



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Rembrandt and Harriet Peale Collection, circa 1820-1932, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley

Funding for the processing and digitization of this collection
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Rembrandt and Harriet Peale collection
Date:	circa 1820-1932
Identifier:	AAA.pealremb
Creator:	Peale, Rembrandt, 1778-1860 Peale, Harriet Cany, ca. 1800-1869
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection of papers measures 0.2 linear feet, dates from circa 1820-1932, and provides scattered documentation of the lives of painter Rembrandt Peale and his wife Harriet. There are seven letters from Peale which discuss his <i>Patriae Pater</i> portrait of George Washington and his subsequent attempts to gain a commission from Congress for his equestrian portrait of the first president, as well as illuminating his opinion on patronage for the arts. The collection also contains a copy of Peale's lecture on "Washington and his Portraits," a page with drawings of Roman coins by Peale, two codicils to Harriet Peale's will, printed material including a pamphlet for Peale's <i>The Court of Death</i> and a catalog of sale for Harriet Peale's estate, and photographs of Rembrandt and Harriet Peale.

Administrative Information

Provenance

In 1960, Lawrence A. Fleischman donated one letter. Six items were donated by Charles E. Feinberg in 1962. An additional 35 items were transferred from the National Collection of Fine Arts Library to the Archives in 1979.

Related Material

Also found in the Archives of American Art are the following collections relating to Rembrandt Peale: the Albert Duveen collection of artists' letters and ephemera, 1808-1910, includes an 1855 September 8 letter from Rembrandt Peale to an unidentified person, available on 35 mm microfilm reel D9 (frames 848-850); Printed material relating to Rembrandt Peale, 1830-1862, lent for microfilming by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1855, is available on microfilm reel P29; and the Charles Henry Hart autograph collection, 1731-1912, contains a lithograph by Peale available on 35mm microfilm reel D5 (frame 103).

Alternative Forms Available

The papers of **Rembrandt and Harriet Peale** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2008 and total 183 images.

Processing Information

Portions of the collection were microfilmed on receipt on reels 3470, 3646, and D9. All accessions were integrated and fully processed by Stephanie Ashley in 2008 and digitized in 2008 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Rembrandt and Harriet Peale collection, circa 1820-1932. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via AAA's website.

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Biographical Note

Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860) was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and was the second son of painter Charles Willson Peale. He was known primarily for his historical paintings and portraits, particularly those of George Washington. Peale painted his first Washington portrait in 1795 at the age of 17, in a sitting arranged by his father. From 1795-1800 he traveled in Maryland and the South painting portraits, and from 1801-1803 studied with Benjamin West in London.

Peale returned to Europe from 1808 to 1810, and spent most of his time in Paris where he was inspired to take up historical painting. From 1813-1822 he lived in Baltimore where, in 1814, he established a museum for paintings and natural history that later became known as the Peale Museum. Peale's most famous allegorical painting, *Court of Death*, was completed in 1820 and was one of the most popular paintings of the decade.

In 1822 Peale moved to New York City where he embarked on an attempt to paint what he hoped would become the "Standard likeness" of Washington. In the process he reviewed portraits by other artists including John Trumbull, Gilbert Stuart and his father, as well as his own 1795 picture which had never truly satisfied him. His resulting *Patriae Pater*, completed in 1824, depicts Washington through an oval window, and is considered by many to be second only to Gilbert Stuart's iconic *Athenaeum* painting of the first president. Peale subsequently attempted to capitalise on the success of what quickly became known as his "Porthole" picture, collecting testimonials praising the portrait from people who had known the president, and lobbying Congress, in vain, for a commission to paint an equestrian portrait of Washington. Despite his failure to gain such a commission, "Patriae Pater" was purchased by Congress in 1832 and still hangs in the U.S. Capitol.

Peale subsequently produced over 70 replicas of the "porthole" picture and in the late 1850s delivered a series of lecture entitled "Washington and his Portraits" along the East coast. He was also an accomplished writer and lecturer on natural history, and was among the founders of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, a president of the American Academy, and a founder of the National Academy.

Scope and Content Note

This collection of papers measures 0.2 linear feet, dates from circa 1820-1932, and provides scattered documentation of the lives of painter Rembrandt Peale and his wife Harriet. The papers contain seven

letters from Peale to various individuals, including Massachusetts senator Elijah Hunt Mills, that document his attempts to seek recognition and recompense from Congress for his portraits of George Washington and illuminate his opinions on patronage of the arts. Also found here is a copy of Peale's lecture on "Washington and his Portraits," and legal papers consisting of two codicils to Harriet Peale's will which list the disposition of Rembrandt Peale paintings in her possession. There is a page with drawings of Roman coins by Peale, printed material including a pamphlet for Peale's popular allegorical painting *The Court of Death*, and a catalog of sale for Harriet Peale's estate. Photographs picture Rembrandt and Harriet Peale respectively, circa 1850.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as one series.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Art -- Economic aspects
- Coins, Roman
- Painters -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia
- Painting, Modern -- 19th century
- Portrait painting, American

Types of Materials:

- Drawings
- Photographs

Names:

- Peale, Rembrandt, 1778-1860 (Court of death)
- Washington, George, 1732-1799

Occupations:

- Portrait painters -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia

Container Listing

Series 1: Rembrandt and Harriet Peale Papers, circa 1820-1932

Scope and Contents: Letters from Rembrandt Peale discuss his *Patriae Pater* portrait and the equestrian portrait of Washington that he hoped would be commissioned by Congress following the acclaim that *Patriae Pater* received.

A typescript for Peale's address on "Washington and his Portraits" that was read before the New York Historical Society on June 16, 1857 is accompanied by a typescript of the address copied by George Tatham. Several handwritten pages and apparent additions or changes to the address are not included in the typescript.

Calling cards are for Harriet Peale and Miss L. C. Herring. Miss Herring's card is found with a 1932 receipt from Miss Louise C. Herring to Richard M. Fielding marked "sold" for a portrait of George Washington attributed to Rembrandt Peale, one "pencil scale" of Washington by Rembrandt Peale, and one self portrait by him. There is also a copy of a receipt for an 1863 money loan to Harriet Peale.

A manuscript, handwritten by Peale, with transcription, entitled "Portrait of Washington," repeats some of the sentiments Peale expressed in an 1825 letter to Elijah Hunt Mills, including his belief in the importance of supporting the fine arts, especially painting, which he believes "is capable of exciting the sentiments of Patriotism in a degree only secondary to Eloquence." Another handwritten manuscript appears to be an introduction to drawings "in this Book" by pupils in a Philadelphia high school.

Legal papers include two codicils to Harriet Peale's will which list the disposition of Rembrandt Peale paintings in her possession. Printed material includes a catalog of sale for Harriet Peale's estate listing the Rembrandt Peale paintings held by her at the time of her death. An additional catalog of sale is for the property of a household in Philadelphia whose owner is not identified.

Additional printed material includes a pamphlet about Peale's painting *The Court of Death*, as well as news clippings relating to Peale, his paintings, the Peale family and portraits of George Washington.

Artwork consists of ink drawings by Peale of Roman coins on a page affixed to two prints glued side by side on the verso of the drawings.

Photographs consist of photo cards containing two prints of the same negative from M. B. Brady's studio of a portrait of Rembrandt Peale and one photograph on a photo card of Harriet Peale.

Box 1 Letters from Rembrandt Peale

Box 1, Folder 1

[Letter to General Mercer, 1824, March 31](#)
(transcribed)

Notes: Peale mentions gathering testimonials on the the merits of *Patriae Pater* and discusses the resolution in Congress relating to his hoped for commission; appeals to Mercer to be in favor of an act extending copyright to paintings and drawings.

Box 1, Folder 2

[Letters to Elijah Hunt Mills, 1825](#)
(2 letters, transcribed)

Notes: The first letter to the Massachusetts senator, dated 1825, January 13, describes the equestrian portrait in detail and expresses Peale's hope that Mills will be able to advocate for the purchase of the painting in Congress; Peale speaks to the issue of national patronage of the arts and expresses the belief that it would enable native artists to "demonstrate their ability....in adding splendour to our National glory." The second letter, dated 1825, January 29, repeats his request for Mills's support.

Box 1, Folder 3	Letter to General Mercer, 1828, September 24 Notes: Mentions the possibility of selling the "Equestrian Washington to the corporation here" (in Baltimore) and refers to his preparation for a trip to Italy.
Box 1, Folder 4	Letter to Philip Hone, 1831, January 24 (transcribed) Notes: Offers Hone first choice of his "Italian copies."
Box 1, Folder 5	Letter to Lemuel G. Olmstead, 1856, March 24 Notes: Peale responds to a request for information on a portrait of Joel Barlow painted by his father, Charles Willson Peale.
Box 1, Folder 6	Letter to S. Whittemon, 1859, May 6 Notes: Routine acknowledgement of a letter.
Box 1, Folder 7	Address on "Washington and His Portraits," circa 1857 (pages 16 and 17 are scanned twice as they appear out of numerical sequence in the original document)
Box 1, Folder 8	Calling Cards and Receipts, circa 1863-1932
Box 1, Folder 9	Manuscript, "Portrait of Washington," circa 1820s
Box 1, Folder 10	Manuscript, "Drawings by Pupils in the High School, Philadelphia," 1844
Box 1, Folder 11	Legal Papers, 1868-1869
Box 1	Printed Material
Box 1, Folder 12	Catalog of Sale for Harriet Peale's Estate, 1870
Box 1, Folder 13	Catalog of Sale of Household Property, Owner Unidentified, 1832
Box 1, Folder 14	Pamphlet for The Court of Death, circa 1820
Box 1, Folder 15	News Clippings, circa 1860-circa 1929
Box 1, Folder 16	Artwork, Page with Drawings of Roman Coins, circa 1826

Box 1, Folder 17

[Photographs of Rembrandt and Harriet Peale, circa 1850s](#)

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