

# Basic Detail Report



**Title: Sir Richard Arkwright**

# Basic Detail Report

Date: 1790

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@2815c

Medium: Oil on canvas

Description: Born in Lancashire, Richard Arkwright (1732-1792) began his career as a barber and wigmaker. He later amassed a huge fortune in textile manufacturing he developed cotton-spinning machines for which he held several patents, built a number of mills, developed markets, and revolutionized the factory system.

Arkwright presented an address on the king's escape from assassination at the hand of Margaret Nicholson and was knighted in 1786. He died one of the wealthiest commoners in the kingdom. (1) In 1789 or 1790 Arkwright commissioned Brown to paint his portrait. In June 1790 the New Britain and two other portraits were transported from Brown's Cavendish Square studio to Arkwright's new London residence, the Adelphi, at Adam Street. (2) Brown depicted Arkwright in an upholstered red armchair framed by a swag of matching red drapery. He wears a deep green coat over a white brass-buttoned waistcoat and black breeches. He holds a parchment scroll, which may be the address he delivered to King George III when he was knighted; alternately, it could be a copy of his patent for cotton-spinning machinery or the plan of a newly acquired estate. (3) The portrait of Arkwright marks a significant change in Brown's style. His early rough and freely brushed paint application was very similar to that of Gilbert Stuart. Around the time he portrayed Arkwright, Brown developed a more highly refined painting technique, which was based on a smoother paint surface and more sophisticated modeling.

This new stylistic phase may have been prompted by the highly realistic manner of Joseph Wright of Derby's newly completed portrait of Arkwright (1789-90; National Portrait Gallery, London). (4) MAS BIBLIOGRAPHY: Frederick W. Coburn, "Mather Brown," *Art in America* 11 (August 1923): 252-60; Dorinda Evans, "Benjamin West and His American Students", exhib. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 1980), pp. 74-83, 93-102; Dorinda Evans, "Mather Brown: Early American Artist in England" (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1982). Notes: 1 . On Arkwright, see R. S. Fitton, "The Arkwrights: Spinners of Fortune" (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989). 2. Fitton, "Arkwrights", p. 200. Around this time Arkwright also purchased from Brown a large likeness of George III, and a painting depicting the death of Cato (p. 201); these two works (whereabouts unknown) are recorded in Evans, "Mather Brown", nos. 67, 244. 3. Helen Comstock, "The Connoisseur in America," *Connoisseur* 141 (May 1958): 198; Fitton, *Arkwrights*, p. 203. 4. Evans, "Mather Brown", pp. 92, 147.

Dimensions: 50 3/8 x 40 3/8 in. (128 x 102.6 cm) Sheet Dimension: 50 3/8 x 40 3/8 in. Frame Dimension: 61 x 50 in. (154.9 x 127 cm)