

# THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF AMERICAN ART

HORATIO GREENOUGH'S *GEORGE WASHINGTON* AND THE ERA OF THE COMMON MAN

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, public works of sculpture, almost always depicting American military or political heroes, pervade the country's parks and open city spaces. Yet there was once a time in America when neither native sculptors nor public works could be found. Until Horatio Greenough's (1805-1852) unprecedented advances in the realm of sculpture at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the profession of the American fine arts sculptor did not exist.

In the year 1832, the American government awarded Greenough the first federal commission ever given to a native sculptor. Working out of a small, abandoned church in the hills just outside the city of Florence, Italy, Greenough completed his magnum opus in 1840. As a federal commission, this statue was to be an integral piece in the patriotic decoration of Washington D.C., the fast-growing American capital city (Fig. 1). As a symbol of commemoration and patriotism, Greenough's *Washington* was to sit beneath the rotunda of the Capitol building. Including all of the expenses incurred in transporting the sculpture to the Capitol, the commission cost the government just over \$71,000, an exorbitant amount of money for the time.<sup>1</sup> However, the sculpture's current location, hidden within the walls of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington D.C., where it resides awkwardly next to an escalator and unrelated museum exhibits, attests to the poor reception it received when it was installed beneath the rotunda in 1841, as well as its lengthy history of denigration by the American public. At the time of its installation in the Capitol and throughout the years that followed, the American public rejected the sculpture and unceasingly disparaged its classical representation of George Washington. Greenough's public sculpture was openly and widely considered a failure.

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Larkin, *Art and Life in America* (New York: Holt Rhinehart and Winston, 1964), 172.

Greenough worked on the federal commission for eight years between 1832 and 1840. He carved the statue out of a piece of Carrara white marble that reached ten and a half feet tall, six and a half feet wide, eight and a half feet in depth, and weighed twenty tons.<sup>2</sup> The sculptor idealized Washington's wrinkle-free face, basing the representation on his life-mask. Greenough chose to depict Washington enthroned and draped in a classical toga. Washington's partially nude torso reveals carefully articulated musculature throughout the neck, chest, and abdomen. Washington's well-defined body conveys supreme physical strength and anatomical precision. The figure's straightforward gaze is set with a stern look articulated by its creased eyebrows and tightened mouth. Stylized hair covers Washington's head and flows backwards and over his ears, where it abruptly ends above his neck. The left arm holds a Roman sword with its hilt facing outwards, while his right arm juts out from his side, bent at almost a right angle, as he points his index finger directly upwards. Covering the figure from the waist down, the toga billows over the character's legs to its ankles, with naturalistic, carefully rendered drapery folds. The figure's sandal-clad feet rest naturalistically on the floor: the right foot remains close to the throne, while the left foot extends further outwards. The ornate throne on which the figure sits depicts two classical reliefs on each side. The back of the throne only reaches up to the Washington's lower back, causing the figure to seem oversized in comparison to the throne. Two small, sculpted figures, standing naturalistically in the contrapposto, support each side of the back of the throne. Overall, the formal qualities of Greenough's statue reflect a sense of classical monumentality.

During the eight years Greenough labored on his *George Washington*, political and social developments in Jacksonian America drove changes in the visual arts that would ultimately end the American artistic preference for the European neoclassical style and result in the unfavorable

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<sup>2</sup> Larkin, 182.

reception of Greenough's sculpture. The election of Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) as American president in 1828 marked the rise of the populist Democratic Party and the lasting legacy of an American Two Party System. Jackson won the 1828 election in a landslide by championing the common man and rallying the masses against American elites.<sup>3</sup> While Jackson rallied the common man, the young nation's commercial industries boomed, immigrants entered the nation at an unprecedented pace, and the American middle class consolidated into a large, important American demographic.<sup>4</sup> With massive amounts of land and resources yet to be exploited, the young, democratic nation was on the verge of becoming a world powerhouse, and with the election of a populist democratic leader, egalitarian ferment proliferated in the young country. Jackson's presidency began a new American era. The days of the European-modeled Early Republican era (1789-1828), during which time the American upper class dominated the government and hoped to maintain a hierarchically organized American republic, were over. With Jackson, a new era began that was characterized by unprecedented feelings of populism and egalitarianism. It would be later known as the Age of the Common Man.<sup>5</sup>

The populist, egalitarian fervor associated with the Jacksonian era reached its height of power between the years 1828 and 1845, despite Jackson finishing his second presidential term in 1837, and heavily influenced American tastes in the visual arts.<sup>6</sup> The American masses that supported him, known as Jacksonian populists, were neither elitist nor very well educated due to the costs associated with higher education at the time that working class Americans could not

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 298.

<sup>4</sup> Larkin, 148.

<sup>5</sup> Erika Schneider, *The Representation of the Struggling Artist in America, 1800-1865* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 76.

<sup>6</sup> Schneider, 76.

afford.<sup>7</sup> Importantly, this populist demographic, empowered politically by Andrew Jackson's presidency as well as financially by America's booming trade industries and flourishing economy, inspired great change in American artistic preferences. While Greenough worked on his neoclassical sculpture in Florence, the American art scene transitioned rapidly, from one that relied on an adopted European classicist vocabulary to one that favored accessible images produced with a vernacular visual vocabulary. In Jacksonian America, European forms that had once been the preference of American elites lost favor due to their inaccessibility to the American public and reliance on a non-American style. Jacksonian populists ridiculed neoclassical works, like Greenough's *George Washington*, for their nudity, Europeanness, and unrelatability.

Instead, Jacksonian populists championed images that celebrated the life of the common American in a relatable manner. William Sidney Mount (1807-1868), Asher Brown Durand (1796-1886), and other American artists capitalized on this demand by creating genre images that glorified the common man and landscape scenes that celebrated the American frontier.<sup>8</sup> This glorification of the common man expressed in numerous paintings by Mount, including his popular 1845 painting, *The Dance of the Haymakers*, glorifies an otherwise mundane scene in a realistic manner (Fig. 2). Similarly, Durand was a member of the Hudson River School, a prominent mid-nineteenth century group of American landscape painters. Durand's 1837 landscape painting, *View near Rutland, Vermont – The Berry Pickers*, exemplifies the simplicity, beauty, and accessibility that appealed to the Jacksonian masses (Fig. 3). Populist Americans initiated the democratization of American art through the promotion of accessible works that

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<sup>7</sup> William Oedel & Todd Gernes, "The Painter's Triumph: William Sidney Mount and the Formation of a Middle-Class Art," *Winterthur Portfolio* Vol. 23, No. 2/3 (1988), 111.

<sup>8</sup> Schneider, 76.

could be enjoyed by all Americans. Catering to the Jacksonian emphasis on egalitarianism, these artistic movements established a distinctly American visual vocabulary defined by populism.

Considering that Greenough's *Washington* represents the first federal commission granted to an American sculptor, art historical literature on this sculpture is surprisingly limited. The leading scholar on Greenough and his life remains Nathalia Wright (1913-2004), who published an extensive biography on Greenough, as well as a series of his letters and essays. In her book *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, Wright devotes an entire chapter to *Washington* sculpture, analyzing its reception in Europe and the United States, but does not acknowledge the greater cultural and societal shifts in Jacksonian America that conditioned the American response to the neoclassical sculpture. Furthermore, although important sources for nineteenth-century American art, public sculpture in Washington D.C., and analyses on George Washington iconography regularly reference Greenough's *Washington*, historians rarely attempt to explain why Greenough's sculpture was rejected so vehemently in Jacksonian America. Unfortunately, scholars and writers glance over Greenough's *Washington* with ridicule, explaining that its failure with the public rested solely on Greenough's choice to portray Washington bare-chested. No scholarly work has singularly devoted itself to Greenough's *Washington* or analyzed its reception through the lens of the times in which it was produced. Truly, through an analysis of the shift in artistic tastes that occurred rapidly in Jacksonian America, one can more fully understand why it was received so poorly in the United States and hopefully reconsider the sculpture's significance. Based on all scholarly work that has covered Greenough's *Washington* until this point, this present analysis will be the most extensive analysis of the sculpture and its place within the greater Jacksonian American cultural movement to-date.



This examination will demonstrate that Horatio Greenough's *Washington* failed to inspire universal patriotism amongst a Jacksonian era American audience because Greenough's neoclassical approach had quickly lost favor amongst Jacksonian populists during the Age of the Common Man. This analysis will explore how artistic developments in the United States manifested themselves in the poor reception of Greenough's *George Washington* by the American public. Through understanding the nature of the Jacksonian society that critiqued Greenough's *Washington* in the 1830s and 1840s, the reasons for the sculpture's unfortunate reception become clear: Greenough's neoclassical *Washington* clashed with the egalitarian, populist ferment that characterized the Jacksonian era and the artistic preferences of Jacksonian populists. In only a few decades, the Jeffersonian American emphasis on classically derived European styles gave way to accessible Jacksonian images that idealized the common man and American landscapes. Between the time that Greenough received his commission and the time he sent it to Washington D.C., American art preferences and opinions in the United States changed, and this change determined the poor reception and failure of Horatio Greenough's *Washington*.

## THE ARTIST AND SCULPTURE

In many ways, Greenough's early life prepared him for the classically influenced *George Washington* that he completed for the American government. Born in Boston in 1805, Greenough demonstrated a strong interest in sculptural creation from a young age.<sup>9</sup> During his youth, Greenough attended a nearby private school, where he learned Greek and Latin.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, Boston was a thriving mercantile city during this time with a strong British influence that promoted an interest in classicism, as evidenced by the founding of its famous Athenaeum in 1807.<sup>11</sup> Greenough explored the Athenaeum as a boy, studying its casts of ancient sculptures. In 1821, Greenough enrolled at Harvard, where the most important works studied at the school included passages by Latin writers from the imperial Roman Augustan age.<sup>12</sup> Greenough became a particularly well-versed classical scholar at Harvard through reading classical literature and studying its artifacts. He also learned how to read French and Italian, and came to speak the latter fluently as he prepared for the sculptural profession he planned.

Greenough's library records while at Harvard confirm that he withdrew works on anatomies, descriptions of Greece and Italy, lives of artists, and artistic treatises by Leonardo da Vinci, Leonbattista Alberti, and Johann Joachim Winckelmann.<sup>13</sup> While there, Greenough crafted his first sculptural rendition of George Washington, likely based on a copy of Gilbert Stuart's (1755-1828) *Athenaeum Portrait*, which was originally painted in 1796 after Washington sat for the portrait and widely understood as the finest representation of the

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<sup>9</sup> Nathalia Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 23

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

American icon (Fig 4).<sup>14</sup> Also during this time, Greenough met Washington Allston (1779-1843), a famous painter and poet, who proved to be one of the most important influences and relationships of his life.<sup>15</sup> As Greenough approached the end of his senior year at Harvard, he already had plans to move to Italy as soon as possible.<sup>16</sup> In either April or May of 1825, Greenough sailed on a vessel bound for Gibraltar. After this trip, he would only spend about three more years of his life in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

In 1825, Greenough arrived in Rome, an ancient city bustling with artistic fervor. Greenough immersed himself in the Roman art world, touring galleries and museums, and establishing an intimate relationship with the city's art and history.<sup>18</sup> The works of Renaissance masters, like Michelangelo, who accurately modeled forms of nature, inspired Greenough's artistic aims, but he also paid attention to the contemporary art and artists.<sup>19</sup> While Greenough studied in Rome, the most prominent neoclassical sculptor was Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770-1844).<sup>20</sup> Thorvaldsen was one of the most well regarded sculptors in the world, along with Antonio Canova (1757-1822), a Venetian who had worked in Rome but had died a few years before Greenough's arrival. During Greenough's period in Rome, the followers of Canova and Thorvaldsen had formed rival factions within the greater neoclassical movement, with Thorvaldsen championing the grand, rugged, and masculine in his sculpture, and Canova's followers preferring the polished, subdued aspect of his sculpture.<sup>21</sup> Unlike Canova, Thorvaldsen more freely imitated antiquity and sculpted a wider range of imaginative subjects.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Greenough originally did not consider himself a neoclassical sculptor. In describing his own style in 1826, shortly after his arrival in Italy, Greenough wrote a letter to Allston in which he insisted that his style was ultimately independent of the styles of both Thorvaldsen and Canova.<sup>23</sup> Greenough held that these neoclassical sculptors had actually failed because “they study the Greeks for examples altogether instead of studying as the Greeks did,” suggesting that their neoclassical aesthetic merely copied the Greeks and lacked philosophical sophistication.<sup>24</sup> Greenough criticized traditional neoclassicism’s superficial sculptural emphasis on pure, subdued surface beauty. Indeed, Greenough understood himself and his art as separate from neoclassicism, but hoped to emulate the ancient Greek’s sculptural philosophy which caused his aesthetic to resemble that of neoclassicism.<sup>25</sup> Greenough’s unique style would find inspiration in classical artistic philosophies concerning the importance of character, and transmit a much more direct psychological aspect compared to traditional neoclassical works. Greenough was interested in the idealistic and naturalistic, but above all, he was interested in representing character through sculpture.

In 1827, due to illness arising from a period of depression and anxiety that almost had him induced in an Italian insane asylum, Greenough’s friends and family advised him to leave Rome and return to the United States.<sup>26</sup> During his convalescence in Boston in 1827, Greenough likely saw Gilbert Stuart’s full-length portrait of *Washington at Dorchester Heights* and Rembrandt Peale’s *Porthole Portrait* at the Boston Athenaeum’s first annual exhibition (Figs. 5

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>25</sup> Greenough’s artistic ideology resembled Johann Joachim Winckelmann’s (1717-1768) artistic theory, which asserted the superiority of ancient Greek sculpture and culture. Winckelmann’s research on Hellenistic Greek culture and sculpture stimulated the eighteenth-century neoclassical movement in art and informed Greenough’s artistic philosophy.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 48.

& 6).<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Greenough probably saw Sir Francis Chantrey's (1781-1841) *George Washington* statue, which was unveiled at Boston's State House that fall (Fig. 7).<sup>28</sup> Inspired by these portraits, Greenough sculpted his first professional bust of Washington late in 1827 while in Boston. Additionally, he surveyed elite Bostonians for potential commissions, promising to deliver sculptures once he returned to Italy.<sup>29</sup> Late in 1827, Greenough travelled to Washington D.C., where he modeled a bust of President John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) to advertise his ability as a sculptor. While there, Greenough hoped to test the American government's desire to commission a major public sculpture, as one of Greenough's most persistent aspirations as a sculptor concerned completing a significant governmental commission for his young nation.<sup>30</sup>

In May 1828, Greenough left Boston for Florence, where he encountered the works of Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo at the permanent collections of the Accademia, Uffizi, and the Pitti Gallery, institutions that Greenough referred to as his "great instructors."<sup>31</sup> He also encountered another major influence on his artistic career in the American novelist, James Fenimore Cooper.<sup>32</sup> In Cooper Greenough found a mentor; older, with refined artistic tastes, and a gentlemanly demeanor.<sup>33</sup> In his letters, Greenough reflected on Cooper, writing that Cooper "finished my education and he was my ideal of an American gentleman."<sup>34</sup> In 1829, Greenough modeled a bust of Cooper, who ordered other sculptural commissions soon after in the hopes of increasing Greenough's chances of receiving commissions from the American government.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Cooper began to recommend Greenough widely for employment in the United States. In

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

1830, Cooper wrote a confident letter to Greenough: “almost without a competitor, you are certain of the patronage of every man who thinks for himself.”<sup>36</sup>

Further supplementing Greenough’s reputation as a professional American sculptor, in the spring of 1831, the number of American artists in Florence reached its peak. During this time, many American artists traveled to the Italian city to study drawing, and this influx of notable American artists launched Greenough into the midst of a prestigious American artistic society, in which he would make valuable connections and perfect his artistic philosophy.<sup>37</sup> At this time, Greenough cultivated relationships with Thomas Cole (1801-1848) and Samuel F.B. Morse (1791-1872), with whom he lived in a house on the Via Valfonda in Florence.<sup>38</sup>

While he networked with American artists in Florence and completed various private commissions, Greenough’s desire to fulfill a public commission for the American government was echoed in the nation’s capital. Prior attempts to commemorate Washington had failed, leaving the city without a sculptural monument to honor its iconic namesake. In 1829, the government had explored the possibility of building a tomb for Washington’s casket and remains under the Capitol’s lower rotunda.<sup>39</sup> Architects completed the tomb within the center of the building, but Washington’s body was never interred there due to resistance from his descendants.<sup>40</sup> With the centennial of Washington’s birth approaching in 1832, members of American Congress hoped to commission a sculptural monument dedicated to George Washington.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> William Charles Allen, *History of the United States Capitol: A Chronicle of Design, Construction, and Politics* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2001), 170.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 171. It was determined that Washington’s body should remain undisturbed in his family tomb at Mount Vernon, Virginia.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Leonard Jarvis, the chairman of the Committee on Public Buildings, launched negotiations for a sculpture, putting forward Greenough's name on Washington Allston's recommendation.<sup>42</sup> By many accounts, it was Allston above all who secured Greenough as the main candidate for the sculpture.<sup>43</sup> The resolution was passed quickly, but with some dissent. Members of the committee wanted to know more about the artist before awarding him such a prestigious commission. Advocates noted Greenough's fame in Europe and referenced various recommendations that they had received from American and European connoisseurs, like Allston and Cooper. Henry Dearborn, a representative from Massachusetts, exclaimed that "no other American sculptor had yet appeared who was as fit to be entrusted with the execution of Washington's statue."<sup>44</sup> Greenough's nationality was emphasized throughout the process, underscoring the prevailing determination that no foreign artist should be entrusted with such an important commission.

The House Committee on Public Buildings reported a resolution on February 16, 1832, calling for President Jackson to commission Horatio Greenough to sculpt a marble statue of Washington for the Capitol's rotunda.<sup>45</sup> The commission held that the statue was to be full length, pedestrian, and would copy the head of Jean-Antoine Houdon's (1741-1828) statue of Washington, located in the Virginia State Capitol (Fig. 8).<sup>46</sup> Importantly, the resolution left the "accessories" to the judgment of the artist, bestowing Greenough with significant influence over the representation of Washington.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 118.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Allen, 174.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

On July 8, 1832, Greenough replied to the Secretary of State, Edward Livingston, that he would accept the commission and described his conception of the work. He proposed to make the statue 15 feet high, with a base that spanned 10 feet. He based these dimensions on his studies of the Florence Baptistery, a control space about the same size as the Capitol's rotunda.<sup>48</sup> He wanted his figure to “not be a mere image of the man to gratify curiosity, nor a vain display of academic art, but an embodying of his spirit.”<sup>49</sup> Greenough took on the great commission with a sense of duty and painful responsibility. For Greenough, the “hope of being found worthy to execute a statue of Washington for one of the great cities of my country, has been my support through years of solitary study in a foreign land.”<sup>50</sup> Underscoring the personal significance of the commission, Greenough went on to write: “Believe that in exertion I will be true to my country—and that I fully feel that if I prove worthy of this task I shall not have lived in vain.”<sup>51</sup> Clearly, Greenough felt that his work amounted to an act of American patriotism.

Prior to Greenough's *Washington*, important sculptures of the American hero followed the neoclassical style, which had been advocated by American elites like Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and John Quincy Adams because it embodied the themes of Greek democracy and the European Enlightenment upon which the new country was founded.<sup>52</sup> Jefferson helped introduce the style to the United States by recommending classical depictions of George Washington for two of the first, major federal sculptural commissions of Washington during the Early Republic. Houdon's version of Washington was completed in 1792 for the Virginia State Capitol and Canova's sculpture of Washington for the North Carolina Capitol was finished in

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<sup>48</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 121.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Crawford, 41.



1821. Jefferson declared in 1816 that “old Canova of Rome” was without rival the best sculptor, and for decades Americans accepted this opinion.<sup>53</sup>

Houdon’s full-length sculpture of George Washington for the Virginia State Capitol illustrates Houdon’s intense study of George Washington’s actual body measures and facial features.<sup>54</sup> Jefferson originally supported Houdon’s preference for depicting Washington in a toga for the Virginia State Capitol statue (Fig. 8).<sup>55</sup> Houdon chose instead to depict Washington standing triumphantly in his military uniform. Houdon held that: “A little deviation in favor of the modern costume would be more expedient than a servile adherence to the garb of antiquity.”<sup>56</sup> When Houdon depicted Washington in his contemporary garb, Jefferson realized that this was most likely in the best interest of the American public, as he knew that common viewers might perceive a costume as self-aggrandizing since Washington was still living at the time. Houdon’s likeness of Washington served as the standard for the leader’s facial features and figure well into the twentieth century, including Greenough’s *Washington*.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, in 1816, Jefferson recommended Canova for the commission to complete a statue of George Washington at Raleigh, North Carolina.<sup>58</sup> Jefferson wrote: “As to the style or costume, I am sure the artist and every person of taste in Europe would be for the Roman... our boots and regimentals would have a very puny effect.”<sup>59</sup> Canova depicted Washington as a seated Caesar, writing his resignation from the presidential office on a tablet and wearing classical garb, including sandals and a toga (Fig. 9).<sup>60</sup> Over time the statue became popular

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<sup>53</sup> Larkin, 177.

<sup>54</sup> Nichols Clark, “An Icon Preserved: Continuity in the Sculptural Images of Washington,” In *George Washington: American Symbol*, edited by Barbara Mitnick, 39-54, (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1999), 39.

<sup>55</sup> Crawford, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Clark, 39.

<sup>58</sup> Crawford, 41.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Clark, 42.

amongst its American audience and there was a profound sense of loss when it was destroyed in a fire in 1831.<sup>61</sup>

Other neoclassical renditions of Washington were created during the period of the Early Republic, signifying the popularity of this style. The American painter Joseph Wright's 1784 plaster bas-relief portrait of Washington depicted his head crowned with a laurel wreath, a symbol associating him with the virtues and political leadership of the ancient Roman Republic (Fig. 10).<sup>62</sup> Around 1795, the Italian Giuseppe Ceracchi completed a portrait bust that depicted Washington as a Roman emperor, complete with Roman military garb and classical short, curly hair (Fig. 11).<sup>63</sup> Ceracchi's portrait bust commemorated Washington's military triumphs by associating him with ancient Roman military leaders. The English sculptor, Sir Francis Chantrey, completed a full-length sculptural rendition of Washington for the Massachusetts State House in Boston in 1826 (Fig. 7).<sup>64</sup> Chantrey's version glorified Washington's ability as a statesman by combining elements from Washington's time with neoclassical themes. Chantrey depicted Washington in the traditional garb of an eighteenth-century gentleman, draped in a toga and holding a scroll, neoclassical motifs that associated him with Roman statesmanship.<sup>65</sup> Based on these early examples, it is clear that the European neoclassical style characterized American artistic tastes in Jeffersonian America and before the Age of the Common Man. Greenough certainly knew of these neoclassical traditions, and borrowed from previous artists while also inputting his own ideas.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Clark, 41.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>64</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 118.

<sup>65</sup> Ilene Lieberman, "Sir Francis Chantrey's Monument to George Washington: Sculpture and Patronage in Post-Revolutionary America," *The Art Bulletin* Vol. 71, No. 2 (1989), 254.

To execute the monumental statue, Greenough rented a former church building located a mile outside of Florence on the slope of Fiesole hill in a neighborhood known as the Querce.<sup>66</sup> In 1834, he secured a cast of Houdon's bust of Washington from Fontainebleau, France (Fig. 12). His other chief influence was Stuart's *Athenaeum Portrait*, of which he ordered a copy in 1833 (Fig. 4).<sup>67</sup> He also acquired anatomical preparations in the form of antique casts, prints, and books, and diligently studied every aspect of the American hero in preparation for his monumental work.<sup>68</sup>

In his conception for *Washington*, Greenough sought purity, simplicity, and timelessness, values starkly in contrast with the blasphemous reception the statue generated in 1841.<sup>69</sup> Greenough took for his model Phidias' *Olympian Zeus*.<sup>70</sup> Various neoclassical artists drew inspiration from this ancient Greek work, including Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, whom Greenough visited in Paris, in his paintings *Napoleon I on his Imperial Throne* and *Jupiter and Thetis* (Figs. 13 & 14).<sup>71</sup> Specifically, Greenough modeled his *Washington* on Quatremère de Quincy's painted reconstruction of the *Olympian Zeus* from 1815 (Figs. 15 & 16).<sup>72</sup> All of these images depicted the main figure enthroned, evoking a sense of divine authority.

Following this classical model, Greenough chose to portray Washington with the body of the Greek god Zeus, wearing a toga and sandals.<sup>73</sup> In the larger-than-life sculpture, Washington's right hand points toward heaven, acknowledging the Christian religious laws man lives by, while his left hand returns his sword – hilt first – to the people, signifying the completion of his service

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<sup>66</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 123.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 123-124.

<sup>69</sup> Gary Wills, "Washington's Citizen Virtue: Greenough and Houdon," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 10, No. 3 (1984), 431.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 421.

<sup>72</sup> John Crawford, "The Classical Tradition in American Sculpture: Structure and Surface," *The American Art Journal* Vol. 11, No. 3 (1979), 40.

<sup>73</sup> Allen, 174.

and abdication of power.<sup>74</sup> Greenough expressed his main intentions with the iconography when he wrote: “I have made him seated as first magistrate and he extends with his left hand the emblem of his military command toward the people as the sovereign. He points heavenward with his right hand. By this double gesture, my wish was to convey the idea of an entire abnegation of Self and to make my hero as it were a conductor between God and Man.”<sup>75</sup> Greenough also classicized Washington’s face by neglecting to depict wrinkles. This stylistic choice aligned with the imperial Roman sculptural style that idealized rulers’ faces. This imperial style contrasted with the republican Roman sculptural tradition that depicted wrinkles as a sign of the stresses associated with the burden of republican governance. Greenough also added thicker, fuller hair, emulating the busts of Hellenistic ruler portraits.<sup>76</sup> He also raised the figure’s eyebrows slightly to energize the face, a characteristic of imperial Roman and late antique portraiture, as he had previously done in his portrait busts of Washington.

The reliefs on either side of the throne depict Apollo driving the sun chariot across the sky on one side and the infant Hercules strangling snakes in his cradle while Iphicles sleeps (Figs. 17 & 18).<sup>77</sup> Greenough described the Hercules and Iphicles iconography when he wrote that he “represented the Genii of North and South America under the forms of the infants Hercules and Iphicles – the latter shrinking in dread while the former struggles successfully with the obstacles and dangers of an incipient political existence.”<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, Greenough meant the Apollo relief to represent the enlightenment that stemmed from the North American

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<sup>74</sup> Wills, 431.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Laurretta Dimmick, “George Washington, 1827-28.” In *American Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, edited by Thayer Tolles, 3-5 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), 4.

<sup>77</sup> Wills, 432.

<sup>78</sup> Vivien Fyrd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol 1815-1860* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2001), 83.

nation's birth.<sup>79</sup> Greenough's iconographic motivation for including these reliefs was patriotic, however, only someone knowledgeable about pagan myths could understand the sculptor's contemporary references through classical iconography.<sup>80</sup>

Although no document reveals Greenough's inspiration for the final version of Washington's throne, the lion heads appearing on either side of the throne suggest a reference to Solomon's Throne of Wisdom as described in the Old Testament, a common symbol in medieval Christian iconography.<sup>81</sup> With the Throne of Wisdom reference, Greenough connected Washington with the spiritual leadership and virtuous Christian kingship associated with the biblical stories of Solomon, a king of ancient Israel.<sup>82</sup> The two statues that flank the back of Washington's throne represent a Native American and Christopher Columbus (Figs. 17 & 18). By adding the figure of Columbus holding the globe, Greenough claimed that he "wished to connect our history with that of Europe."<sup>83</sup> Greenough depicted Columbus as a Biblical prophet, with long hair, a beard, and a classical toga.<sup>84</sup> With regard to his connection to Washington, Columbus represents the founding of the land that Washington would form into a nation.<sup>85</sup> Greenough chose to depict the Native American as a symbol of the contributions made by Columbus and Washington in establishing the United States, with the figure referencing the imposing American expansion and replacement of the native culture by an American one.<sup>86</sup>

Greenough described his *Washington* as the "birth of my thought" and "utmost effort of my mind," effectively explaining the sculpture's classically inspired iconography and intense

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Crawford, 40.

<sup>81</sup> Allegra Lafrate, *The Wandering Throne of Solomon: Objects and Tales of Kingship in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2016), 249.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Fyrd, 80.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

interest in representing Washington's heroic character.<sup>87</sup> In a letter updating Edward Livingston on the sculpture's progress, Greenough defended his choice to present a classicized Washington noting that he wanted to present Washington as an "agent" and that it "had not been without much reflection" that he had "set aside the dress of Washington's time."<sup>88</sup> For Greenough, Washington's contemporary dress would interfere with the timelessness of the sculpture by "calling attention to trifles," and he believed the toga would give the statue a sense of "what is natural and permanent," justifying his classicized depiction<sup>89</sup>

The sculpture was officially completed in 1840 and exhibited at select locations in Florence. In the fall of 1841, nine years after the resolution to create the sculpture had passed, Greenough's completed sculpture was unloaded at the Washington Navy Yard and hauled to the Capitol building.<sup>90</sup> After years of intense planning and rigorous execution, the twenty-ton statue was finally installed upon its pediment beneath Capitol's rotunda on December 1, 1841. Although the statue had been received favorably in Florence, its reception in the United States would be far different.

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<sup>87</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 158.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Allen, 174.

## THE RECEPTION

From Greenough's earliest conception for the *Washington* sculpture, friends and fellow Americans exhibited skepticism over the statue's overtly neoclassical design. Government officials generally disapproved of Greenough's plans for the sculpture, which reached Washington D.C. in May of 1834, on account of the sculpture's nudity and the figure's upraised arm.<sup>91</sup> Leonard Jarvis, a congressman from Maine, held that Greenough had "undertaken to idealize Washington and to make an emblematic statue." Jarvis complained, "it is not our Washington that he has represented."<sup>92</sup> In 1834, Senator John P. King from Georgia criticized Greenough's employment of the Roman sword and held that it should be substituted for the Constitution, and that Washington should be clothed.<sup>93</sup> Responding to these critiques, President Jackson invited Washington Allston to the capital to discuss the statue and initiate a change in its design.<sup>94</sup> Allston refused and Greenough never received an official comment on his design.<sup>95</sup> However, by 1835, various reports from his countrymen made clear the overall displeasure with his plans in the United States.<sup>96</sup> Despite this, Greenough remained determined to obey his own creative instinct.<sup>97</sup>

The reception of Greenough's work was completely different in Florence than in the United States. Europeans had been primed to understand and appreciate his approach differently than Americans. Neoclassicism had dominated European, particularly Italian, tastes since the mid-eighteenth century, as remnants of the classical past could be found in Italian streets and

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<sup>91</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 129.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

museums. Thus, a wider European audience could understand Greenough's stylistic motifs and appreciate the sculpture's message regarding the purity of Washington's character. Throughout the years of its production in Florence, scores of Europeans and Americans visited Greenough's studio and commented upon it, with a majority of the visitors praising it. Luigi Sabatelli, the director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan thought that Greenough had given Washington "back to the veneration of the world."<sup>98</sup> An American abroad who likely understood classical forms, Isaac Appleton Jewett explained: "Every part of it is emphatic... how completely is the marble purged of every thing but Washington."<sup>99</sup> Another American abroad, George Calvert, held that "Washington, to be best seen, ought to be beheld, not as he came from the hand of the tailor, but as he came from the hand of God" in a testament to Greenough's sculpture.<sup>100</sup>

Before the statue's unveiling beneath the rotunda, various American artists and intellectuals praised Greenough's conception of Washington.<sup>101</sup> Upon seeing a sketch of Greenough's plans for the sculpture, artists Samuel F.B. Morse and John Chapman, believed the idea to be "sublime" and "glorious."<sup>102</sup> Another artist described the work as "a grand ideal personification of the spirit of Washington – as a mighty work of art – simple, natural, grand" and that the statue would give "a far truer idea of the real Washington than if it had been represented in the regimentals of the American General."<sup>103</sup> But some Americans who travelled abroad and admired the sculpture could anticipate its tumultuous reception in the United States. Frances Appleton, the daughter of a wealthy Bostonian industrialist, wrote: "How many 'down easters [a reference to Americans from New England]' will kinder think it a burning shame to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 127-128.



have the General rigged out like an old Heathen instead of the buff and blue.”<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, when Greenough exhibited the statue in Florence in 1840 and 1841, the work was admired and favorably commented upon in Italian newspapers, notably in an article published in the *Giornale del Commercio*.<sup>105</sup>

Despite its successful reception in Italy, by 1841, Greenough had already composed an explanation and defense for his sculpture, which was to be printed when it reached the United States, a vain attempt to quell the violent reception that he apparently foresaw in his homeland.<sup>106</sup> He was correct to fear this kind of response. When it was installed in the Capitol in 1841, the statue was placed on a thirteen-foot-tall wooden pedestal beneath the dimly lit rotunda, which lifted the sculpture so high off the ground that one of the figure’s feet and the chair’s ornamentation could not be seen. Commenting upon the poor representation, Senator William Preston exclaimed that the statue was “the most horrid phantasmagoria I have ever beheld.”<sup>107</sup> The opinion of most Americans regarding the sculpture was equally unfavorable. Some admired the workmanship and beauty of the figure’s head, yet expressed a preference for different details. The American public wanted to see Washington standing, smaller in figure, more defined in action, and with an English inscription, not Latin. However, the main objection to Greenough’s sculpture was its foreign, unrelatable, and un-American portrayal of the American hero.

The American audience rejected the un-American, Europeanized neoclassical sculpture. To the Jacksonian public, the toga seemed foreign, pagan, and inappropriate, while Washington’s partial nudity was described as incomprehensible and blasphemous.<sup>108</sup> Stemming from the country’s Puritanical religious roots, some Americans who viewed the sculpture wrote that its

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 142.

partial nudity prevented them from comprehending the statue's meaning.<sup>109</sup> Philip Hone, in response to the sculpture, wrote: "Washington was too prudent and careful of his health to expose himself thus in a climate so uncertain as ours, to say nothing of the indecency of such an exposure."<sup>110</sup> Charles Bulfinch, the architect of the Capitol, believed that Greenough had portrayed Washington preparing for a bath.<sup>111</sup> As a neoclassical architect and intellectual, Bulfinch appreciated the sculpture as art, but knew a majority of his countrymen would take the statue too literally.<sup>112</sup> Bulfinch warned his son "I fear that it will cause much disappointment—It may be an exquisite piece or work, but our people will hardly be satisfied with looking on well developed muscles, when they wish to see the great man as their imagination has painted him."<sup>113</sup>

Unfortunately for Greenough, for many Americans like Bulfinch, it appeared "as though he were entering or leaving a bath."<sup>114</sup> Further attesting to the general reception that disdained the sculpture's nudity, Nathaniel Hawthorne exclaimed: "Did anybody ever see Washington nude? It is inconceivable. He had no nakedness, but I imagine he was born with his clothes on, and his hair powdered, and made a stately bow on his first appearance in the world."<sup>115</sup> Other Americans thought that Washington looked as if he had jumped out of bed, only managing to grab a sheet.<sup>116</sup>

Various American magazines and newspapers published criticisms of the statue. Amos Kendall, the editor of a Washingtonian newspaper, held that the statue's combination of mythical

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<sup>109</sup> Fyrd, 76.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Allen, 174.

<sup>114</sup> Jeffrey Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, Part 3* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2001), 135.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

and historical elements could introduce a “barbarian taste” into the civilized society, likely referencing the statue’s neoclassical form and its connection to European monarchy – considered in nineteenth century America to be an oppressive force that limited human freedoms.<sup>117</sup> Under a pen name, an author for *The New York Herald* described Greenough’s figure as one risen from a coffin “with his winding sheet about him” and pronounced Greenough’s stylistic choices as “the selection of an idiot.”<sup>118</sup> Even the imperfect Latin tense in the word *faciebat* in the statue’s inscription, which Greenough intentionally employed based on ancient artists to avoid the appearance of arrogance, was criticized by Americans as poor Latin.<sup>119</sup>

Various Jacksonian politicians who saw the statue on a daily basis criticized the work. A group of Congressmen found that it appeared to represent a Hindu statue on a funeral pile.<sup>121</sup> Even Representative Henry A. Wise, who had once promoted Greenough’s sculptural skill, wrote: “What was it but plagiarism from the heathen mythology to represent a Christian hero... a Jupiter Thonans, or Jupiter Stator, in place of an American hero and sage? A naked statue of George Washington! Of a man whose skin had probably never been looked upon by any living. It might be possibly suit Italian tastes, but certainly it did not the American taste.”<sup>122</sup> He found the Latin inscription to be misleading and thought Washington’s seat resembled the throne of an unimportant temple.<sup>123</sup> He would have kept the head of Greenough’s figure and thrown

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<sup>117</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 144.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. The Latin term *Faciebat* is the third-person singular imperfect active tense of the Latin verb *Facere*, which translates in English to “to make.” Thus, *Faciebat* translates in English to “he/she/it used to make/was making.” By signed his work using this term, Greenough associated himself with how famous Greek sculptors like Polykleitos and Apelles signed their works. Renaissance masters adopted this tradition, as the usage of *faciebat* insisted that art was always a thing in process, never completed, and that the artist could have always done better.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 114.

<sup>121</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 144.

<sup>122</sup> Fyrd, 76.

<sup>123</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 144-145.

everything else into the Potomac.<sup>124</sup> Wise's denunciation of the sculpture's neoclassical style typified many of the numerous critical remarks voiced by Americans who rejected the statue's Europeanized, foreign pose.

Despite the significant amount of criticism aimed at the sculpture after its installation, the work did have some proponents. Generally, these advocates were wealthy, well-educated Americans who had an understanding of classical themes. Henry Tuckerman, Greenough's close friend, biographer, and art critic visited Greenough's Italian studio after the sculpture had been transported to the United States, but noted that "by those best qualified to judge, it was here (in Florence) esteemed a fine work."<sup>125</sup> Although Greenough's *Washington* had left the studio before Tuckerman's arrival, the traveller nonetheless commented on the sculpture based on old molds, drawings, and casts still present in Greenough's workshop.<sup>126</sup> Tuckerman wrote "let me say a few words about the nudity of this statue, for which it has been much censured in America" alluding to the distaste the sculpture evoked when it was brought to the United States.<sup>127</sup> Aware of its poor reception in the United States, Tuckerman retorted that Washington's nude form most effectively expressed Washington's pure character.<sup>128</sup>

Tuckerman also attacked the critics of Greenough's sculpture on theoretical grounds, writing that "Greenough's fellow-countrymen, by whose order this statue was made, would have preferred it draped, ought to be of no weight, even if such a wish had accompanied the order."<sup>129</sup> Tuckerman held that Greenough had done the correct thing as an artist by exercising his own

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Henry Tuckerman & Horatio Greenough, *A Memorial of Horatio Greenough: Consisting of a memoir, selections from his writings, and tributes to his genius* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Co., 1853), 228.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 229.

independence.<sup>130</sup> Tuckerman believed that “the majestic head and figure of Washington will reveal and confirm the greatness of his character, for the body is the physiognomy of the mind.”<sup>131</sup> Tuckerman held that if an American audience beheld the object with contemplation, “he will forget that Washington ever wore a coat, and will turn away from this noble colossal form in a mood that will be wholesome to his mental state.”<sup>132</sup> Unfortunately for Greenough’s work, the American masses proved incapable of appreciating the statue in the way Tuckerman suggested.

Although a handful of well-educated, wealthy Americans appreciated Greenough’s work, the sculpture was continually disparaged by the Jacksonian masses. With little news regarding how his statue had been received in the United States, Greenough visited Washington D.C. in 1842. When he went to inspect the statue with a group of friends, the lighting of the statue in the rotunda appalled him.<sup>133</sup> Francis Higginson, a friend of Greenough’s, remarked “there sat Washington in the dark.”<sup>134</sup> The darkness gave the statue a rigid, vindictive expression and prevented viewers from seeing the reliefs or the small figures adorning Washington’s throne.<sup>135</sup> Upon seeing his sculpture in the dark, Greenough was upset and believed he could understand why it had received such poor reviews from Americans.<sup>136</sup> For the sculptor, the only solution was to move the statue outside.<sup>137</sup>

In 1843, Greenough wrote a letter to Congress petitioning that the statue be moved to the Capitol grounds, where a wooden structure could be placed over it for protection.<sup>138</sup> The petition

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 145.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 148.

was accepted, and the statue was moved to a wooden shed on the eastern grounds of the Capitol, directly in front of its eastern entrance (Figs. 19, 20, & 21).<sup>139</sup> The removal of *Washington* to its new location did not enhance its reception.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the greater exposure to sunlight heightened the effect of the statue's nudity and made it more open to ridicule.<sup>141</sup> Americans continued to criticize the indecency of portraying Washington without clothing.<sup>142</sup> One account of a visitor's experience in Washington D.C. described an "ill-looking shanty" that contained "a statue of Jupiter Thonans, easing himself, without a shirt on his back, holding a thunderbolt in his right hand."<sup>143</sup> The statue was even subject to pranks, as one spectator placed a large cigar between its lips. Congress continued to debate what exactly was to be done with the massive sculpture, which had quickly become a nuisance and laughing stock. One member joked that they would be lucky to find a place within the country where the sculpture would excite admiration.<sup>144</sup>

After suffering weather damage, in 1908, Congress determined that the statue should be removed from Capitol grounds and hidden from the public eye in the nearby Smithsonian Castle, where a National Gallery of Art was being created.<sup>145</sup> Later in 1964, the statue was moved to the Museum of History and Technology, which is today known as the Smithsonian National Museum of American History. For this presentation, the pedestal was lowered, with the statue's previous pedestal repurposed as the cornerstone of the Capitol Power Plant in Washington.<sup>146</sup> Today, the first federally commissioned sculpture completed by an American artist sits

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>140</sup> Meyer, 150.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Allen, 175.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

awkwardly next to an escalator and unrelated museum exhibits.<sup>147</sup> The sculpture's current location attests to its poor reception by the American public.

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<sup>147</sup> Meyer, 135.

## ART IN JACKSONIAN AMERICA

Horatio Greenough's vision of George Washington contrasted greatly with popular tastes that gained traction during the tumultuous and controversial presidency of Andrew Jackson. Jackson had become a public figure after his victory at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 secured his reputation as a military hero, and the general parlayed it into an unexpectedly successful political career.<sup>148</sup> After an era of uncertainty, the miraculous victory over the British inspired a boom in enthusiasm for the triumph of democracy and the American republic. But with this period of enthusiasm and patriotism also came conflict and bitter political argument over the young nation's direction and destiny. This debate was carried out most actively between American elites and populists in the years leading up to Jackson's defeat of John Quincy Adams in the presidential election of 1828.<sup>149</sup>

Jackson's election effectively ended the elitist dominance that had characterized the Early Republican era. Jackson was seen as the guardian of the common, landowning Americans and the antithesis of wealthy elites. His group of gritty democrats, populist campaign strategy, previous military service to his country, and humble origins all appealed to working class Americans who feared that elites wished to dominate the social order and retain power in government.<sup>150</sup> Jackson criticized the elitist nature of the previous Adams administration and its tendency to favor industry over the common American craftsman and landowner.<sup>151</sup> Capitalizing on the plights of the common man, Jackson employed populist politics to win the office of the presidency, and was inaugurated in 1829. His strategy to appeal to the masses worked, as he won every state outside of New England, Adams' home territory.

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<sup>148</sup> Sellers, 3.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.



So-called Jacksonians, working class Americans who supported the Tennessee frontiersman, celebrated his success and the supposed triumph of a democratic government over an oligarchical order. Jackson's election marked the beginning of a new democratic, egalitarian era. For his supporters, America had become a truer democracy, one that favored the working man over the elite, and this significantly impacted American culture in the 1830s and 1840s. The legacy of this election had wide effects on American society and how it perceived itself. Upon Jackson's journey to Washington D.C. to begin his presidency, Daniel Webster held that the rallying Americans seemed to believe "that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger."<sup>152</sup> Thousands gathered at Jackson's inauguration, cheering manically over the new President's promise of vaguely described reforms.<sup>153</sup> To Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, an onlooker during Jackson's inauguration, "the reign of King 'Mob' seemed triumphant."<sup>154</sup>

Jackson's message appealed to Americans for obvious reasons. In the early 1830s, the United States was primed for unprecedented growth, with massive untapped land resources, rapidly growing industry in the northeast, and seemingly unlimited opportunities for westward expansion.<sup>155</sup> By Jackson's time, the thirteen colonies had grown to twenty-four states and Americans spread westward with hopes of finding financial success.<sup>156</sup> To fill the vacant western lands, immigrants from western Europe – English, Welsh, Scotch, Irish, Germans, Dutchman, Swedes, Belgians – were welcomed into the country.<sup>157</sup> Industry in northeast cities expanded, and workers began forming some of the nation's first trade unions.<sup>158</sup> Relentless industrialization, immigration, and urbanization destabilized the previous, articulated class

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 301.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Larkin, 148.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

structure and gentrified status quo in the United States.<sup>159</sup> During the Jacksonian era, the working class in the United States became a catalyst for social movements that promoted the values of patriotism and puritanical religious beliefs that would influence the trajectory of American culture.<sup>160</sup>

The transition away from neoclassical art forms popular in Europe occurred swiftly and was clearly referenced by European visitors during this time. Throughout the 1830s, as Jacksonian fervor swept over the nation, European criticism of America's lack of culture reached unprecedented heights.<sup>161</sup> Accounts of this uncultured land come from European travellers who visited the young nation, many of whom found it to be a rude, anti-intellectual place, where money was the primary pursuit of the individual.<sup>162</sup> Based on other European accounts, the mission of Americans was to "clear the forests, hunt the wild beasts, scatter the savage tribes... till the soil, dig in the mines, and work out the rude ways of physical existence..."<sup>163</sup> From a European perspective, in Jacksonian America there was not a time and place for the appreciation of fine art and no respect for those of dared defy these cultural norms.<sup>164</sup>

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), who travelled the United States for nine months between 1831 and 1832 as a French ambassador to inspect American prison systems, published his perspective on American art in the third volume of his book *Democracy in America* from 1840.<sup>165</sup> De Tocqueville's writing makes it clear that he was impressed by the American obsession with egalitarianism and democracy, but De Tocqueville was also critical of the arts

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<sup>159</sup> Oedel & Gernes. 111.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Schneider, 77.

<sup>162</sup> Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1969), 28-30.

<sup>163</sup> Lillian Miller, "Paintings, Sculpture, and the National Character, 1815-1860," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 53, No. 4 (1967), 697. Quotation from Thomas Colley Grattan's book *Civilized America* published in 1859.

<sup>164</sup> Miller, 697.

<sup>165</sup> Pessen, 39.

produced by democratic nations in comparison to those produced by European nation's with strong aristocracies and rigid class structures.<sup>166</sup> He noted that democratic nations lacked a taste for art and preferred mass-produced, low quality imagery. The democratized nature of American art contrasted with European tastes, driven by an aristocracy without regard for the masses. Explaining the utilitarian attitude toward art in America, De Tocqueville wrote: "Democratic nations...will therefore cultivate the arts that serve to render life easy in preference to those whose object is to adorn it. They will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful should be useful."<sup>167</sup> For De Tocqueville, the class struggles in the United States and unorganized social hierarchy impacted its taste in the arts, leading to what he considered a more base taste in art driven by the working class. De Tocqueville wrote: "Thus the democratic principle not only tends to direct the human mind to the useful arts, but it induces the artisan to produce with great rapidity many imperfect commodities, and the consumer to content himself with these commodities."<sup>168</sup> Here De Tocqueville insinuated that democratic societies tend toward mass production due to the intermingling of social ranks, which in turn limits the quality of art and crafts. De Tocqueville also noted that "in aristocracies a few great pictures are produced; in democratic countries a vast number of insignificant ones. In the former statues are raised of bronze, in the latter, they are modeled in plaster."<sup>169</sup> Americans, he argued, had no class and lacked refined artistic tastes.

American artistic preferences did in fact move away from European classicism and toward a more democratic taste that accommodated the visual preferences of the Jacksonian

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<sup>166</sup> Pessen, 42.

<sup>167</sup> Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: historical-critical edition of De la démocratie en Amérique*. Edited by Eduardo Nolla and translated by James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010), 788-795.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

populist.<sup>170</sup> European neoclassical works necessitated a defined, elitist taste and connoisseurship that required an educated knowledge of the European masters, making them inaccessible to Jacksonian populists who did not possess this knowledge.<sup>171</sup> Art Historian Lillian Miller once argued that “Americans of the nineteenth century, finding such connoisseurship impossible because of the country’s limited wealth and lack of art treasures, concluded that such an emphasis on the past and on aristocratic training in the arts was actually undesirable for a democracy.”<sup>172</sup> Not only did Americans dislike European tastes; they actually thought they were un-American.

In opposition to the inaccessibility of neoclassicism, for Jacksonian populists, the basis for American taste and artistic preference was what one’s “own eyes and untaught good sense” could see and conclude without complex reasoning.<sup>173</sup> It was decided that American art should be pleasing to “all classes, and all ages,” suggesting a kind of autodidactic approach to cultural understanding.<sup>174</sup> For this new era of American art, the goal was to create patriotic images that common Americans who had no formal training in the visual arts could easily understand.

All realms of Jacksonian era American art catered to the common man. In literature, folkloric legends were written to suit American tastes, like the tale of Johnny Appleseed wandering through the state of Ohio with a sack of seeds and a Bible, or the story of the lumberjack Paul Bunyan who was ninety-seven axe handles tall. These tales reflected the interest in forming a distinctly American culture and appealing to homespun Americans.<sup>175</sup> Thus, a key

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<sup>170</sup> Miller, 699.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Larkin, 150.

element of Jacksonian American art was its level of accessibility to all and this element was aligned with the principles of democracy associated with the politics of the time.

Curiously, wealthy American patrons also turned away from European neoclassicism during the Jacksonian era. Elites enjoyed Durand and Mount's paintings and served as important collectors and advocates of this new style of American art.<sup>176</sup> American galleries, like Harding's Gallery, which functioned from 1833 to 1847 in Boston, promoted itself to collectors by showcasing American art as opposed to European works. The gallery announced that paintings by the artist Chester Harding were "fresh from the studio of the American artist, not [some] smoke-dried old master."<sup>177</sup>

Truly, the democratic fervor that enveloped the United States during the 1830s while Greenough labored on his *Washington* changed how Americans felt about art and sculpture. Highlighting the significant shifts in American culture while Greenough worked abroad, Morse wrote Greenough in 1836: "You are in a country in which every man swaggers and talks, knowledge or no knowledge, brains or no brains, taste or no taste, they are all *ex nato* connoisseurs..."<sup>178</sup> Earlier, in 1833, Morse similarly warned Cooper, who was living in Florence

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 151. An instance of this taste can be seen when a large group of Italian paintings worth sixty thousand dollars were offered to any city that would pay twenty thousand. The overall response to this offer was that it would be better if that money was spent on native works.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. One of the most popular genre painters during the Jacksonian era was William Sidney Mount, who embodied the characteristics of American populism that characterized the Jacksonian era art scene. Mount created idealized scenes that romanticized aspects of the common American's life. Although he acquired a classical education and respected the European tradition of copying the ancients, Mount valued originality, veracity, accessibility, and national character as the criteria for art. Other popular artists during the Jacksonian era included skilled landscape painters, like Asher Brown Durand, a prominent member of Hudson River School. This popular artistic group painted wilderness scenes in upstate New York and New England. Concern for refining American character manifested itself in the artistic renditions of American landscape painting, like those by Asher Brown Durand, and his works were incredibly popular in Jacksonian America.

<sup>178</sup> Larkin, 149.

at the time, that he would return to a country whose tastes and manners had profoundly changed.<sup>179</sup> Evidently, Morse was not wrong in his warning.

It is clear that there was a distinct shift in attitudes about art during the Jacksonian era. Truly, the common American was more responsive to the ordinary and nonfictional, and patriotic artists were welcome if they could reduce great events to human scale and present heroes as relatable humans.<sup>180</sup> In *The American Scholar* Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) wrote, “give me insight today and you may have the antique in future worlds.”<sup>181</sup> Almost summarizing the taste of the Jacksonian American, Emerson wrote: “I embrace the common... and sit at the feet of the familiar.”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the stories behind the reception of Greenough's sculpture, and the social and artistic developments that took place in Jacksonian America, it is now possible to examine how Greenough's *Washington* clashed with the Jacksonian cultural ethos. Over the span of years that Greenough labored on the *Washington*, wealthy Americans of all classes embraced a populist American art movement that rejected European tastes, which then influenced the poor reception of Greenough's neoclassical sculpture in the rotunda of the Capitol. The populist Jacksonian was religious, patriotic, and not very well educated, who had a taste for relatable, realistic artworks that glorified the everyday. Decidedly, the American masses viewed the neoclassical forms popular during the days of the Early Republican era – at the time that Greenough was a student at Harvard, and then as an ex-patriot in Italy – as foreign, inappropriate, and elitist. Instead, Jacksonian Americans championed the works of American artists who employed subject matter that was accessible to all American classes. By the time Greenough's statue reached the American Capitol in 1841, American artistic tastes had turned from neoclassicism toward more naturalistic genre scenes and romanticized landscapes, and had left Greenough and his artistic philosophy behind.

The main criticism of Greenough's sculpture reflects the populist artistic taste that developed during the age of Jackson. This primary criticism concerned the fact that Washington was portrayed as a pagan god and not as a common American, which Jacksonians perceived as inappropriate and un-American. This primary criticism expressed by American audiences reflective of the ideology of the Jacksonian common man, which rejected neoclassicism in favor of a distinctly American style guided by the principles of egalitarian democracy and prudish Puritan religious values that shaped the nation's cultural landscape. The Jacksonian visual

vocabulary championed the mundane and the reserved, aspects that could be understood and appreciated by all Americans. This democratization of American art was made evident by the Jacksonian emphasis on realism, in depicting subjects as they actually were, forfeiting the kind of idealization that was common in neoclassicism.

For Jacksonian Americans, verisimilitude was essential, and this meant the literal rendition of natural or human forms and a precise copying of detail.<sup>183</sup> This point was powerfully illustrated when, while sitting for his sculptural portrait in the years 1834 and 1835, President Jackson asked Hiram Powers to “Make me as I am... It’s the only safe rule to follow.”<sup>184</sup> Although Powers depicted Jackson wearing a toga symbolizing his status as a statesman, he forfeited any sort of idealization by modeling Jackson exactly how he was, even down to his toothless mouth (Fig. 22).<sup>185</sup>

The poor reception of Greenough’s *George Washington* was determined by the artistic changes that occurred as a result of the cultural shifts in Jacksonian America. Although neoclassicism had been the dominant art form in the United States during the times that preceded the Jacksonian era, social developments in the United States created a populist fervor that manifested itself in the American taste for the arts. Populists criticized neoclassical works like Greenough’s for their inaccessible, foreign, and inappropriate nature. Jacksonian populists considered the European style undemocratic.

In retrospect, even Greenough himself recognized the characteristics of this new America that led to his statue’s controversial reception. Greenough complained about the generalized assumptions regarding artwork in the United States in his essay *Remarks on American Art* from

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<sup>183</sup> Miller, 701.

<sup>184</sup> The Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Collection Records: Andrew Jackson,” Accessed 2017. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/94.14/>.

<sup>185</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 127.



1843. Greenough wrote “the susceptibility, the tastes, and the genius which enable a people to enjoy the fine arts, and to excel in them, have been denied to the Anglo Americans.”<sup>186</sup> Greenough remarked that there was “a stubborn, antipoetical tendency in all that we [Americans] do, or say, or think” in comparison to the Europeans and that this prevented the development of American artists.<sup>187</sup> Greenough clearly alluded to the populist artistic desires of the Jacksonians who had ridiculed his statue and renounced his earlier viewpoint that art in his homeland had come to maturity, instead he saw American art still in its infancy, a trait that had ruined the reception of his *Washington*.<sup>188</sup>

It is clear that the sculpture’s failure to portray Washington as a common man resonated poorly with the Jacksonian American audience. This poor reception was the result of cultural shifts in Jacksonian society that increasingly championed the common man as well as democratized, realist artistic forms, while simultaneously disparaging the neoclassical impulses of a European culture that was considered decadent, imperial, and inappropriate. The neoclassical style, which had been popular in America during the Early Republican era, gave way to a realist, democratized style during the Jacksonian era. Unfortunately, Greenough’s Europeanized, neoclassical rendition of George Washington failed in conforming to these Jacksonian artistic values, and for this reason it was rejected and forced into obscurity.

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<sup>186</sup> Rosand, 12.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Wright, *Horatio Greenough: The First American Sculptor*, 153.

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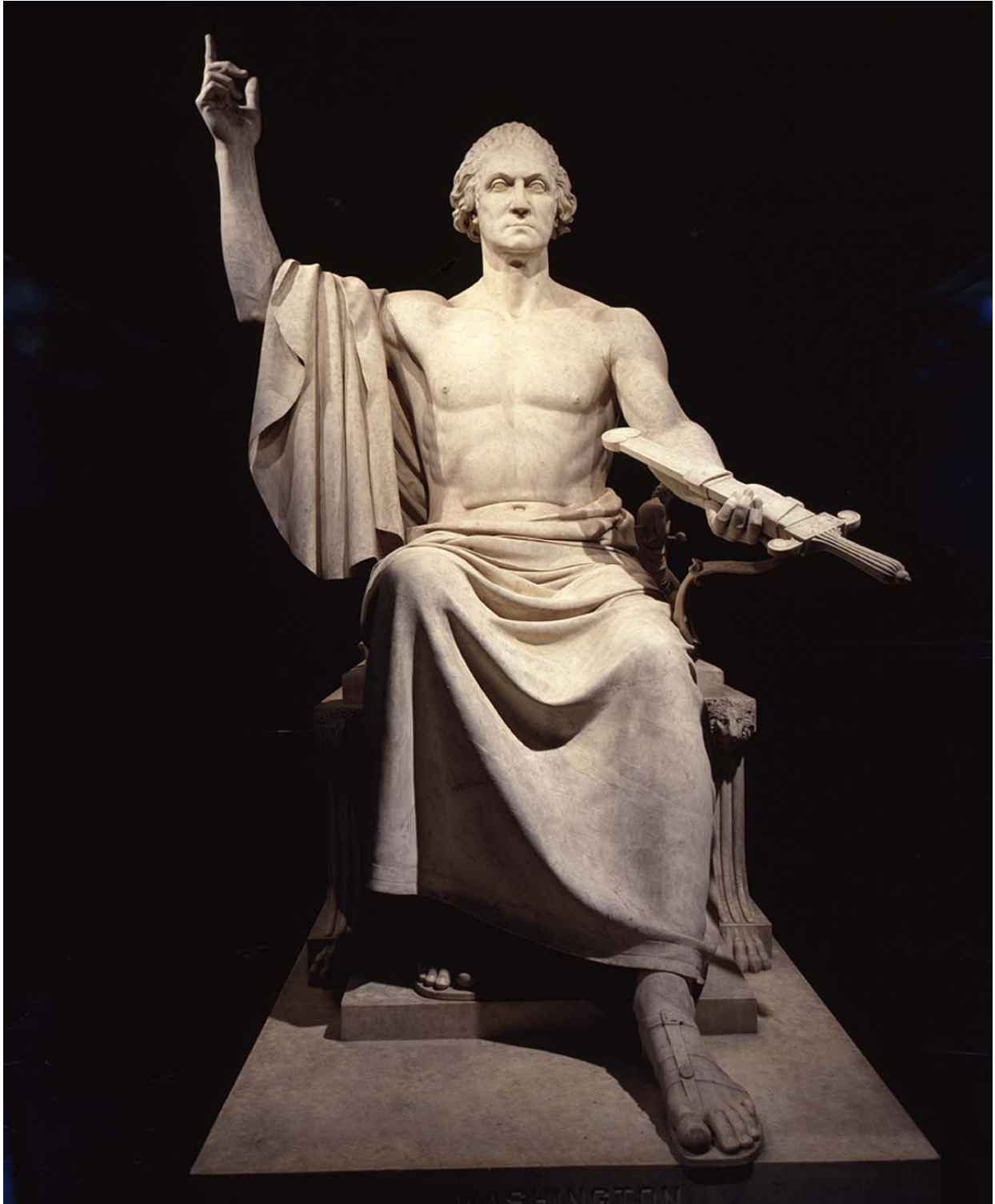
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## VISUALS



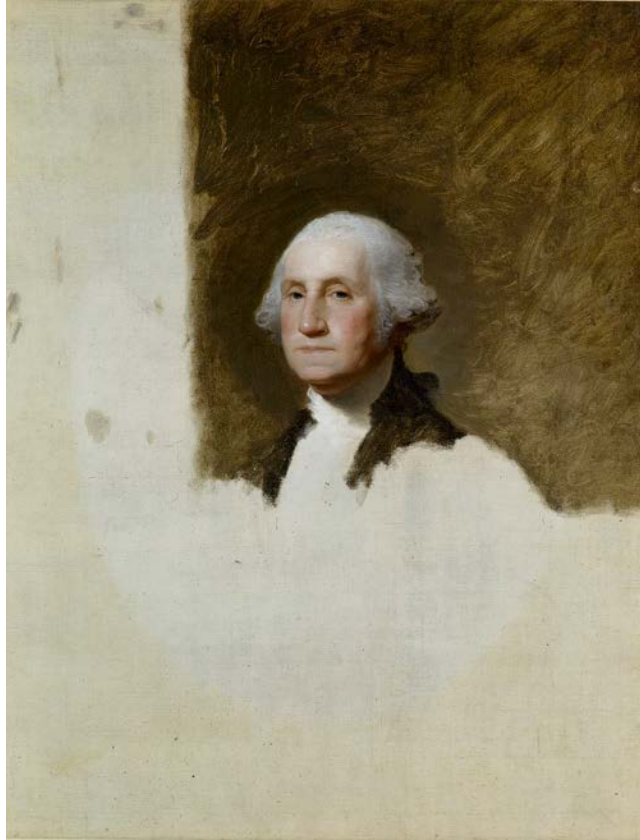
**Figure 1:** Horatio Greenough, *George Washington*, 1832-1840, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington D.C.



**Figure 2:** William Sidney Mount, *Dance of the Haymakers*, 1845, Long Island Museum, New York



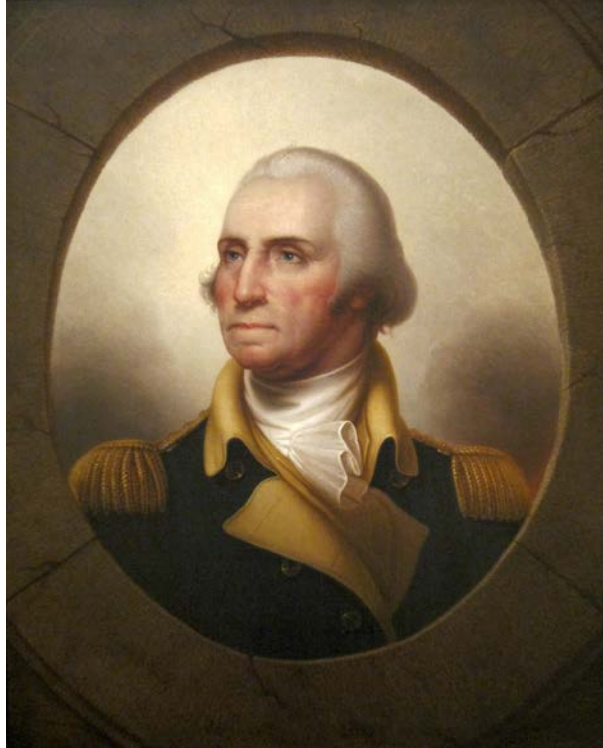
**Figure 3:** Asher Brown Durand, *View near Rutland, Vermont – The Berry Pickers*, 1837, High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia



**Figure 4:** Gilbert Stuart, *Athenaeum Portrait*, 1796, National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.



**Figure 5:** Gilbert Stuart, *Washington at Dorchester Heights*, 1806, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Boston, Massachusetts



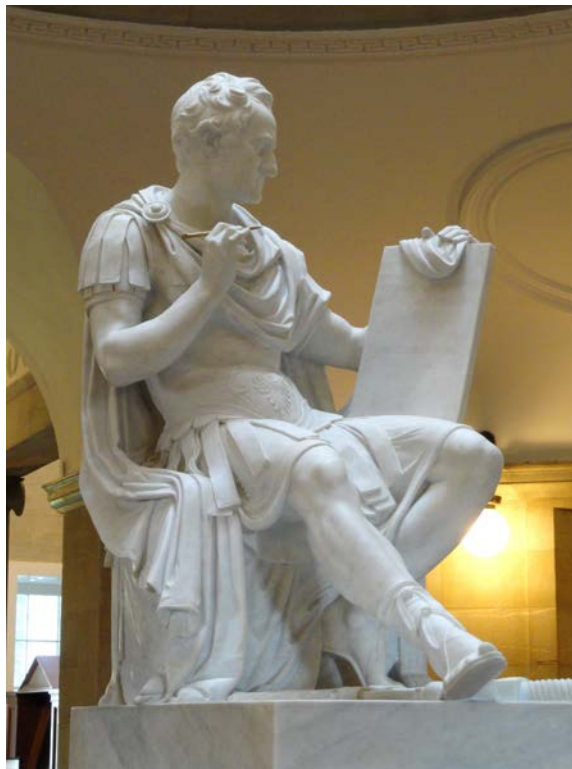
**Figure 6:** Rembrandt Peale, *Porthole Portrait*, 1823, Old Senate Chamber of the United States Capitol, Washington D.C.



**Figure 7:** Sir Francis Chantrey, *George Washington*, 1827, Boston State House, Boston, Massachusetts



**Figure 8:** Jean-Antoine Houdon, *George Washington*, 1792, Virginia State Capitol, Richmond, Virginia



**Figure 9:** Antonio Canova, *George Washington (Marble Copy of Original)*, 1821, North Carolina State Capitol, Raleigh, North Carolina

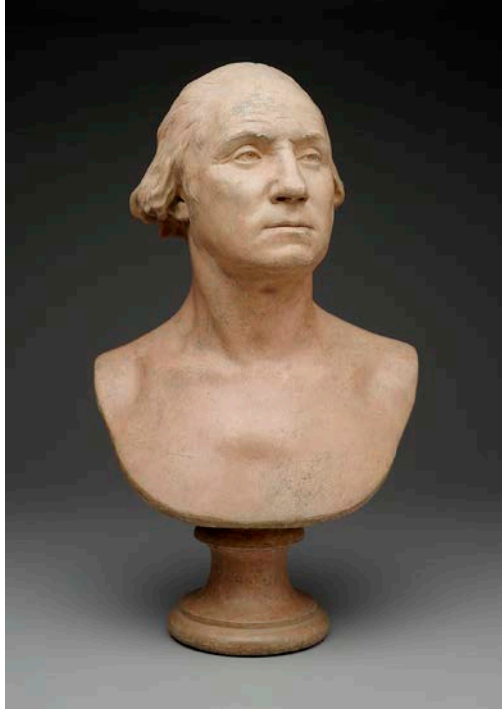




**Figure 10:** Joseph Wright, *George Washington*, 1784, Washington's Study at Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, Virginia



**Figure 11:** Giuseppe Ceracchi, *George Washington*, 1795, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, New York



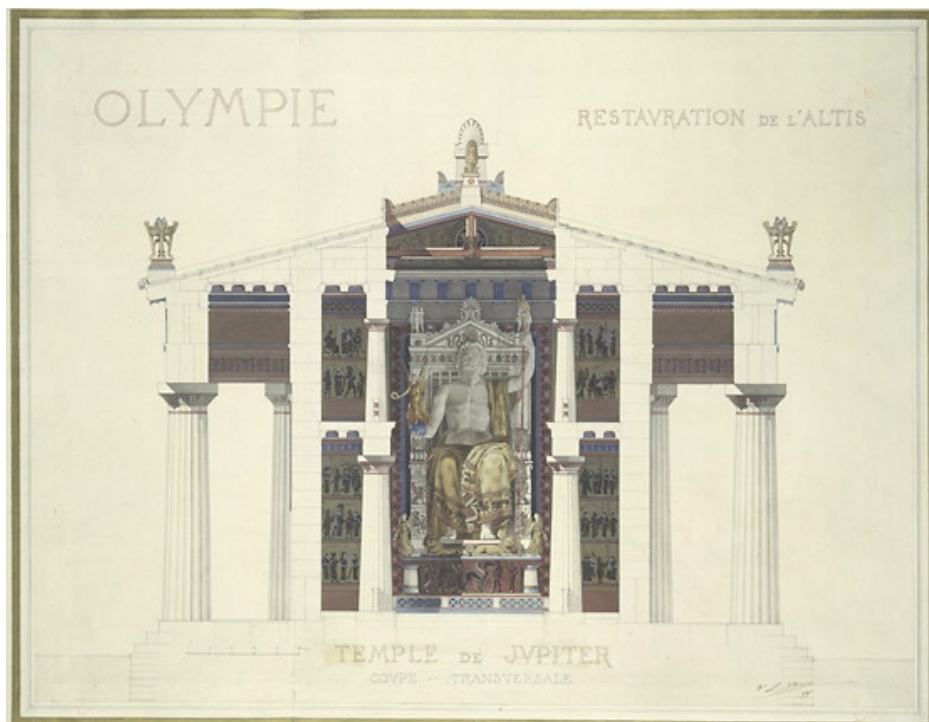
**Figure 12:** Jean-Antoine Houdon, *George Washington*, c. 1786, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas



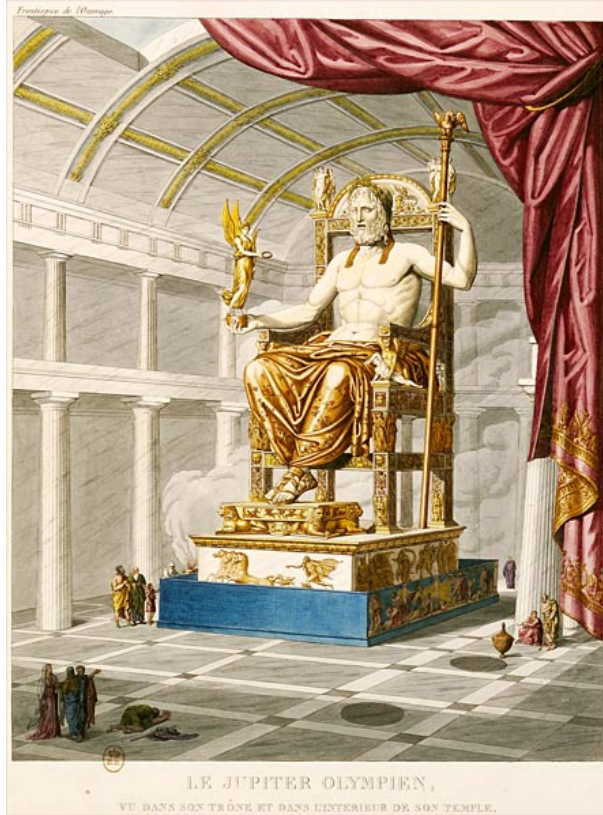
**Figure 13:** Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Napoleon I on his Imperial Throne*, 1806, Musée de l'Armée, Paris, France



**Figure 14:** Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Jupiter and Thetis*, 1811, Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, France



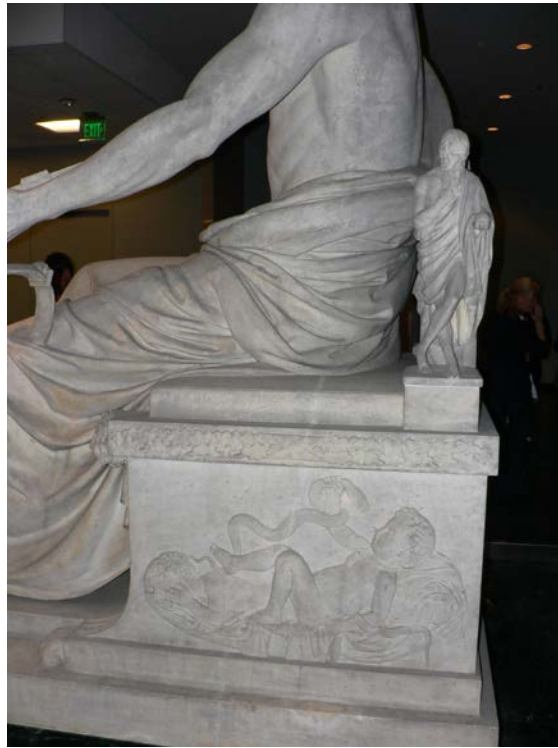
**Figure 15:** Quatremère de Quincy, *The Olympian Zeus*, 1815, Reprinted engraving



**Figure 16:** Quatremère de Quincy, *The Olympian Zeus*, 1815, Reprinted engraving



**Figure 17:** Horatio Greenough, *Washington Throne Detail of Native American and Apollo Relief*



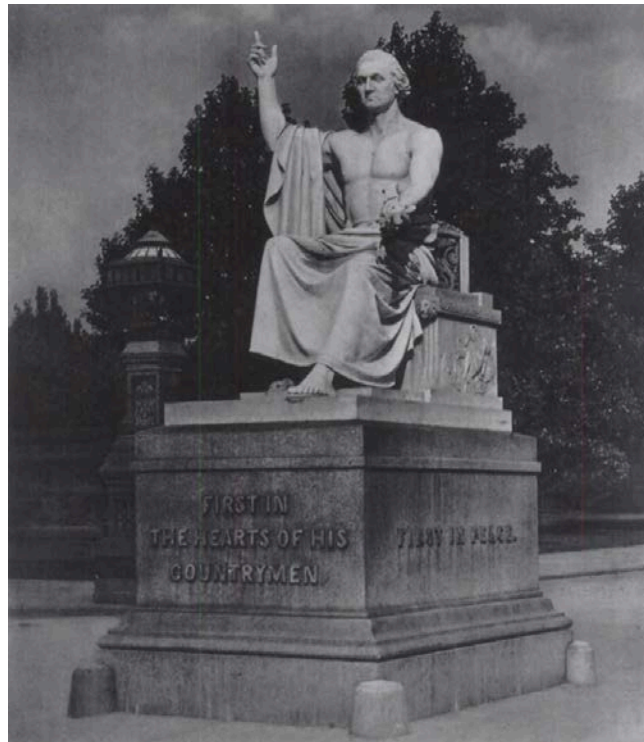
**Figure 18:** Horatio Greenough, *Washington Throne Detail of Christopher Columbus and Hercules Relief*



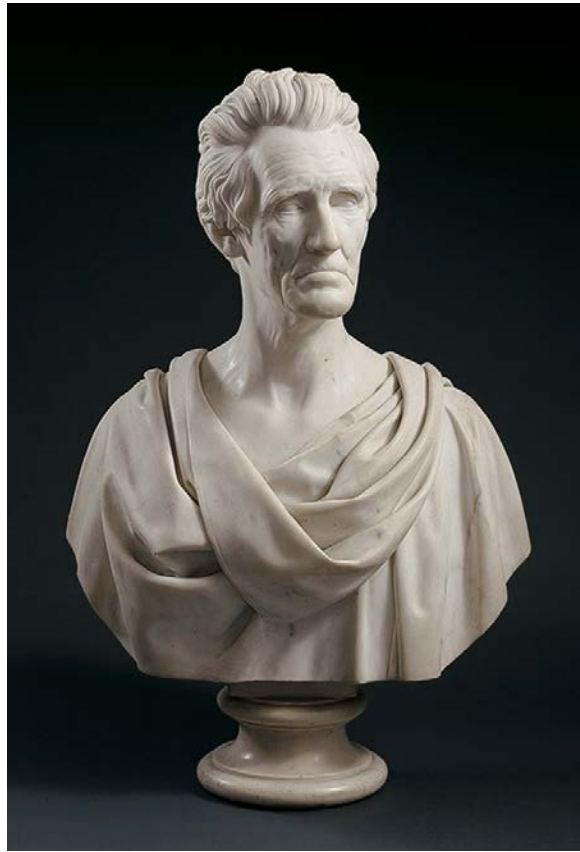
**Figure 19:** Photograph of Greenough's sculpture in the eastern grounds circa late 1800s or early 1900s



**Figure 20:** Photograph of Greenough's sculpture in the eastern grounds during Rutherford B. Hayes' inauguration in 1877



**Figure 21:** Photograph of Greenough's sculpture in the eastern gardens circa late 1800s or early 1900s



**Figure 22:** Hiram Powers, *Andrew Jackson*, 1839, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, New York