

Governor John Brooks



Object Title: Governor John Brooks

Date: 1820

Artist: Gilbert Stuart

Active: American, 1755 - 1828

Medium: Oil on wood panel

Dimensions: 32 x 25 5/8 in. (81.3 x 65.1 cm)

Credit Line: Gift of Mrs. Edward T. Harrison, in memory of her husband, Edward T. Harrison, 1965 (3370.1)

Object Number: 3370.1

Description:

Outfitted in uniform with a sword by his side, Governor John Brooks looks out at the viewer with confidence and command. Brooks achieved both military and political status, rising to the rank of colonel during the Revolutionary War and then serving as governor of Massachusetts. Despite his subject's static pose, Gilbert Stuart, the preeminent portraitist of federal America, animated the composition with lively brushwork and fresh, vibrant colors. He captured and enlivened surface textures, such as the gleaming gold buttons of Brooks' uniform and his rosy, wrinkled skin. Stuart's fluid handling of pigments and luminous color evolved from European stylistic conventions learned during the painter's training in England and study of eighteenth-century British portraiture.

Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755–1828)

Governor John Brooks, 1820

Oil on wood panel

Gift of Mrs. Edward T. Harrison, in memory of her husband, Edward T. Harrison, 1965 (3370.1)

The preeminent portraitist in Federal America, Gilbert Stuart immortalized Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. This portrait of Massachusetts Governor John Brooks shows the Revolutionary War hero in military regalia, gazing out at the viewer with confidence and assurance. Brooks sits with the rigid formality befitting a man of stature, even as his likeness is animated by Stuart's exuberant brushwork and vibrant colors. Indeed, Stuart has skillfully mastered the varying textures of Brooks's gold uniform buttons, luxurious white necktie, and ruddy complexion. His fluid handling of pigments evolved from the European stylistic conventions that he learned as a student in England, as well from the example of British portrait painters such as Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Portrait of Governor John Brooks (#3370.1) **GAL 10** United States
Gift of Mrs. Edward T. Harrison, c. 1820
given in memory of her husband Gallery 10
Oil on panel

ARTIST: Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828). Trained in Scotland and England. Famous for portraits of George and Martha Washington. Enjoyed great success as a painter during his lifetime.

SUBJECT: Governor John Brooks. A colonel in the Revolutionary War and a faithful supporter of George Washington. Later was a physician in Medford, Massachusetts and a governor of Massachusetts.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUE: Scorned preliminary drawing. Began by blocking in large masses with no detail, then applying color with round, blunt strokes. He avoided blending his paint into a uniform color. As painting proceeded, he added details, finishing with a few crisp accents.

STYLE: Stuart defines form and volume through the use of color and light. There are no lines in this painting. The volumes of the face, for example, are defined by subtle coloristic shading rather than any

linear edge. He contrasts broad flat areas of color like the blue coat with details like the ruffle at the neck and epaulets, where the thickness of the paint and brushstrokes create actual texture and suggest light effects.

Background kept simple to focus attention on sitter; classical column suggests antiquity and artist's roots in a classical portrait style.

INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS: Compare with the paintings of the Cookes by Jennys. Which is more detailed, which more life-like and naturalistic? How is the style of painting used to express personality?

GILBERT STUART

American, b. North Kingston, RI, 1755;
d. Boston, MA 1828

***Governor John Brooks*, 1820**

Oil on panel

Gift of Mrs. Edward T. Harrison, given in
memory of her husband, Edward T.
Harrison, 1965 (3370.1)

Gilbert Stuart, responsible for one of the most famous American portraits—George Washington's image on the one dollar bill—lived an extravagant life and had a prolific career. Extremely popular during his lifetime, Stuart was known for his mastery of characterization and fashionable style. Upon his death, several of his peers drafted a resolution naming him the father of American portraiture. The sitter for this portrait, John Brooks (1752-1825) had both successful medical and military careers before entering politics and subsequently being elected to seven consecutive terms as Governor of Massachusetts.