and exhibits into his museum that would be comprehensible to all members of the community.

Since most European museums during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century only granted admission to scholars, The Philadelphia Museum was ahead of its time. Opposed to the pretentiousness of the academic community Peale wrote, “What is the Amount of real pleasure in our learned societies? You will learn as much by studying the manners of your Pigs and Goslins, and not be put to the blush if by chance a Man of sence [sic] comes as a visitor” (Miller, 1988, p. 869). Through an introspective connection to nature Peale saw an inherent value in each person distinguishing the human race as an extension of the natural world.

Due to his belief that every individual was capable of fulfilling a role in society, he held fellow citizens accountable for their deeds. This was apparent within his autobiography where he expressed a desire to enhance his community through initiatives in labor and ethics. By opening his museum to the public, Peale was able to advocate for social reform while educating the entire population, even those who were uncultivated in the fields of art and science.

### **UTILIZING NATURAL CURIOSITIES**

In order to broaden his audience at The Philadelphia Museum Peale knew it was crucial to appeal to society's attraction with amusements. Therefore, he created a museum experience that provided entertainment while engaging patrons in the learning process. Since he was aware of the mysteries that were evoked by rare artifacts and natural curiosities, these items became the main staple in his exhibits and programs.

As exemplified through the Book of Nature, Peale believed there were many hidden lessons within the discovery of new specimens:

Furnishing the Idle and dissipated with a great and new source of amusement, ought to divert them from frivolous and pernicious Entertainments. It is fully demonstrated that viewing the wonderful structure of a great number of *beings best formed for their respective stations*, elevates the mind to an Admiration and adoration of the Great Author! (Charles Willson Peale to Thomas Jefferson, Philadelphia, June 6, 1802)

By referring to these unusual objects as “natural curiosities,” Peale confirmed his unfamiliarity with their form and function. Instead of disregarding the value of oddities, Peale decided to use their unique characteristics to incite interest through broadsides that touted the extraordinary nature of each item.

This was demonstrated by the outlandish manner in which he promoted the Mastodon exhibit by having Moses Williams ride through town on horseback wearing Native American apparel and handing out broadsides (Hindle, 2003, p. 122). On these advertisements he offered an exciting portrayal of the Mastodon by referencing a traditional Shawnee Indian tale, which described it as being, “huge as the frowning Precipice, cruel as the bloody Panther, swift as the descending Eagle, and terrible as the Angel of Night” (*Skeleton of the Mammoth Is Now To Be Seen*, printed by John Omrod, Philadelphia, 1790, American Philosophical Society).

Once the community took interest in these spectacles they were provoked to visit the Philadelphia Museum where they could gain a glimpse of the publicized oddities. After reading letters and journals documenting visitors’ experiences at this institution it is apparent that Peale’s conception of rational entertainment had an immense impact on patrons. Since they were barraged with natural curiosities upon entering the museum, visitors became consumed with the process of unveiling the meaning of these objects.

## **TEACHING THROUGH SELF DISCOVERY**

Associating pedagogy with self-discovery, Peale’s goal was to motivate patrons to learn through introspection. This process, which has been highly touted throughout history, was exemplified in the *Tabula of Cebes*. Presumably written during the first century, this text uses the presence of an orator to fully explain the religious symbolism depicted on a tablet located inside the Temple of Crones. The narrative is told from the perspective of a viewer who enters the temple, along with a group of friends, and then attempts to understand the spiritual significance of the imagery within the tablet (Elsner,

1997, p. 41). Even though the visitor is capable of describing these pictures, he is still unable to formulate an accurate interpretation of their true meaning.

Fortunately, an old man steps forward and offers to translate each image. Given the man's status as an elder, it is implied that he possesses wisdom that has been handed down from generation to generation. According to Elsner (1997), "As all mystic and religious interpretations must, the *Tabula* validates itself by appealing to a detailed hierarchy of authority and an oral tradition of secret exegesis" (p. 41). As the elder reveals the contents of the tablet, the viewer becomes adept at deciphering the visual symbols while being transformed by the experience. Since these visual metaphors explain the meaning of life, the viewer is essentially guided through a pilgrimage, which allows for self-discovery.

Similar to the elder in the *Tabula*, Peale saw himself as someone who possessed the power to reveal life's mysteries. This is evidenced by his own depiction in *The Artist in His Museum* in which he portrayed himself as a scholarly figure who was familiar with his acquisitions. As he appears in the foreground of the composition surrounding him is a mounted turkey hunched over next to a box of taxidermy tools, along with a jawbone and a larger skeletal piece. Each of these items is submerged in the shadows of the scene, which alludes to the mysteries they evoke. Even though being placed here suggests their attainability, they still remain shrouded in secrecy.

Like most of his works, Peale utilized the composition of this painting to depict the enigmas that were inherent in nature. By concealing items regarded as being natural curiosities, embodied his belief that the viewer had much more to learn about these

subjects. According to Charles Coleman Sellers (1980), “The educational theory it implements came straight from Jean Jacques Rousseau... [who believed] Teaching is a sublime ministry inseparable from human happiness, and the learner must be led always from familiar objects toward the unfamiliar – guided along a chain of flowers, as it were, into the mysteries of life” (p. 1). Due to every individual’s inherent curiosity Peale believed his museum patrons would be compelled to learn by revealing the mysteries that were inherent in his collection of unusual specimens.

### **CHARLES WILLSON PEALE’S PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES**

Since Peale had an immense collection of materials, to which he had devoted much time and care, he greatly valued each item’s ability to promote knowledge and sentiment. Within his museum Peale believed these acquisitions would stimulate patrons to formulate associations according to each object’s presentation. By observing every item’s physical characteristics, it would become easier to delineate the similarities and differences between them. In doing so, viewers would arrive at a conclusion that informed the classification and typology of specimens.

Through Peale’s exhibits of life forms according to Linnaeus’s system of categorizing animals, plants, and minerals; these comparisons became more apparent. Furthermore, displaying these specimens in vertical arrangements confirmed their relationship within the Great Chain of Being. Even though these exhibits were accompanied by a minimal amount of text, they exemplified the order and harmony that was apparent in nature.

Within Peale's installations of waxworks, he depended on the placement of each model in relation to the object they informed in order to convey meaning. By presenting scenes that depicted wax figures utilizing these artifacts, patrons were able to interpret the object's function through a storybook context. This format proved essential to the viewer's response since they were able to focus on a process-oriented depiction of the artifact while being provoked by the narrative elements. Furthermore, these scenes also provided information that alluded to the cultural significance of each object and the society that created it.

As Peale became aware of the visitor's incessant desire to form a connection with the items on display he decided to create numerous interactive exhibits that would enable individuals to gain valuable insight into the fields of science and technology. Similar to the physiogtrace, many of these inventions evoked viewer participation, thereby enabling them to learn through their own involvement in a procedure. While this form of engagement aided in the learning process, it also provided an outlet for rational entertainment in the community.

## **OBJECT-CENTERED LEARNING TODAY**

With the onset of material culture studies in the field of academia, more museums are now reinventing the way they integrate objects from their repositories into exhibits and programs. By utilizing various visual and conceptual components of tangible forms, museum educators are able to breathe new life into these acquisitions. While this goes against the standard practice of displaying items with an abundance of informative text,

object-centered learning provides an outlet for patrons to formulate their own observations.

Inherent within this approach to showcasing objects are significant opportunities for developing associations between visual signifiers and various fields of knowledge.

According to Lynn D. Dierking (2002),

Objects are not simply objects. That is, the nature of an object (especially, perhaps, in a museum) is not immediately self-evident. This is because the meaning of each object relies on its place in a semiotic system: a system of signs that each of us has more or less access to. Each object is thus like a text, the meaning of which we “read” or “construct” in our interactions with it. (2002, p. 30)

By observing collection materials in correlation to others, viewers are able to analyze broader concepts by comparing the physical attributes that make each item different. Through this mode of constructivism they can negotiate between various theories that cannot be judged according to the authoritative standards of what is correct or incorrect (Dierking, 2002, p. 21). Therefore, every viewer is motivated to formulate responses without the inhibitions of academic restraints.

In many of today’s museum programs educators are utilizing object-centered learning in a manner that engages patrons to handle acquisitions or observe staff members as they demonstrate an object’s use. Through these interactions individuals develop a better understanding of each item’s tactile qualities. According to Bernie Arigho (2008), when people examine movement, “a sixth sense that is too often left out of the equation” (p. 207), they are stimulated to remember more since they can re-enact an action or behavior from their own memory (p. 207). By encouraging museum visitors



to form personal bonds with familiar and unacquainted objects it is likely that they will learn through their own recognition. Furthermore, these individuals will develop lasting associations that can aid their understanding of diverse areas of research while promoting self-growth.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

While there are many routes that could be taken within this research, I am now more compelled by Peale's interpretation of material culture. Seeing that he was an artist, provoked by his own insular dialogue and beliefs, it is extraordinary that he was able to find a way to express himself in the outside world. I believe that his validation for creative thinking is what sparked him to create a venue where the public could engage in thoughtful discourse.

By establishing the Philadelphia Museum, Peale was able to promote his own initiatives while encouraging community members to take part in exhibits that featured their personal acquisitions. As referenced in his portraits, Peale began to formulate perspectives on other individuals through their associations with objects. Since society at this time was being transformed by technological shifts and a new sense of nationalism, the objects that defined them can now provide an effective portrait of American history.

With this in mind, I believe it is imperative to bring the public into the collection process through programs and exhibits that enable and promote individuals to donate objects and contribute to displays. Since there are many museums that still utilize these procedures, it would be interesting to complete case studies on the effectiveness of them. Not only should the benefits of collecting objects from community members be

evaluated, but also so should the objects themselves. By conducting a study on these practices, educators could learn what these objects say about our contemporary society in relation to that of Peale, and how museum patrons interpret these items.

## **REVIEW OF THE STUDY**

Through this research on Charles Willson Peale and his utilization of visual literacy, I investigated how his pedagogical practices were beneficial to the community. Not only was he adept at speaking to the general public through visual metaphors, but he also became proficient at using his own aesthetic approach to guide patrons through the learning process. After assessing Peale's biography and conducting a visual analysis of his portraits and collection materials, I began to detect common themes within his consistent use of allegorical forms. Through these observations Peale's ideologies began to emerge as defined by his use of symbolism.

Upon visiting the Museum of Comparative Zoology and the Peabody Museum, where most of Peale's original acquisitions are now archived, I was able to formulate a better interpretation of each object's form and function. The items I studied consisted of Peale's ornithology collection and artifacts that he received from the Lewis and Clark Expedition. By viewing the White-headed eagle (Illustration Ten) and other birds Peale mounted, it was easier to determine which preservation techniques he utilized and what attributes possibly defined these specimens as natural curiosities.

With regards to the ethnographic objects, I gained a more definitive apprehension of these items by watching one of the museum staff members handle each one. In doing so the assorted illustrations and physical characteristics that composed the artifacts

became more apparent. As these visual identifiers began to emerge, they evidenced the object's meaning. Many of the Native American garments consisted of pictorial narratives that were only noticeable once they were turned over or rearranged, so being able to maneuver them proved to be essential. This form of observation was also beneficial since I was able to discern the tactility and movement of each item.

In the end, I gained a more complete and full comprehension of each artifact and its cultural implementation. Since most of these items had spiritual significance, it was imperative to understand the images and materials that composed them. Once these elements were revealed, it was easier to discern their ceremonial use and meaning. Furthermore, examining the demonstrated use of the objects that served a utilitarian function informed my apprehension of their operation within a specific society.

After studying Peale's collection materials, along with the portraits *George Washington at Princeton*, *Mr. and Mrs. James Gittings and Granddaughter*, *The Exhumation of the Mastodon*, and *The Artist in His Museum*, I discovered many associations between Peale's overall presentations of allegorical forms in these works. Not only did he utilize similar aesthetic practices when displaying objects and composing paintings, but he was also consistent within his conceptual approach. Throughout Peale's various pursuits, it became common for him to use the same visual metaphors to represent his vast ideologies.

With these symbols he epitomized his societal views by depicting individuals along with the objects that personified them and the natural environments that composed their surroundings. These scenes also provided insight into his theories as a naturalist and

the research that informed his perspective as a scientist. Once Peale completed *The Artist in His Museum* he was able to further exemplify his various pursuits through the collection materials and art supplies he incorporated into the composition. Not only did this presentation define his interests, but it also confirmed his belief that objects had the power to engage viewers and operate as educational resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

By utilizing visual metaphors within portraits, Peale offered a depiction of each sitter that was pleasing to their disposition while representing his idealistic perspective. Likewise, in the Philadelphia Museum these same images and arrangements served didactic purposes and aided with storytelling activities. Through his own interest in the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the experiments being conducted by other scientists, Peale desired to make larger contributions within the canon of academia. Furthermore, he wanted to make this same information accessible to all members of society. After dedicating himself to a career as an artist, politician, and museum professional, he emerged with a deep regard for *the self*.

After conducting this research I now perceive that Peale's implementation of allegorical forms helped him attract more visitors into the Philadelphia Museum while guiding them through the learning process. By observing Peale's original collection materials, it becomes evident how the physical characteristics of each object defined their application. Since I viewed these acquisitions in a context similar to the manner in which Peale did two hundred years ago, I began to understand their allure. Studying them in person validated many of my original assumptions while giving me much more to

consider within my research. Seeing the benefits that were inherent in this experience confirmed my belief regarding the success of object-centered learning.

By incorporating symbolism into exhibits and programs, I believe that today's museums would benefit greatly. Not only were these practices beneficial to Peale, but they also helped him achieve his goals as a nation builder. Through his message Peale encouraged viewers to become more engaged in labor processes, educational initiatives, and the conservation of natural resources. In doing so, Peale believed every person would develop a stronger identity while contributing to their community, and thus representing a World in Miniature.



Illustration One: *White-Headed Eagle* (1811), by Alexander Willson and Alexander Lawson. Courtesy of Brown University Center for Digital Initiatives

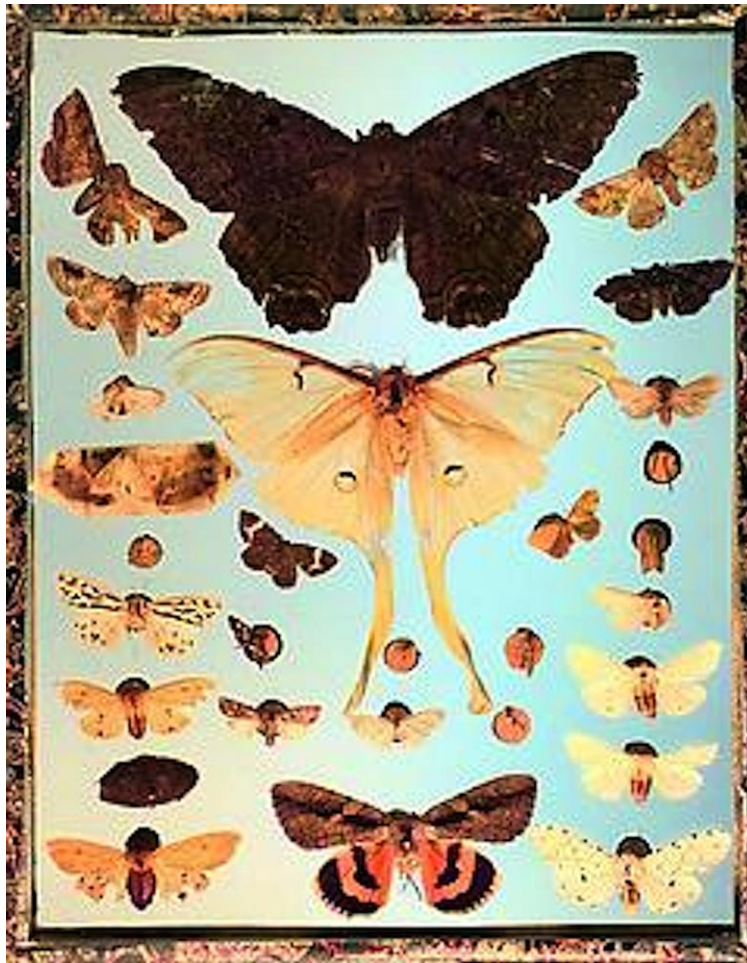


Illustration Two: Moth and Butterfly Mounts, arranged by Titian Ramsay II. Photo: J. D. Weintraub / Department of Entomology, Academy of Natural Sciences





Illustration Three: *George Washington at Princeton* (1779) by Charles Willson Peale. 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





Illustration Four: *Mr. and Mrs. James Gittings and Granddaughter* (1791) by Charles Willson Peale. Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society



Illustration Five: *The Exhumation of the Mastodon* (1806-8) by Charles Willson Peale.  
Courtesy of Maryland Historical Society



Illustration Six: *The Artist in His Museum* (1822) by Charles Willson Peale. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of Mrs. Sarah Harrison (The Joseph Harrison, Jr. Collection)





Illustration Seven: 1. *American Sparrow Hawk*; 2. *Field Sparrow*; 3. *Tree Sparrow*; 4. *Song Sparrow*; 5. *Chipping Sparrow*; 6. *Snow Bird* (1810) by Alexander Willson and Alexander Lawson.  
 Courtesy of Brown University Center for Digital Initiatives



Illustration Eight and Nine: Silhouettes captured by the physiognotrace.



Illustration Ten: Photograph of White-headed eagle belonging to Charles Willson Peale. Courtesy of Museum of Comparative Zoology and Harvard University

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