

Basic Detail Report



Title: Lydia Lynde

Date: ca. 1762-64

Primary Maker: com.gallerysystems.emuseum.core.entities.RecordXPerson@3e100

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Medium: Oil on canvas mounted on Masonite

Description: Copley's utterly stylish likenesses of females of the early 1760s, such as Lydia Lynde, secured his position as New England's preeminent portraitist. With Joseph Blackburn gone perhaps driven out of Boston by Copley's extraordinary skills and into a provincial itinerancy before departing the American colonies altogether in 1763 Copley had exclusive control of the Boston market for smart portraiture. Colonists flocked to his studio, wishing to be portrayed as English ladies and gentlemen; Copley knew just how to convey visual identity through an array of props, including furniture, flowers, fruits, pets, drapery, and clothing. He arranged compositional elements to suit each sitter, acknowledging that his anglophile clients required individualized images painted in the tradition of British portraiture. Ironically, American colonists and Copley looked to Blackburn for look of British portraiture. "Lydia Lynde", painted at least four years after Blackburn had left Boston, includes a few nods to the very painter Copley had outdone: the Blackburn-like accentuation of fabric embellishments, pearl-entwined coiffure, and painted oval spandrel. Copley could only guess at the style of contemporary British portraiture but succeeded brilliantly in confecting a rather idiosyncratic mode of British-style portraiture that seems to have pleased his sitters immensely. Lydia Lynde was one of several New England ladies painted in the same fashion, in nearly the same dress, coiffure, and attitude. "Eliabeth Gorham Rogers" (1762; private collection), among the first in this group, was an image of such Rococo flamboyance that it may have inspired the set of portraits that followed. Copley often used the same dress for different women. In part, this practice was the result of the artist's use of mezzotints; sitters may have picked the attitudes and costumes that would adorn them in their portraits from the portfolio of prints that Copley kept in his studio. Sitters also may have admired other portraits in progress in the studio and expressed an interest in the same for themselves. Of the group of quarter-length portraits produced on the heels of that of Mrs. Rogers, Lydia Lynde's may be the earliest, preceding those of Anstice Greenleaf Davis (Brooklyn Museum of Art), Elizabeth Gray Otis (private collection), and Elizabeth Deering Wentworth (High Museum, Atlanta), all dated circa 1764. The portraits share an emphasis on diaphanous drapery and seemingly superfluous transparent scarves. With the exception of Mrs. Otis, the women wear pearls in their hair and lace ruff chokers tied high with a wide ribbon at the nape of the neck. Lydia Lynde's lace-trimmed under dress is similar to that worn by her counterparts; she and Mrs. Otis are the only two with the distinctively decorative and probably fanciful scalloped sleeves. The circumstances of Lydia Lynde's visit to Copley for her portrait are unknown. Based on the work's similarity to other portraits of maidens and young married women, it seems plausible that she was one of many women who sat for Copley because it was a socially advantageous thing to do. Even by the early 1760s Copley's studio was a place to see and be seen in, and a sitting with the artist produced a likeness that embellished the subject in the eyes of her friends and family. The second daughter of the Honorable Benjamin Lynde of Salem and Mary

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Bowles of Roxbury, Lydia was born in Salem or Boston in 1741 and married Reverend William Walter, minister of Trinity Church, Boston, in 1766. With their six children, Lydia and her Loyalist husband fled to Shelburne, Nova Scotia, in 1777 and returned to Boston in 1792. Copley painted no other member of the Lynde or Walter family, which may confirm speculation that Lydia's sitting for Copley was a special occasion in itself, a commission to mark the coming of age of a lovely young woman. Copley was otherwise acquainted with the family; his 1771 legal battle over his Beacon Hill property came before the superior court in which Benjamin Lynde presided. In early 1775 Reverend Walter christened Copley's infant son, Clarke, who never lived to meet his father in London. CRB Bibliography: Guernsey Jones, ed., "Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham 1739-1776" (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914); Barbara Neville Parker and Anne Bolling Wheeler, "John Singleton Copley: American Portraits in Oil, Pastel, and Miniature" (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1914); Jules David Prown, "John Singleton Copley", 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966; Emily Ballew Neff and William L. Pressly, "John Singleton Copley in England", exhib. cat. (London: Merrell Holbertson for The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1995); Carrie Rebora and Paul Staiti, "John Singleton Copley in America", exhib. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1995). Copley's utterly stylish likenesses of females of the early 1760s, such as Lydia Lynde, secured his position as New England's preeminent portraitist. With Joseph Blackburn gone perhaps driven out of Boston by Copley's extraordinary skills and into a provincial itinerancy before departing the American colonies altogether in 1763 Copley had exclusive control of the Boston market for smart portraiture. Colonists flocked to his studio, wishing to be portrayed as English ladies and gentlemen; Copley knew just how to convey visual identity through an array of props, including furniture, flowers, fruits, pets, drapery, and clothing. He arranged compositional elements to suit each sitter, acknowledging that his anglophile clients required individualized images painted in the tradition of British portraiture. Ironically, American colonists and Copley looked to Blackburn for look of British portraiture. "Lydia Lynde", painted at least four years after Blackburn had left Boston, includes a few nods to the very painter Copley had outdone: the Blackburn-like accentuation of fabric embellishments, pearl-entwined coiffure, and painted oval spandrel. Copley could only guess at the style of contemporary British portraiture but succeeded brilliantly in confecting a rather idiosyncratic mode of British-style portraiture that seems to have pleased his sitters immensely. Lydia Lynde was one of several New England ladies painted in the same fashion, in nearly the same dress, coiffure, and attitude. "Eliabeth Gorham Rogers" (1762; private collection), among the first in this group, was an image of such Rococo flamboyance that it may have inspired the set of portraits that followed. Copley often used the same dress for different women. In part, this practice was the result of the artist's use of mezzotints; sitters may have picked the attitudes and costumes that would adorn them in their portraits from the portfolio of prints that Copley kept in his studio.

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Dimensions: 30 x 25 in. (76.2 x 63.5 cm) Sheet Dimension: 30 x 25 1/4 (masonite)
Frame Dimension: 35 1/2 x 31 in. (90.2 x 78.7 cm)