A PORTRAIT BUST OF WASHINGTON

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George Washington's likeness was reproduced more often than any other American's until recent times. In addition to the more formal portraits, those used as decorative details on textiles, woodwork, and ceramics made in Europe and the Orient, as well as obscure profiles on jewelry, buttons, and doorknobs, filled a far-spread demand. Six years before Washington became the first president, he wrote to Francis Hopkinson: "I am so hackneyed to the touches of the Painter's pencil, that I am now altogether at their beck, and sit like Patience on a monument, whilst they are delineating the lines of my face. . . . At first I was as impatient at the request, and as restive under the operation, as a colt is of the saddle. The next time I submitted very reluctantly, but with less flouncing: now no dray moves more readily to the Thill, than I do to the Painter's Chair."

A little-known contemporary portrait of Washington in marble recently came to the Museum as a bequest of Helen Hay Whitney. Unlisted in the standard works on the subject and seldom shown publicly, it is the earliest of the sculptured likenesses of Washington. The derivative portraits in various media, from sculpture to Wedgwood medallions, silver shoe buckles, and memorial embroideries, are classified by the names of the well-known artists to whom the General sat. This bust is indirectly the Charles Willson Peale type, after a painting which John Hancock ordered in 1776. Peale's diary mentions several sittings for the purpose that year, and a mezzotint engraving of the portrait, dated 1780, although unsigned, is believed to have been done by the same artist. On September first, 1778, LaFayette wrote to Washington: "I intend to have your picture. And Mr. Hancock has promised me a copy of that he has in Boston. He gave one to Count d'Estaing, and I never saw a man so glad at possessing his sweetheart's picture, as the Admiral was to receive yours."

Of the fourteen different portraits of Washington that Charles Willson Peale painted from life, this is the second and represents the soldier in the prime of life, before his face was changed by age and the loss of his teeth, or, even worse, by the bitterness and disillusionment caused by the malicious attacks of his political enemies. We are so accustomed to the later portraits of the venerable Pater Patriae by Gilbert Stuart and Rembrandt Peale that we might forget Washington was ever young—except for Parson Weems's legend of the cherry tree and the first paintings by the elder Peale.

It is obvious that Peale's Washington, painted for John Hancock, furnished the inspiration for another portrait done in Paris for LaFayette by the court painter Jean Baptiste LePaon. This canvas, completed in 1779, is now believed lost, but in an engraving of it by Noël LeMire, dated 1780, the details of Washington's face and the position of the left hand tucked into the waistcoat, as well as the harbor scene in the distance, are too similar to be accidental. Le Paon was born in Paris in 1738; he painted a series of battle pictures at Versailles and the Palais Bourbon in Paris and superintended the decoration of a palace for Catherine the Great. In addition to Washington, he painted LaFayette at the siege of Yorktown, and this painting was likewise engraved by LeMire.

It was to the French interpretation by Le Paon that the sculptor Louis Jacques Pilon turned in 1781 for a model of Washington. Although our marble bust is thus twice removed from Peale's original work, the face retains the contour and expression of the Hancock portrait. Pilon too was a Parisian, born in 1741, and a pupil of Jean Baptiste Lemoyne. At twenty-six he won the grand prize of the Royal

Academy with a bas-relief of Christ Driving the Money-Changers from the Temple. Several years later he went to Rome for further study, but his work there was not distinguished and his personal conduct scandalized his masters. Back in Paris, he was named curator of sculp-

The sculptor cut on the plinth of the bust the same Latin motto that appears on LeMire’s print: *Ne Quid Detrimenti capiat Res publica* (The State must harbor nothing detrimental), and inscribed on the right side: *F. L. J. Pilon, anc pensionaire du Roy 1781.*

This may be the same bust that was formerly owned by M. Sahunne-Lafayette and included...
Engraving of George Washington made by Noël LeMire in 1780 after a painting by Jean Baptiste LePaon. Bequest of Charles Allen Munn, 1924

in the exhibition of French Art of the Eighteenth Century in Brussels in 1904. It is uncertain when the bust was brought to this country or how it came into Mrs. Whitney’s possession; except for a brief entry in the catalogue of the Loan Exhibition of Portraits of Soldiers and Sailors in American Wars held at Duveen’s last November, it has not been published before. Because of the distance between the sculptor and his subject, described in the foregoing facts, this marble bust might aptly be called the Peale-LePaon-Pilon likeness of Washington.