The sculptors who attempted portraits of Washington during the great man’s lifetime are few indeed, and only two or three at best can be considered to have much importance as artists. In this small group are the classic Frenchman Houdon; the superbly talented Philadelphia wood-carver Rush; and poor Joseph Ceracchi. Houdon’s statue in Richmond, his bust of Washington, and the famous plaster life mask, along with Stuart’s numerous paintings, are so well known and have for so many years been generally accepted as Washington’s true likeness that the portraits by Rush and Ceracchi have been more than somewhat neglected.

Rush, who raised the ship carver’s craft to the highest degree in his portrait busts of the Philadelphia worthies of his time, until recently held a place too obscure for a man of his marked abilities. But he has by now (thanks to Henri Marceau) been carefully saved from the curious oblivion which clouds the memory of so many early American artists. A biography and catalogue of his work, the record of an exhibition held some years ago in the Philadelphia Museum of Art has restored the rightful fame of this sterling artisan and sculptor.

The Washington portraits by Houdon and Stuart have both been exhaustively studied. From every possible angle research has been done on them, even down to the bewildering complex of copies of copies of copies. On the other hand, Ceracchi seems fated to receive only the most perfunctory nods from history, and the trace of his portraits of Washington, modeled from life in Philadelphia in 1792, or thereabouts, is a tangled mass of conflicting fact and fancy.

Ceracchi’s life as we find it recorded is short, and his span of days is marked toward the end with increasing alarms and commotions, down to the dubious end in rebellious madness and violence. He was born in Rome in 1751, the son of a jeweler. He disappeared at Paris swallowed in ignominy and oblivion in 1802, a convicted assassin, but unsuccessful even in this his last desperate gesture. According to some his sentence of death by guillotine was changed, in view of his obvious madness, to permanent incarceration.

But whether his end closed down quick by hurtling blade or slow in battened cell, it is certain that from January 30, 1802, society was relieved of his presence by the courts of France as one condemned for planning to murder Napoleon.

Of all the artists who, passing, left their mark in the United States just as the new nation began, Ceracchi surely stands alone as the most eccentric. He burst upon the American scene about 1791, fresh from the rabid republican turbulence of Revolutionary Paris, filled with a volcanic enthusiasm for Liberty and the Rights of Man, his black eyes aglitter with a genius that was soon to curdle with accumulating disappointment into fixed obsession. Whether the early shadow of his mental agitation can be discerned by knowing psychiatrists in the works Ceracchi executed in Philadelphia
is problematical but there is about them all an almost indefinable effect that could suggest a disturbed psychological state. Most notable perhaps is a wide unevenness in quality between, for instance, his busts of Washington, Clinton, and Hamilton. Then too there is the curious handling of eyes and hair in all these busts, marked with deeply incised lines. Added to these things, one must take into account the hopeless and exotic errand which brought Ceracchi to the United States.

He had a wildly extravagant scheme for constructing here a monument consecrated to Liberty. This grandiloquent project, to be of statutory marble one hundred feet high and three hundred feet in circumference, was designed in four compartments, like acts in a play, each one peopled with classical gods and goddesses, some in colossal scale. Saturn, Clio, Apollo, Minerva, Mercury, and Neptune were envisioned; mingling with these was a whole emblematical cast of allegorical personages, Nature, Fame, Philosophy, and Government (piquantly represented as a voluptuous young woman being forcibly divested of her flimsy veil of Policy). Moreover there was to be a colossal goddess of Liberty descending in a chariot drawn by winged steeds. Scattered about were to be flambéaus, butterflies, stars, and rivers, with showers of other symbols all emerging from marmoreal clouds and rocky grottoes and eminences. In one compartment the Declaration of Independence was to be inscribed “on a massy column,” and arching over the whole construction was to be a marble rainbow. This fantastic affair conceived like a baroque theatrical “machine” or the petrified libretto of an opera buffa was to include somewhere, it is supposed, niches for portrait busts of the great heroes of the American Revolution.

One cannot refrain from quoting Madison’s apt remark that Ceracchi “was an enthusiastic worshiper of Liberty and Fame, and his whole soul was bent on securing the latter by rearing a monument to the former.” Others spoke of Ceracchi’s unstable, excitable temperament. His contentiousness is said to have caused the wreck of our first frail attempt at a school of art, organized by the painter Peale. If not, strictly speaking, insane at this point, Ceracchi beyond any doubt was quite an odd little man embarked upon a fool’s errand.

The Liberty monument—its cost was estimated at more than $30,000—found no friends in Congress when the proposal was presented, and in 1795, after trying to raise this large fund by private subscription (also without success), Ceracchi returned in disgust to Europe to become fatally entangled with Napoleonic political affairs.

When the scheme for the Liberty monument finally came to nothing Ceracchi had to sell as much of his work as he could in Philadelphia to pay his expenses. He even demanded payment from Jefferson and Hamilton, who had posed for him merely to encourage his project and were under no obligation whatever to purchase their portraits. He apparently sold two plaster casts of his bust of Washington in the colossal size. President Washington politely refused the gift of the life-size marble bust of himself (he was never fond of seeing himself decked out as a Roman emperor). Congress had no desire to buy it for the Government at $4,000, but at last, by reducing the price, a buyer was found who was willing to spend half that sum on it.

This was Señor Josef de Jaudenes y Nebot, Chargé d’Affairs from the Court of Spain to the United States. Señor de Jaudenes, a dandy and spendthrift, lived in great style in an elegant Philadelphia house with his charming young wife, Matilda Stoughton of Boston. Their sumptuous portraits by Stuart reveal them ornate and content in lace and red velvet. Jaudenes, ambitious to move to high diplomatic degree, rather fancied himself for promotion to minister, or better still, ambassador. He intended, when raised in rank, to present the marble bust of Washington to his political master, the infamous Godoy, known as the Prince of the Peace. A less diplomatic gesture one can hardly imagine in view of the contrast between Godoy’s vicious political place and that of the virtuous president. To this end the bust was shipped to Spain. Jaudenes, however, was soon disabused of his dream of importance when a new Spanish minister appeared on the scene, whereat there was nothing to do but withdraw
to his ancestral vineyards near Palma on the Isle of Mallorca. The Jaudenes family embarked on the good ship Governor Mifflin on July 24, 1796, from Philadelphia, never to return, leaving behind them a sizable debt.

With this turn of affairs the Washington bust remained in Cadiz still cased, and there it was finally bought from the widowed Matilda, then in financial distress, sometime between 1804 and 1816. The new owner was Richard W. Meade (father of the famous Civil War general). Richard Meade, a Philadelphia art collector, was then serving as United States naval agent at the port of Cadiz. He was a man of some wealth and taste who lived many years at Cadiz in Moorish luxury surrounded with paintings by the old masters and other works of art. His collection when he returned to Philadelphia was one of the most elaborate to be seen in this country in 1820.

In Spain Meade had many friends in high places, and almost alone he supported the tottering royal government during the savage Peninsular Wars, with many shipments of grain and hard cash. The king, Ferdinand VII, admitted his country owed Richard Meade a great debt, to the sum of over four hundred thousand dollars—a debt never paid. During this time of unrest Meade had many chances to buy rich furniture and paintings from impoverished families such as the Jaudenes. Two things, at least, from this unusual early American art collection are prized objects now in this Museum—the Washington bust, an important historical document, and an ornate French seventeenth-century ebony cabinet, one of the few of its kind and quality known. But we are getting ahead of our story.

On his return to this country in 1819 Meade put all his energies into legally pressing his claim on Spain, without any success, and at the time of his death in 1851; his wife placed some of his paintings and the Washington bust as loans at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, where they remained on display down to the time her estate was settled in 1852. The Meade collection was then sold and the pictures scattered. The Washington bust, and presumably some of the more important paintings, were then added to the private collection of Gouverneur Kemble, whose famous foundries and hospitable mansion were at Cold Spring, New York, across from West Point on the banks of the Hudson.

In his youth Kemble held an appointment as United States consul at Cadiz during the Monroe administration, and there he heard of Meade and his famous collection containing Ceracchi's original portrait of Washington. It may have been Kemble who suggested having the bust engraved in 1835 to appear in the life of Washington written by his good friend Paulding.

Soon after he purchased the Washington bust Kemble lent his new treasure for display in New York at the Washington Exhibition held in aid of the old New York Gallery of Fine Arts at the rooms of the American Art Union in 1853. Here Emanuel Leutze's gigantic chef d'oeuvre Washington Crossing the Delaware was the central attraction at its first public exhibition in America. In 1855 or thereabouts the Washington bust was engraved again as an illustration for the life of Washington written by Kemble's lifelong friend Washington Irving.

Towards the end of his life Kemble decided that the portrait bust of Washington was of such importance and interest that it should belong to the United States Government, and the year of his death in 1875 it was shipped to the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, there to be conveniently viewed by Congress prior to purchase. The sale, however, was never completed and the bust remained in the Corcoran Gallery presumably until about 1889, when, rather carelessly packed, it was shipped to the heirs of Gouverneur Kemble. The portrait arrived unsatisfactorily damaged; a chip had been cracked from the wing of one nostril.

In 1889 there was held in New York one of the first really large historical exhibitions of early American art in connection with the Centennial Celebration of the Inauguration of George Washington as First President of the United States. This elaborate affair was marked by national observation of the day, April 30. In New York much ceremony prevailed with a ball and a banquet, with prayer and parade and
Josef de Jaudenes y Nebot and his wife, Matilda Stoughton of Boston, painted in 1794 by Gilbert Stuart
many long speeches and toasts and pyrotechnical displays and general rejoicing. The special exhibition of family portraits and relics held in the Assembly Rooms of the Metropolitan Opera brought together a mass of early American historical treasures such as had never been seen. It is said that twenty thousand visitors came by special excursion rates from all over the country to study this array of patriotic memorabilia. There were portraits of almost every important man who figured in the original inauguration ceremony a hundred years before, and of course a paramount feature of this collection was a group of more than thirty Washington portraits. This was the first time that many of these had been shown to the public, and never before had so many been brought together at once. The Jaudenes-Meade-Kemble bust was among them. One of the energetic gentlemen composing the Art and Exhibition Committee was the lawyer John L. Cadwalader. He had known Kemble and had many times seen the Ceracchi bust at Cold Spring, and he knew of its interesting history. At the close of this historic exhibition, at the suggestion of Cadwalader, the Kemble heirs and executors deposited the Ceracchi bust in the new Metropolitan Museum of Art, where it has remained ever since. Through purchase Cadwalader later, in 1904, became the owner of the bust, though he left it at the Museum, and it became, with the rest of his art collection, the property of the Museum by his will in 1914.

There are two marble busts of Washington by Ceracchi: the one of which we have given the history, the Jaudenes-Meade-Kemble bust, named for its successive owners; and another, colossal in scale, called the Middleton bust, which belongs to the Carolina Art Association and is now in the Gibbes Art Gallery at Charleston.

A terracotta bust by Ceracchi, supposedly a portrait of Washington, is in the Museum at Nantes, France, but this accords so slightly with other portraits of Washington that it may well be the bust of some other person. Possibly it is the lost bust of Senator Cadault, in whose collection it was in the early years of the nineteenth century.

As we look at the Jaudenes-Meade-Kemble portrait it is easy to see why it has failed of much popular appreciation, important as it may be historically. The general public has always accepted the portraits by Houdon and Stuart as standards, in spite of the strong recommendations for veracity in likeness the Ceracchi bust received from those who knew both something of art and something of Washington himself. The portrait-painter Trumbull, for instance, consistently praised the work of Ceracchi. Dunlap, another American artist, says in his famous History, "I have seen the statue of Washington [by Houdon] in the capitol at Richmond, it is not so good a likeness as Ceracchi's bust in marble the size of life, or Stuart's original head of Washington." Jefferson, with many of his contemporaries, thought of Ceracchi as second in rank only to the great Canova.

When Trumbull exhibited Ceracchi's colossal plaster bust of Washington at the annual exhibitions of the American Academy of Fine Arts in New York so many complaints of its lack of likeness were heard that he felt obliged to insert the following amusing note in the Catalogue published in 1829:

Visitor—That a bust of Washington? impossible! it an't a bit like him!
Auditor—Pray, sir, did you ever see Washington?
Visitor—No, sir, I never saw him!
Auditor—Then how can you tell what like he looked?
Visitor—Oh! I know very well what like he looked; I was born only two years after he died, and besides, I have seen enough of pictures of him, to know what like he looked; I ought to know something about it!
Auditor—But how can you know that any of the pictures you have seen were truly like Washington?
Visitor—I don't know how, but they must be a resemblance of him, because they were printed; Yes, sir, printed in England, too!

You may hear this dialogue daily repeated, on the approach of visitors to this superfine bust. Such is the unhappy state of the public mind, with regard to a correct apprehension of Washington's person and his looks. The truth is, that a false idea of his likeness has been foisted upon the public sentiment, by an inundation of miserable trash, that has been palmed upon the world for Washington—so that it is now almost a hopeless task to rectify the public opinion on this subject. . . . There are, however, remaining to us, a few genuine originals, of good artists, by which those who wish it may be able to rectify their erroneous impressions; and this bust is one of them. We acknowledge the artist's want of judgement,
in disguising him in Roman costume, but the countenance is a genuine likeness, particularly the lower part of the face, and especially in the expression of the mouth.

Ceracchi, the author of this bust, was an artist of high talents, and the likenesses of John Jay, George Clinton, and General Hamilton, are sufficient pledges of the excellence of the likeness in this bust, to execute which he expressly crossed the Atlantic.

Ceracchi's idealization of Washington is in the now discredited Italian neoclassic style which was so powerfully appealing in the early nineteenth century, whereas Houdon's work is entirely French and realistic in character, a style which gained in popularity during the later years of the century. The French work, therefore, has the quality of a modern portrait and its slight idealization is romantic as opposed to Ceracchi's ponderous, outmoded classic idealization. This fact would seem to be the key to our reaction to the Ceracchi portrait—our first reaction on looking at it is "it doesn't look like Washington": what we really mean is "it doesn't look like Houdon's Washington." Houdon has all the advantage over Ceracchi because his portraits of early American heroes were the models for all the familiar monuments made by later American sculptors who studied in Paris.

In making a portrait from life a sculptor seldom works in the colossal or heroic scale, and the first study for such a work is usually the size of life. Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that, though Ceracchi did make a colossal portrait of Washington, the Jaudenes-Meade-Kem-
Giuseppe Ceracchi, miniature painted in 1792 by John Trumbull

ble bust in this Museum is the sole relic (a copy in stone) of the lost terracotta original for which Washington actually posed. Though the Jaudenes-Meade-Kemble bust appears to have many faults, it retains something more than a trace of likeness to the original. Its faults would seem on examination to be in large part the errors due to a clumsy stonecutter rather than to any lack of skill on the part of the modeler. Quite possibly Ceracchi’s original clay study may have been as good a likeness as his other American portraits—notably those of Jefferson, Clinton, and Hamilton.

The Washington bust looks as if the delicate matter of translating from clay to stone had been done by a bungler. Whether this job was done by Ceracchi himself in Philadelphia or by some provincial Pennsylvania stonecutter there, we do not know. The bust is inscribed at the back Ceracchi faciebat Philadelphia 1795. This might be taken as a clue that Ceracchi himself cut the stone, and he may have, like many Italian sculptors of his time, been an expert at modeling clay but not so adept at marble-carving. This task, in Italian studios, was usually turned over to trained artisans who did nothing but copy in stone.

In any case, the proportions of the face do not agree with the rest of the head. The head, neck, and shoulders do not fit comfortably together. The massive shoulders with their Imperial Roman armor and drapery might almost be a part of some other statue. The details of the features and hair are overworked in a style which characterizes the hand of the novice. The whole has an air of unease. Only the lower part of the face bears much resemblance to other portraits of Washington. The “best” view, as the printmakers found, is the proper left profile.

If these errors were not the fault of the stonecutter, there is another place in the process where a serious slip between clay and marble might have occurred that would account for some of its lack of proportion. When the clay original was hardened by baking it in a pottery kiln the heat may have expanded and warped the clay. Ceracchi, his mind occupied with political matters, may not have felt these defects were worth his correction since by then he must have known that the money for his great monument was not forthcoming—perhaps he lost interest. In 1793-1794 he made a brief trip to Europe, and at that time he may have taken his American portraits in clay to Italy (at least this move is inferred in a letter of Jefferson’s), where the Washington bust was copied in marble and brought back on his return to Philadelphia in 1795.

However, though damaged by careless, insensitive work, apparently done in haste, and further damaged later by chance in shipping, this neoclassic portrait cannot be summarily dismissed as completely without any saving resemblance to the lines of the face of Washington as seen by Ceracchi in 1792. As such it will always have a definite historical interest and value aside from the curious turns of its history.

A persistent legend is told of Ceracchi’s last days, so strange and characteristic of the man and his unhappy politico-plastic aberrations, which well may bring to a fitting close this account. It is said that when he was at last condemned he begged permission, which was granted, to ride through the streets of Paris to
the place of his execution garbed in flowing robes and crowned like a Roman emperor, in an antique chariot of his own design. Perhaps this triumphal car was like the one he wanted to carve on his great American monument. In any event, at the end of the ride he encountered Liberty.

The Ceracchi portraits of Washington that we have been able to trace, conveniently fall into three distinct types:

Type A—The Jaudenes-Meade-Kemble bust, life size, marble, in the Metropolitan Museum. Of this type two others are mentioned, both now lost, which were probably of the same design.

1. The original terracotta seen by Thomas Hubert at the statuary works of the Brothers Pisani in Florence in 1803.


Type B—Colossal size. Of this type four examples are mentioned:

1. The Middleton bust, marble, purchased in Rome in 1820 by John Izard Middleton of Middleton Place, South Carolina. This descended in his family until 1915 when it was bequeathed to the Carolina Art Association. (This marble copy might have been made in the studio of Canova, see below.)

2. The Peters-Appleton bust, plaster. This was bought in 1809 from the widow of Theodore Peters, a Bordeaux merchant, by Thomas Appleton, United States consul at Leghorn, Italy. In 1820 Appleton acted as agent for the state of North Carolina when it commissioned Canova to make a statue of Washington. Appleton lent his plaster bust by Ceracchi to Canova that he might copy the face, about 1820. It is now lost. The Canova statue was destroyed by fire in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1831.

3. The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts bust, plaster. This was seen by Lafayette in 1824. At the time he remarked "if it were not for the name it might as well be anybody else." This bust was destroyed, presumably by the fire of 1845 in the Academy. It is not mentioned in later catalogues.

4. The American Academy of Fine Arts bust, plaster. This was described by Trumbull and was listed in the annual catalogues of the institution from 1816 until about 1831. Now lost.

Type C—The Nantes Museum bust, terracotta. Though the inventory calls this bust colossal in size its height is given as approximately 28 inches. It bears almost no resemblance to any other portrait of Washington, including the other portraits of him by Ceracchi.