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Source: *American Art*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 2007), pp. 20-41

Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/521888>

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Copley's Cargo

Boy with a Squirrel *and the Dilemma of Transit*

Jennifer L. Roberts

John Singleton Copley's *Henry Pelham (Boy with a Squirrel)* is best known, indeed almost exclusively known, for its role in a famous transatlantic tale. In 1765, when the picture was made, Copley (1738–1815) was the premier portrait painter to the mercantile elite in the colonial city of Boston. His considerable skills had been largely self-taught; although he was familiar with European art through prints and theory books, he had had little in the way of formal instruction, few opportunities to study oil paintings in the flesh, and had never ventured outside New England. Flush with success at age twenty-seven as a provincial portraitist but determined someday to attain the exalted status of a history painter on the European model, he wanted to know how his work would be received by the arbiters of aesthetics on the other side of the Atlantic. To that end, he created *Boy with a Squirrel* (frontispiece), packed it up, and shipped it to London for exhibition at the Society of Artists.¹ Months later, he received the welcome news that no less an authority than Britain's leading painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, had called his work a "very wonderfull Performance." Although Reynolds and his colleagues noticed a certain overzealous attention to detail, a certain "over minuteness"

in the composition, they recognized Copley as a precocious talent and encouraged him to come to London for more training as soon as possible.²

The transatlantic triumph of *Boy with a Squirrel* has long served as an ordinary episode in histories of American art. Because the painting's exhibition in London brought Copley's work into direct juxtaposition with more cosmopolitan fare, the tale of its passage has frequently anchored broader comparative studies attempting to discover emerging distinctions between American and European art. Many discussions of the painting have used its largely positive (if somewhat bemused) reception overseas to establish and legitimate the protonationalist roots of a homegrown American empiricism, a uniquely "unspoiled vision" attributable only to painters in America.³

In each of these narratives (whatever their ultimate aim), *Boy with a Squirrel* is rightly seen to derive its historical significance from its transatlantic relay. But in every such narrative that relay itself has been almost completely elided. In each telling, the painting's passage across the ocean is for all intents and purposes treated synoptically: Copley sends, Reynolds receives, Copley hears back—all in the space of a sentence or

John Singleton Copley, *Henry Pelham (Boy with a Squirrel)*, 1765. Oil, 30 3/8 x 25 1/8 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of the artist's great granddaughter. Photo © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

two. The massive expanse of the Atlantic Ocean, its peculiar navigational and cultural contours, the long delays it imposed on Copley's anxious aesthetic transaction—none of these obstacles has been considered relevant to the close interpretation of the painting. The painting remains always unproblematically present, both to the historians and to the protagonists; the vast breadth of the Atlantic passes in the blink of an eye. These spatiotemporal compressions have the implicit effect of representing the space between Boston and London as an inert gap, a predictable intermission, that remains external to all art-historical concerns and leaves no trace on Copley's painting. I will argue here, by contrast, that *Boy with a Squirrel* cannot be understood without taking the protraction and difficulty of its long-distance transit into account. Indeed, the painting is ultimately about its own transportation and the uncertainties attending it. I hope to show that the practical challenges of shipping a canvas from America to London in the mid-eighteenth century—how to pack it, how to track it, and so forth—were uniquely aligned with a larger set of period preoccupations, in theories of exchange, illusion, perspective, and perception, with the conveyance of sensory information. Copley was intimately familiar with both painting and shipping. *Boy with a Squirrel* seems to have compelled him to explore, even if only half-consciously, the intersection of the two practices.

This essay is part of an ongoing study of the dispatch and transit of pictures—their literal movement—across and around the Anglo-American landscape in the century preceding the Civil War. One of my goals in developing this highwayman's art history—intercepting pictures while they are on the roads, on the seas, on the move—is to find ways of expressing how geographic and temporal intervals affect strategies of

artistic production. Thirty years ago, Pierre Bourdieu implored scholars looking back on historical exchanges not to “abolish the intervals” that originally separated events. He argued that the deferral and uncertainty that thoroughly shape all human activity are precisely what the analytical eye of hindsight tends to obliterate, and that historians must “reintroduce time [and by extension space], with its rhythm, its orientation, its irreversibility” into the analysis of cultural production. To examine *Boy with a Squirrel* in transit, and the challenges attending its movement, is one way to help reinstate the formative intervals that determined the development of eighteenth-century art and material culture in America. It is a task that seems increasingly urgent today, as our own telecommunicative experience of space and time approaches instantaneity. For if we imagine the Atlantic and other interstitial eighteenth-century spaces along the lines of our own experience, as non- or negative spaces, as abstract, merely categorical or cartographical boundaries, we will fail to see—even to seek to see—the strategies that Copley and other cultural agents devised to navigate them. In Copley's case, we will fail to see the ways in which the Atlantic functioned as a medium. In reality, the medium of *Boy with a Squirrel* is not just “oil on canvas”; it is “oil on canvas on merchant ship on Atlantic Ocean.” The ocean in 1765 subjected Copley's image to a unique set of social, mercantile, military, and navigational conditions. Like any other artistic medium, it configured the possibilities for meaning and expression. The theorist Nelson Goodman wrote in 1968 that “such properties as weighing ten pounds or being in transit from Boston to New York on a certain day hardly affect the status of [a] painting in its representational scheme.” I will argue the contrary here; weight and time and transit pervade Copley's painting not only in



1 John Singleton Copley, *Nicholas Boylston*, 1767. Oil, 49 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Bequest of Ward Nicholas Boylston. Photo, Rick Stafford © President and Fellows of Harvard College

its material configuration but also in its design and iconography.⁴

Boy with a Squirrel is a rich candidate for this kind of “vehicular” analysis because Copley created it specifically, and deliberately, in order to be dispatched.⁵ The care that Copley invested in the painting (a portrait likeness of his half brother, Henry Pelham) was considerable. It is difficult to overestimate the significance the picture would have held for him: it was to serve as his calling card to a group of artists whom he idolized and hoped someday to equal, and its success or failure in London would determine the course of his ambitions

as a painter. *Boy with a Squirrel* was Copley’s first major noncommissioned work, his first exhibition painting, and the first canvas he produced for transport across the Atlantic. In painting for these purposes, moreover, he departed radically from his customary pictorial habits.

As befits its singular status, the painting diverges significantly in compositional terms from Copley’s earlier work. For example, we might note that in no other image did Copley feature a drinking glass (in period terms, a “tumbler”). Granted, the ostensible purpose of the glass here is simply to showcase the artist’s hard-won technical skills in rendering transparency and reflection. But surely a glass of water is a curiously calculated object to include in one’s first transatlantic painting, especially since the boy’s hand gesture, and with it the delicate suspensional arc of the squirrel’s chain, carefully spans the precise diameter of the lip. Whatever else we might say about this humble motif, it undeniably involves the passage of a sensory chain across a body of water and thereby presents in microcosm the plight or task of the painting itself. In addition, the disposition of the background drapery is unusual. Whereas most of Copley’s earlier (and later) portraits tended to follow the Van Dyckian convention of arranging drapery as a charismatic decorative threshold opening to or carving out a space behind the sitter (compare his *Nicholas Boylston*; fig. 1), here Copley draws the drapery flatly and symmetrically behind the boy’s head, aggressively blocking off the background rather than engineering a relation between the sitter and a larger setting. The curtain does not function, then, as “a stock stage-set borrowed from the imitators of Sir Peter Lely” (as biographer James Flexner put it) but rather as an intentional digression from such conventions.⁶ The curtain constrains the portrait to a relieflike space, encouraging

2 John Singleton Copley, *Nathaniel Allen*, 1763. Oil, 50 x 40 in. Honolulu Academy of Arts, Frank C. Atherton Memorial Fund Purchase



a closed system of internal relationships without recessive outlet.

The narrow space permits and supports Copley's turn to a profile format in *Boy with a Squirrel*. Neither the significance nor the strangeness of this choice has been widely acknowledged. Profiles were unprecedented in Copley's work up to that time, and they were unusual in finished oil portraits of the mid-

eighteenth century more generally.⁷ The painting is also Copley's first in which the image hinges spatially around a highly polished table surface. Copley had begun experimenting with such tables—in his *Nathaniel Allen* (fig. 2), *Samuel Phillips Savage* (1764), and *Mrs. Samuel Waldo* (1764–65), for example—but only with this painting did he start to use the motif as a metapictorial device rather



3 John Singleton Copley, *Boy with Squirrel, John Bee Holmes*, 1765. Oil, 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Lent by H. Richard Dietrich Jr.

than a discrete studio prop. Here the surface of the table entirely transects the horizontal expanse of the canvas, mediating between the space of the viewer and that of the sitter as well as producing reflections that underpin the structure of the composition and contribute to the internal patterning already noted. While Copley would return to this motif in later works like *Paul Revere* (1768), *Mrs. Humphrey Devereaux* (1771), and *Mrs. Richard Skinner (Dorothy Wendell)* (1772), he first invented it for *Boy with a Squirrel*.

The squirrel is also worth some preliminary remarks. As scholars Paul Staiti and Roland Fleischer have

shown, chained squirrels held daintily by women and children were fairly common motifs in colonial American portraits. As emblematic devices, they signified diligence and patience as well as the proper Lockean education of the sitter, whose refinement was indicated by his or her successful domestication of the wild creature.⁸ In 1765 Copley produced two other squirrel paintings: *Boy with Squirrel, John Bee Holmes* (fig. 3) and *Mrs. Theodore Atkinson*. These seem experimental when compared with *Boy with a Squirrel*; neither of the other squirrels is as precisely integrated into the composition as the one in the Pelham picture. Note, too, that Henry Pelham's pet—not the sitter—is the creature that makes visual contact with the viewer. The London-bound squirrel serves a pivotal structural role and bears exceptional powers of formal condensation that I will address more fully as my argument unfolds.

Copley's Atlantic

Of course, the squirrel in *Boy with a Squirrel* is not just any squirrel. It is a flying squirrel (explaining the delicate ruff of skin along its belly), a species native to North America with obvious thematic resonances for travel and movement. These connotations were overtly acknowledged in the eighteenth century; both "squirrel" and "flying squirrel" were common names for the schooners, sloops, and men-of-war that passed regularly through Boston in the 1750s and 1760s.⁹

These resonances would not have been lost on Copley, who lived in a historical moment and in a community in which people knew the names of ships; Copley understood the metaphoric and mechanical dimensions of the shipping world to which he would be entrusting his painting. He was born in Boston in 1738, when the city was the undisputed



4 James Carwitham after William Burgis, *A South East View of the Great Town of Boston in New England in America*. Colored engraving probably issued after 1764. I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library. Photo, New York Public Library/Art Resource, New York

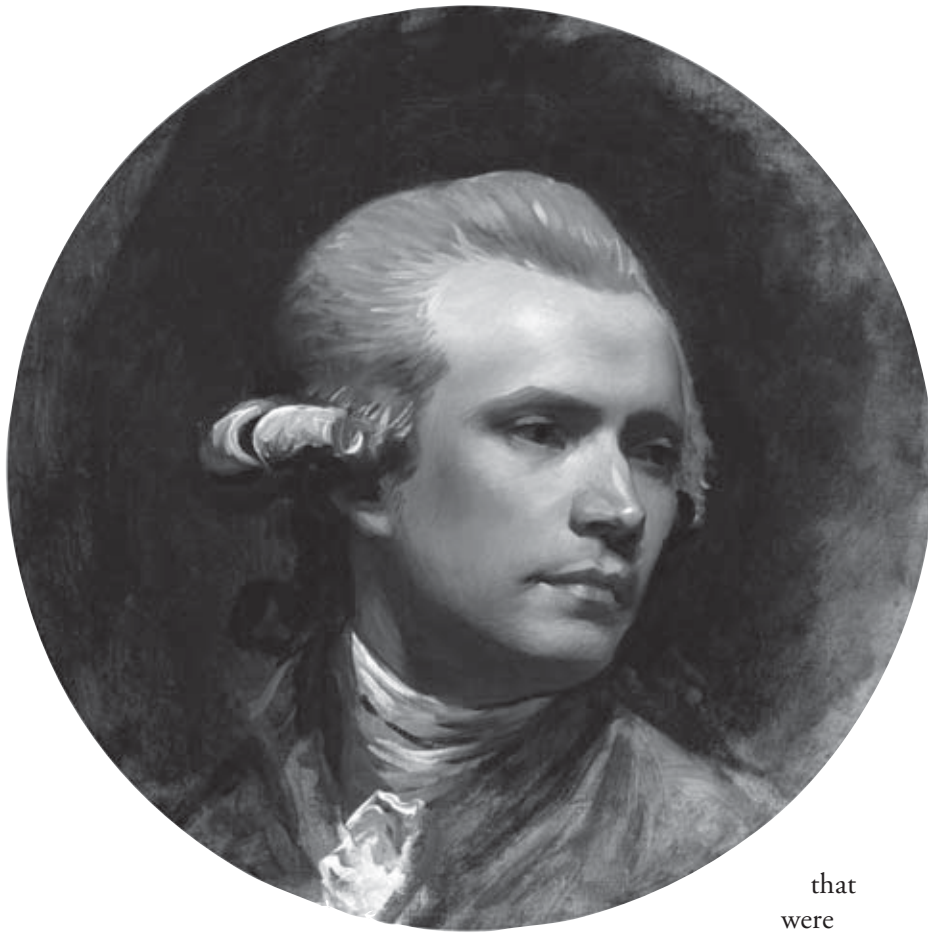
center of American maritime commercial activity (fig. 4). The first ten years of his life were spent in his mother's tobacco shop on Long Wharf, an immense pier jutting (then as now) a quarter mile into the center of Boston Harbor. Copley would have awakened each morning to a noisy, smelly, colorful panorama of merchant shipping activity. In his twenties (having relocated inland by a few blocks), he built his painting career on commissions from prosperous merchant families like the Hancocks, who ran the largest transatlantic shipping firm in Boston. Four years after painting *Boy with a Squirrel* he would marry the daughter of the Boston agent for the British East India Company.¹⁰ In short, Copley's life and livelihood depended, in virtually every particular, on the profitable transportation of objects, persons, and information across and around the Atlantic Ocean.

In the eighteenth century the entire British Empire was what Joseph Roach has called an "oceanic intercultural." It was a culture whose very survival, as well as its habits of thought and expression, was bound up in the effects that oceanic transport had on objects, communication, and community.

Those effects derived largely from the long delays that determined all transoceanic communication. Even without pirate attacks, navigational errors, or bad weather, it took at least a month to cross the Atlantic. This delay was hardly predictable or rational (hence the inadvisability of treating it as an abstract intermission). Passage was asymmetrical. The distance between Boston and London was roughly 2,900 miles, but crossing the ocean eastward toward London took roughly 4 weeks while traveling toward Boston, against the westerly currents, took on average almost twice as long, 7 1/2 weeks.

The Atlantic also served as a temporal scrambling agent, frustrating the linear sequencing and coordination of events. Five ships launched from London in a particular order, for example, did not necessarily arrive at Boston in their original sequence. As Ian Steele has shown, we can see the effects of this discontinuity, among other places, in early-eighteenth-century colonial newspapers, whose editors had to devise elaborate mechanisms for contending with the fact that shiploads of information were spaced irregularly and that news "resolutely refused to come in order."¹¹

These long, uncertain intervals meant that concerns about decay, delay, and mistransmission affected every form of transatlantic communication. On both sides of the sea, people struggled to find ways to minimize the effects of time and passage on transported objects, to predict or foresee distant conditions, to produce at least illusions, if not realities, of simultaneity and copresence between far-flung correspondents. Consider the drive to design faster ships and improve navigation; the preference for light, flat, or desiccated cargoes like textiles, mezzotints, and tea leaves; or the British actuarial, speculative, and fiduciary systems



5 John Singleton Copley, *Self-Portrait*, 1780–84. Oil, 22 ¼ in. diameter. National Portrait Gallery, Gift of the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation with matching funds from the Smithsonian Institution. Photo © 2006 Smithsonian Institution, Courtesy, National Portrait Gallery

that were developed to help manage the risks of crossing the transatlantic gap (and that would eventually evolve into the circulatory systems of global capitalism).¹²

These risks were also Copley's risks in the years before his own removal to London (fig. 5); the ambient threat of destruction, decay, and miscarriage applied to his cargo as much as to any other. The Copley-Pelham family papers (like those of any eighteenth-century transatlantic family) are full of correspondence about lost and delayed transatlantic messages and gifts, and much of Copley's correspondence with clients discusses damages incurred (and anxieties about potential damage) in shipments between coastal cities. His letters pertaining specifically to *Boy with a Squirrel* demonstrate that he was worried about a "changing of the

colours" of the paint during the long sea passage to London. Other letters announce the outright loss of his works in transit. In fact, while he was busy working on *Boy with a Squirrel*, a group of his pastels was lost in a wreck en route to Halifax: "I am sorry to have the Mortification to tell You," says the March 1765 letter breaking the news, that "the Vessel . . . was lost about 30 leagues to the westward of this port, and your drawings, together with several other things, have become the prey of the barbarous Inhabitants."¹³

The successful shipment of cargo required more than safe passage across the water. One of the primary problems transatlantic merchants faced was the fact that information moved no faster than freight. Since it was impossible to gain current knowledge of the market conditions on the other side of the ocean, the anticipated exchange rate for a shipload of goods often needed to be renegotiated when the materials reached their destination. Commodities could not negotiate for themselves, so human agents had to accompany cargo. In the English Atlantic during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, so-called supercargoes were sent across the ocean along with the cargo to oversee its stowage, manage its marketing at the other side, and report the results back to the sender. For large shipping outfits, the supercargo system was often augmented by a group of trusted agents resident in various ports who would receive and handle the arriving goods. Every object sent across the Atlantic needed, in essence, a superadded network of intelligence.¹⁴

In conveying *Boy with a Squirrel*, Copley assembled his own team of mercantile-aesthetic negotiators, who were partially, but not fully, successful in delivering the painting to the Society of Artists. He first gave the painting to

Mr. Roger Hale, who included it with his baggage in the ship to London and served therefore as a kind of supercargo. Once across the Atlantic, Hale delivered it to Captain R. G. Bruce, a merchant navy friend of Copley's then living in London. Bruce conveyed it to a certain Lord Buchan (a.k.a. Lord Cardross) who, fancying himself a familiar of Reynolds since he had sat for a portrait a year earlier, took it to Reynolds's studio. What next transpired remains unclear, but Copley's name was somehow imperfectly transmitted to Reynolds, and when the painting was shown at the Society of Artists in 1766, it was mislabeled as having been made by "William Copley."¹⁵

If nothing else, the painting's transatlantic adventure confirmed the fragility of the link between cargo and information during this period, and the difficulty of ensuring that any object sent across the ocean would be properly marketed, translated, or otherwise interpreted. It also helps us to understand the extent of the painting's imbrication in the maritime world and its systems, for at every point in its passage the painting was handled by naval intermediaries. This is true even of its historiographic passage from the eighteenth century onward. Consider the fact that Captain Bruce not only did the work of collecting Copley's painting when it reached London but also, once it was exhibited, eavesdropped on the conversations of viewers, interviewed Reynolds about the merits of the work, and reported back to Copley what he had learned. All that we know today about Reynolds's analysis of *Boy with a Squirrel*—including his piquant period statements about the picture's "wonderful" qualities—comes from the pen of a merchant captain rather than directly from Reynolds himself. One of the key primary documents in early criticism of American art is, in a sense, a form of naval art criticism.

Pictorial Mobility

Added to the physical uncertainties of transatlantic shipping, Copley faced enormous aesthetic uncertainties. He knew that he could not send the kind of portrait he was accustomed to painting. Although portraiture was the only marketable genre in New England at the time and consequently the only genre in which he had developed expertise, Copley's eager reading of European art theory texts indicated that portraiture could not produce the kind of abstract generalizations that elevated the Grand Manner, which he longed someday to practice. "An History-painter paints man in general," Reynolds would later say, "a Portrait-Painter, a particular man, and consequently a defective model."¹⁶ Copley knew that a portrait like his marvelous *Epes Sargent* (fig. 6), to speak metaphorically, would not travel well. Notwithstanding the painting's obvious thematic emphasis on corporeality and foundational stability, it would be dragged down in an aesthetic sense by its specificity and singularity; these qualities would lash it to the particular time and place of its production.

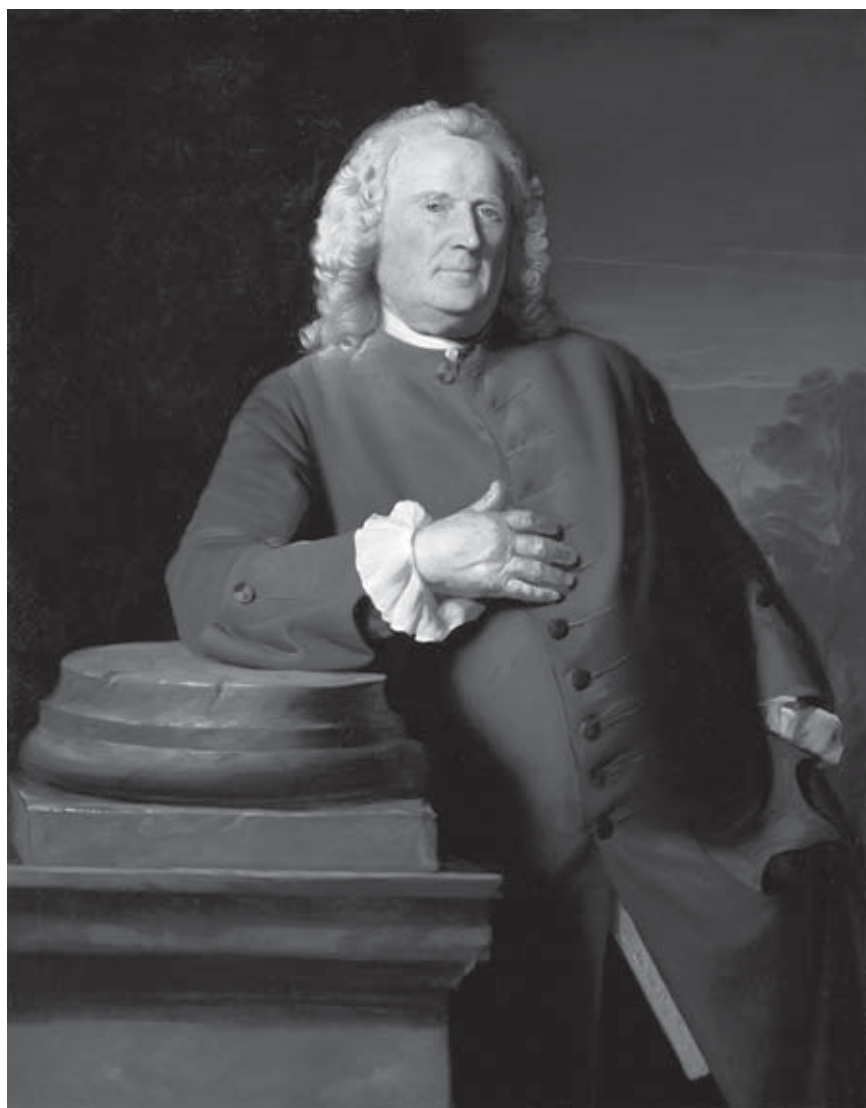
Indeed, as art historian Margaretta Lovell has recently argued, portraiture's important role in eighteenth-century New England depended upon its immobility. Once painted, portraits had a negligible exchange value and would not likely be sold. They were, to use an anthropological term, terminal commodities. Unlike other kinds of possessions whose increasing fungibility in a market economy made them less appropriate to serve as lasting material ties in fragmenting modern families, the personal specificity of portraits made them more likely to stay in families for generations. They reinforced familial—particularly patrilineal—ties. This helps explain why, despite the wealth of porcelain, silver, and other refined manufactures making the transatlantic passage, oil portraits at midcentury were not common cargo.

Almost alone among what historian T. H. Breen has famously called “the baubles of Britain,” portraits were not widely imported to New England, and they were certainly not widely exported from New England. Portraits, in a sense, functioned in eighteenth-century America as adhesives. When painting *Boy with a Squirrel*, Copley would have had to invent ways of overcoming the seemingly fundamental intransitivity of oil portraits. Copley had to work to make his painting move.¹⁷

These imperatives help account for Copley’s unusual choice of the profile format in the painting. *Boy with a Squirrel* is the only single-sitter profile

painting he produced in America.¹⁸ Although neoclassical profiles would become standard in the later eighteenth century, they were rare in Europe, and exceedingly rare in America, at this early date of 1765. Copley’s use of the profile does several things at once. First, it severs the implied eye contact between sitter and viewer. In turning away, the sitter becomes a hardened, reified portrait-object, and the viewer’s own gaze is perpetually deflected. The profile, therefore, distances and generalizes the portrait, helping to rid it of its particularist ballast. At the same time, the profile removes the painting from the realm of strict portraiture and places it in the sphere of other genres. A probable if indirect inspiration for Copley’s profile here is the work of the eighteenth-century French painter Jean Siméon Chardin, whose earlier genre paintings of boys at tables were occasionally reproduced in British periodicals (fig. 7).¹⁹ But although Chardin’s model is compelling, it does not fully explain the resonance of the profile in *Boy with a Squirrel*, which also drew on an emerging connection in British art between the profile format and the portrait medal. When profile views did appear at this time in British art, they commonly served commemorative and/or honorific purposes. They involved distinct allusions to ancient numismatic imagery, and many were deliberately rendered to look like ancient portrait medals inserted into broader compositions. Copley almost certainly knew of portrait medals from a work by Boston engraver Nathaniel Hurd (fig. 8), a friend whose portrait he was painting around the time he was working on *Boy with a Squirrel*. Dated 1762, it has been identified by curator Ellen Miles as the first image produced in the American colonies to incorporate profile portraits. Notice that Hurd makes no attempt to integrate the spatial world of the carefully framed, medal-like profiles with any sort of existing composition on the page. He represents them *in clipeus*,

6 John Singleton Copley, *Epes Sargent*, ca. 1760. Oil, 49 7/8 x 40 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of the Avalon Foundation. Image © 2007 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.





which, as British scholar Marcia Pointon has explained in her work on eighteenth-century portraiture, is the nested framing of an image within a cartouche, as if it had been transposed or “clipped” from one place and inserted into another. Hurd suggested this procedure when, in the advertisement for the engraving, he noted that if cut along the circular borders, the portraits could be made “fit for Gentlemen and Ladies to put in their Watches.”²⁰

The *imago clipeata* tradition dates from antiquity and likely derives from the practice of soldiers bearing the emperor’s portrait on a circular shield before them as they moved. Pointon argues that mid-eighteenth-century profiles were so closely associated with the *clipeus* form that they adopted its inherent structural significance as a “bearing-forth” of the image. The profile, in other words, was understood to be a transported vision. It was structurally identified as an image from elsewhere, a moving and mobile picture, detached from any coherent relation to a specific ground.²¹

These implications of detachment, displacement, and distance were reinforced by the classical connotations of profile portraiture in the eighteenth century. As is well known, profiles were closely associated with Pliny’s account in the *Natural History* of the origin of painting, in which a Corinthian maiden, whose lover was about to depart for war, traced the outline of his profile on the wall. This anecdote was common currency in cultural discourse of the 1760s; it became a frequent subject of British painters by the 1770s and an animating idea behind the popularity of silhouettes and silhouette cutting later in the century (fig. 9).²² In each case, the profile became a token of loss and departure.

It seems logical to suggest that Copley used the profile here in order to borrow its functions of portability and passage. The profile serves as a form of pictorial packaging—a way of



preparing a portrait for geographic and temporal displacement. In his article “The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism,” James Bunn has argued that the profusion of transported objects arriving in England from the ever-expanding reaches of the global empire required that these objects be “cauterized” from the local and specific contexts that defined their original meaning.²³ I would suggest that Copley’s profile serves as a pictorial version of that globalizing commodity operation. Inasmuch as its deployment was inseparable from themes of displacement, the profile was itself a form of cauterized portraiture. It permits the painting to enter an abstract space of transmission and exchange.

And speaking of exchange, the profile also draws the painting into the associational orbit of what is perhaps the most mobile and circulatory of all objects, namely, the coin. This connection is so essential to the transatlantic relay of *Boy with a Squirrel* that it is appropriate to

call the painting a “numismatic profile.” During the eighteenth century, as British culture continued to grapple with the advent of modern finance, the money economy, and the attendant volatility of property and value, the semiotic function of coins and other currency was a topic of intense debate.²⁴ Commonly discussed was the purported capacity of coinage to serve as a stable, unimpeachable, and universal form of transmission. Ancient coins were understood to have bridged space and time within sprawling empires. As David Alvarez has recently argued, Whig theorists like Joseph Addison showed “a great deal of interest in how information can be transmitted without the risk of interpretation” and turned to the numismatic image as “a superior method of communication” that could provide a direct connection to antiquity by virtue of its compelling aesthetic force. This had been neatly reinforced for moderns by John Locke, who, in his second treatise on government, argued

that money circumvents time-space limitations because it is portable and does not decay.²⁵ It serves as a reliable storage and transportation medium for value.

Although the need to bridge the Atlantic may have led Copley to appeal to the transitive and generalizing properties of the coin, this does not mean that *Boy with a Squirrel* functions in a manner neatly equivalent or fully complicit with coinage per se. Any overt allusion to specie would, of course, be anathema to the proper practice of fine art, which in the British eighteenth-century context defined itself in polar opposition to vulgar commercial interests. Copley’s painting is closer in spirit to other, contemporaneous cultural productions that drew upon

- 7 Jean Siméon Chardin, *The House of Cards*, 1740. 32 x 26 in. Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy. Photo, Scala/Art Resource, New York
- 8 Nathaniel Hurd, *Britons Behold the Best of Kings*, 1762. Colored engraving, 4 7/16 x 5 7/8 in. American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts
- 9 Joseph Wright, *The Corinthian Maid*, 1782–84. Oil, 41 7/8 x 51 1/2 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Paul Mellon Collection. Image © 2007 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



the fluency and mobility of currency to imagine narratives of global connection. Consider Joseph Addison's well-known essay "Adventures of a Shilling" (1710), in which a coin speaks in a "soft Silver Sound" about its life. The shilling describes its birth in a Peruvian silver mine and then its various owners and the objects for which it was exchanged. Addison's tale was an early example of the so-called circulation narratives or It-narratives, popular throughout Britain and the American colonies in the eighteenth century, in which a series of events are related from the perspective of an inanimate object (most often a piece of currency) that is exchanged between disparate individuals. Other examples included *The Adventures of a Rupee* (fig. 10), *Adventures of a Bank Note*, *Adventures of a Pincushion*, and *The Genuine Memoirs and Most Surprising Adventures of a Very Unfortunate Goose-Quill*. These fictional currencies are granted the power of memory in order to imagine new forms of social linkage through space and time. They help us see that *Boy with a Squirrel* emerged from a cultural moment in which the agency of circulating objects was being actively explored in the process of binding together a far-flung empire.²⁶

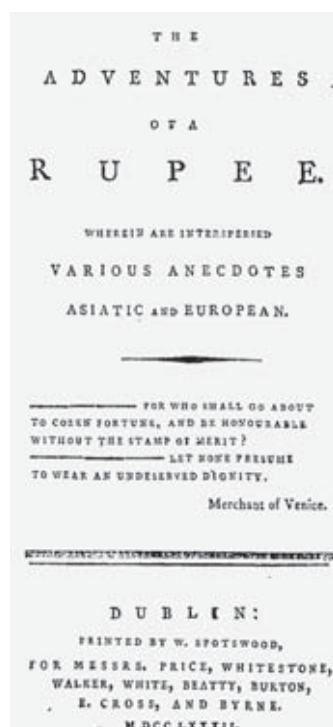
If Pelham's profile allows *Boy with a Squirrel* to adopt some of the vehicular powers of numismatic objects, the squirrel itself also contributes to the painting's circulatory agency. Copley's precise rendering of the flying squirrel, a species not found in Britain, gives the painting a natural-historical interest. One of the most active arenas of exchange in the mid-eighteenth century was the network of letters, shipped specimens, and images of specimens that constituted the vibrant practice of transatlantic natural history. As Susan Scott Parrish has demonstrated in her book *American Curiosity*, these materials became an epistemic currency that allowed American colonists to enter other chains of durational, sociable learning and exchange with European metropolitan

centers. Shipped specimens functioned more like gifts than commodities, since they compelled responses and counter-gifts from their receivers in London, inaugurating an ongoing social intercourse. Moreover, these offerings had the effect of creating lateral rather than hierarchical relationships between periphery and center, since they were highly desirable to urban scientists who could not travel to America themselves. In sending his painting to the Society of Artists, Copley had no established artistic exchange networks to draw on (colonial painters were not regularly shipping specimens of their work to official societies in London). But he was surrounded by colonists who regularly submitted natural-history specimens to the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge (usually referred to simply as the Royal Society). These specimen exchanges produced effects analogous to those that Copley hoped to achieve in his exchange with the Society of Artists. If, as Jules Prown has suggestively claimed, Copley sent *Boy with a Squirrel* to London to begin a "correspondence course" with better-trained painters there, he might well have appealed to the demonstrated networking power of the exotic natural-history object. Copley's squirrel helped to code the painting as a sociable specimen of transatlantic exchange as well as to trigger particular habits of reception in his London viewers.²⁷

Perceptual Delivery

Thus far I have examined Copley's "navigational" procedures on two interconnected levels: the physical level, on which he took steps to ensure the safe and accurate delivery of the painting as an object; and the emblematic and allegorical one, on which the mode and content of his representational program (the numismatic profile and the squirrel-specimen) help code the painting as a

10 Title page, *The Adventures of a Rupee* (Dublin, 1782)



mobile carrier of value and transatlantic relationality. I now turn to the painting's most fundamental mechanisms of delivery—its play between surface and depth in conveying the impression of lifelike form—as similarly informed by the context of transit. In his manipulation of spatial and sensory illusion in *Boy with a Squirrel*, Copley performed what I will call a perceptual delivery. In

(or even the ruffle of his sleeve). It also reiterates precisely the shape of the boy's eye. The shape to the right of the head suggests a similar displacement, mirroring the folds of the ear but also, in its angle and hinging, the boy's mouth. It is as if Copley were attempting to show a transition, in the move from curtain to profile, from precursory graphic, or even diagrammatic, forms to a vivid, rounded



11 Detail of John Singleton Copley, *Henry Pelham (Boy with a Squirrel)*

doing so, he drew heavily on the empiricist philosophy of his time while also connecting his humble shipping project to the sensory mechanics of transatlantic refinement in the eighteenth-century British Empire.

Progressing from the curtain in the background to the sharp table corner jutting into the viewer's space in the foreground, the painting exhibits a series of striking spatial conversions. It shifts from an image of a planar, two-dimensional surface to an impression of a fully rounded world. Simultaneously, along the same axis, it leads the viewer through a process of sensory concentration—moving from an image of disconnected, heterogeneous sensation in the curtain and profile to a rendering of a synthesized sensorium in the body of the squirrel. To begin with, there are strange markings spread across the background drapery (fig. 11) that resemble parts of the boy's body. The fold in the curtain to the left of the face mirrors the delicate crook of his forefinger as well as the curve of his lower palm

figure. The curtain inaugurates a transformation from abstract, flat signs to an evocation of bodily plenitude.

But Pelham's profile is still quite flat, and Copley has evoked the boy as a sensory being in such a way that the youth seems to retain some of the scattered or diffracted qualities of the markings in the drapery behind him. As in any profile rendering, his eye is cleaved from his ear—the two organs on perpendicular trajectories separated by an expanse of cheek. In other words, Pelham looks in one direction and listens in another. This, along with the seemingly distracted way in which his hand fiddles with the squirrel's chain, helps explain why his attitude has often been described as one of daydream or reverie. Pelham's head may be pinned to the canvas, but his mind, Copley suggests, is elsewhere. These dispersive effects starkly differentiate Copley's painting from Chardin's (fig. 7), in which the boy's absorbed attention to his task helps to unify and concentrate the composition overall.²⁸

Pelham's sensory distraction, in turn, decenters the viewer of the painting, whose gaze at the portrait head cannot be met by the boy and alights instead on his almost outlandishly conspicuous ear. There is much to be said about this ear and its emphatic place in the composition (note that the edge of the ear echoes precisely the curve of the squirrel's ruff). The ear might be seen as calling to mind Copley's own fragmented and incomplete perceptual relationship to the painting as it traveled. The painting was to be sent to London for critique. Copley, stuck in Boston, knew that people would be standing in front of the painting, speaking about it. The ear suggests a straining

after those voices that Copley himself could not hear, and the painting might be said to function as a wishful listening device. Whatever its specific resonances for Copley, Pelham's ear replicates the sensory fragmentation and longing that characterized transatlantic communication during this period.

The ear would also have been a brazen, and perhaps even impertinent, image of sensory partiality for Copley's most important viewer in London: Sir Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds (fig. 12), as was well known, had been partially deaf since the early 1750s—he walked around London with a large silver ear trumpet.²⁹ Regardless of Copley's intentions, Pelham's ear may have reminded Reynolds of his own misaligned affective sphere; Copley's profile not only pronounced its own sensory disunity but did so for a viewer who was likely to recognize and reflect on it.

Yet even as the painting proclaims a state of sensory dispersion, it also pictures the conversion of that fragmentation into a unitary form. This recuperation occurs as the viewer's gaze moves forward from the profile to the figure of the squirrel. Its compact body concentrates the scattered, isolated, and incomplete sensory signals that characterize the rest of the image. The formal kinship between the squirrel and the boy invites comparison between the two figures. The gentle curve of the squirrel's shoulder echoes the boy's shoulder (as well as the back of his hand), the point of its nose picks up the triangular curve of the boy's jaw, and—most conspicuously, as mentioned earlier—the meticulously painted white-edged ruff of the squirrel's underbelly presents an exact retracing of the folds of the boy's ear. The squirrel reminds us of the boy. But the sensory marks that are disposed centrifugally in the boy are gathered, condensed, and even synesthetically conflated in the form of the squirrel.

12 Joshua Reynolds, *Self-Portrait as a Deaf Man*, 1775. Oil, 29 ½ x 24 ½ in. Tate Gallery, London. Photo, Tate Gallery/Art Resource, New York



Indeed, all of the senses seem concentrated, held, and present in the squirrel. Whereas the boy's hand, mouth, and nose are disconnected, for the squirrel touch, taste, and smell all meet in the knotted junction of claw, nose, and nut (which is itself joined in a compact triangle with eye and ears). The other visual conjunction or condensation that is permitted—and permitted only by the body of the squirrel—is the animal's gaze connecting the painting and the spectator. As if to apologize for the insults of the boy's distracted profile, the squirrel locates and recenters the viewer. The squirrel, rather like an internal, pictorial supercargo, delivers the bundle of sensory information to the viewer.

This "delivery" happens on the shiny table, which undergirds the image's transformation from a flat, profile projection to a three-dimensional illusion. Its reflective surface provides the painting with another mimetic plane that does not correspond with the picture plane; the tabletop, as if bearing additional witness to the scene before the viewer, insists on the multidimensionality and wholeness of the things on it. The table helps to reconstitute the flat-packed image into a dimensionally complete world.

Spatially, the painting moves from flatness to fullness; sensorially, from scatter to synthesis. This shift from flat background to vivid foreground is consistent with Copley's other American paintings. As Margaretta Lovell has shown, Copley's spatial composition during these years was based in chiaroscuro and figure-background layering rather than in linear perspective methods. The art books he read promoted modeling and a projective figuration as the primary means to lifelikeness: in his 1761 *Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting*, Daniel Webb encouraged painters to attain "that roundness or projection, by which

figures are disengaged from their fond, and spring, as it were, from canvas into life."³⁰ But Copley's application of these techniques in *Boy with a Squirrel* was hardly workmanlike or unreflective. The rhythmic exactitude with which he managed the illusion of springing from the fond—pulling congruent forms through a series of spatial transformations, as in the earlike shape that travels from the curtain, to the profile, to the squirrel's body—suggests otherwise. *Boy with a Squirrel* has a metapictorial intensity not evident in Copley's earlier work; it has the character of a demonstration or theorization of the evocative powers of painting itself.

One explanation for this is, of course, the picture's status as a demonstration piece: Copley shipped the painting to London as an advertisement of his artistic skills, his ability to produce a series of marks and patterns that could convey a powerful impression of reality. But there is more to it than that. For an intellectually ambitious painter like Copley, preparing to transmit a pictorial object across the ocean, the theme of sensory conveyance had a deeper resonance.

In its overt concern with sensation, *Boy with a Squirrel* participates in the broader eighteenth-century discourse of empiricism (the philosophy, founded by John Locke, that holds all knowledge to be based in sense experience rather than innate ideas). The intensity of observation in Copley's American paintings has often been associated with empiricism. As Barbara Novak recently noted, "the problem of how the external world is perceived is an urgent issue" in Copley's time. But while Novak gives Copley's approach a nativist bent, connecting it to an essentially American desire to get at the unvarnished truth of things, I would emphasize instead the status of empiricism as a quintessentially transatlantic project. Empiricist tracts grappled constantly with problems of

communication and perception across long distances. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were each consumed by the problem of distance, particularly its effect on the strength of sense impressions. Hume, to give just one example, wrote at length about how and why removals in space and time produce a “diminution of vivacity” in the perception and/or recollection of “foreign and remote objects.”³¹ It need hardly be said that these were exactly the kinds of questions that drove the development of communications and commodity exchange across the Atlantic Ocean and the other spatiotemporal gaps separating areas of the dilating British Empire. To send an object overseas was to confront, on an unavoidably practical level, the durations and extensions that populated empiricist philosophy.

Boy with a Squirrel may be particularly related to the writings of Anglican Bishop George Berkeley, who had special connections to Copley. Berkeley argued in his influential essays on vision that three-dimensional space cannot be perceived visually. For Berkeley, “what we immediately and properly see are only lights and colours in sundry situations and shades, and degrees of faintness and clearness, confusion and distinctness.” Distance and depth are not immediately seen; they require the learned coordination in the mind of these planar patterns of “lights and colours,” with the information gained by exploring the world tactilely.³²

Ann Gibson and Lucia Palmer have argued that Copley could not possibly have avoided Berkeley’s theories, neither in his general education in Boston nor in his independent education as a painter. Berkeley had traveled to New England in 1729 along with John Smibert, who then became good friends with the engraver Peter Pelham, Copley’s stepfather, in Boston. Smibert’s painting techniques were deeply impacted by Berkeley’s ideas, and it was in

Smibert’s studio and library that Copley learned much of what he knew about painting. These forensic and theoretical connections between Copley and Berkeley would hardly provide sufficient justification for making an interpretative connection with *Boy with a Squirrel*, of course, were there not already something in Copley’s own task that would compel him to tap into this particular corner of period philosophy. For Copley, preparing to send an image across the ocean, Berkeley’s questions about distance and sensory fragmentation were not dry, hypothetical cogitations. The questions in play in contemporary empiricism—What can be perceived at a distance, and how?—were direct, operational challenges for the young painter.³³

In Berkeley’s understanding, objects arrive at the threshold of consciousness as a disassembled set of sensory impressions; these impressions are then synthesized by the perceiver. A key aspect of Berkeley’s claim was his rule of the heterogeneity of the senses. The information I gain from looking at a water glass three feet away is purely visual; the information I acquire by touching it is purely tactile. These two bodies of information never cohere in reality (in fact, for Berkeley, the glass I see and the glass I touch are two entirely different objects); I can only collect the thought “glass at a distance of three feet” through a series of learned and habitual operations in the mind. In other words, a person must actively pull such an object into comprehension from an inchoate sensory “distance” that is beyond cognitive perception. *Boy with a Squirrel*, in its play between flatness and volume, surface and depth, and the disconnection and regathering of sensory information, showcases precisely this process.

Significantly, Berkeley turned to painting to help make his argument about sensory heterogeneity. He argued

that the visual illusions routinely proffered in paintings demonstrate that visual impressions are not naturally or necessarily connected to tangible objects. What looks, in a painting, like the object called “water glass” does not feel like a water glass; it feels instead like a flat surface coated with dried oil paint. “That there is no necessary connexion between visible and tangible ideas suggested by them, we need go no farther than the next looking-glass or picture to be convinced,” he commented.³⁴



13 Detail of John Singleton Copley, *Henry Pelham (Boy with a Squirrel)*

The glass and hand in *Boy with a Squirrel* are relevant in this regard (fig. 13). As noted earlier, Copley has painted the hand so that the curve of the chain appears to span exactly the diameter of the tumbler of water. This makes it appear, at first glance, that the hand hovers directly over the glass. But a closer inspection of this passage reveals this to be a visual deception, for in fact the hand is placed well behind the glass. This means that if one could slide the glass back so that it actually sat just underneath Pelham’s fingers, the glass would (visually) contract, and its diameter would no longer correspond to the measure provided by the chain.

The glass is placed too provocatively to be merely accidental. Copley has set it in precisely the position necessary to engender maximum confusion about its size and position. A nudge to the left or right would break the formal connection between the spread of the thumb and finger and the lip of the glass, and the glass would be immediately perceived as occupying a plane in front of the hand.

In his explanation of the heterogeneity of visual and tactile measurement, Berkeley argued that visual inches and tactile inches were categorically different. While an inch marked on a ruler will always remain the same when measured by a finger held against it, that same inch will “have a different visible extension” depending upon the distance of the ruler from the eye.³⁵ By suggesting that the visual span of the glass and the tactile span of the hand are equivalent, but then demonstrating that equivalence to be false, Copley invites his viewers to acknowledge that they have actively (if improperly) equated visual and tactile inches and, therefore, performed a synthetic act. The habitual synthetic operations that permit painterly illusionism erupt into uncanny visibility here on Copley’s table. The glass-hand puzzle interrupts the viewer’s easy and automatic apprehension of the image, revealing the operation that makes that illusionism possible.

The table surface on which all this occurs in the painting serves as an arena for sensory reckoning. In this sense, it recalls a celebrated table in the history of perceptual philosophy, namely, the one in Molyneux’s Problem, which functioned, arguably, as the primal scene of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century empiricism. Here is Locke’s description:

Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and t’other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man to be made to see: Quaere, Whether by his sight, before he touch’d them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the globe, which the cube.³⁶

Berkeley argued that the blind man would not be able to distinguish the



13 Mark Catesby, *Flying Squirrel*, 1743. Colored engraving from *Natural History*, vol. 2. Courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard College Library

two forms by sight; only after he had handled the objects and learned to associate their tactile contours with their visual contours could he recognize objects by looking at them. Molyneux's table is a charged surface across which the adjudication of sensory knowledge takes place. We might say the same for Copley's table, across which the viewer of the painting receives the visual impressions he offers. Although Copley hardly presumes the viewer's literal blindness, his picture engineers and allegorizes something like an experience of "first sight" (an experience, incidentally, that would also echo the literal scene of the painting's unpacking in London). This operation of "first sight," of the

encounter with data from a distance, is for both Berkeley and Copley a form of active re-collection and "incorporation" (to use Berkeley's term).³⁷ In moving from boy to squirrel, from background to foreground, the viewer actively translates flattened, heterogeneous, dismembered sensory information into whole, bounded bodies or objects. There is, to proffer a suitable anachronism, some assembly required.

Boy with a Squirrel, in its vivid staging of sensory reception, appealed not only to empiricist models of distance perception but also to more workaday processes of reception that pervaded social and economic life in colonial Boston. Indeed, what is perhaps most compelling about Copley's brand of empiricism is the way it mirrors the language of transatlantic commodity exchange and consumption in the colonial Atlantic world. Throughout this world, the transit and reception of products and information was a drama of dimensional conversion, expansion, and enlivenment. Consider architectural pattern books, in which the bodies of buildings in Europe are flattened, modularized, and atomized, then are resynthesized and reincorporated into habitable buildings upon arrival in America. Bolts of textiles unfold and recombine into refined ensembles on the bodies of colonists. Tea expands not on but within the bodies of colonists, its rehydration a literal sensory incorporation. Seeds inflate into plants. And prints into paintings: Copley routinely used imported prints of British and European artworks as portable templates for his own portraits, which he likewise "incorporated" by adding color, modeling, and the individual faces of his colonial sitters. As in Berkeley's learned vision, these activities were all manifestly social and socializing processes that bound far-flung members of the empire through conventional practices of synthesis and reception.³⁸

Copley's squirrel—breaking open and consuming a nut as if to echo the opening of the painting's own woody crate and its subsequent aesthetic consumption—serves as tutelary embodiment of this entire process. We can begin to see why Copley chose a flying squirrel for the painting. Not only is the body of the squirrel (when flying) the most perfect natural analogue imaginable of a stretched canvas in transit (fig. 13), but it is also a convertible and synthetic body that combines both flatness and fullness. On land, the body is whole and rounded, with the creature's senses concentrated and unified; in transmission, it is flat, its anatomy

14 John Singleton Copley, *Mrs. John Winthrop (Hannah Fayerweather)*, 1773. Oil, 35 ½ x 28 ¾ in. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Morris K. Jesup Fund



nearly unrecognizable; and on land again it effortlessly reconstitutes itself into its original form. How better to simulate the aims of the painting itself?

Copley's innovation in *Boy with a Squirrel* was to glimpse and perform an aesthetics of transit for the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, and he continued to develop its tropes in other paintings. The trans-canvas table surface recurs in many later American paintings, especially those that similarly engaged issues of transatlantic separation. *Mrs. Humphrey Devereux (Mary Charnock)* of 1771, for example, was painted for shipment to the American sitter's son in London. Copley would continue to develop his use of the tabletop as a locus for transatlantic sensory adjudication and dimensional conversion. In paintings like *Mrs. John Winthrop (Hannah Fayerweather)* (fig. 14), sitters offer objects for the viewer's contemplation. These objects tend to be presented as if in a process of exchange, transformation, or expansion; as art historian Paul Staiti has shown, the nectarine branch Mrs. Winthrop proudly displays was the result of a complex operation in which imported nectarine stock was grafted into American trees.³⁹ These transformative processes, in which shipped objects take on local embodiment in America, are replicated by their visual unfolding in the reflections on the surfaces of the tables.

Copley developed this rhetoric of transatlantic sensory reception for *Boy with a Squirrel*, when he was first confronted with the problem of shipping a painting overseas. Echoing many available discourses of transportation, exchange, and long-distance perception—from Addison's coins to Berkeley's reception theory—*Boy with a Squirrel* proposed a new aesthetic of transmission and transformation.

Notes

This essay is part of a longer chapter that I am developing for my book *Transporting Visions*. I would like to thank Jules Prown for inspiring my initial interest in Copley, and Ellen Miles, Margareta Lovell, Bryan Wolf, David Lubin, and Jane Kamensky for their extraordinarily generous commentary on drafts of this article.

- 1 For a general introduction to the painting, see Carrie Rebora Barratt, ed., *John Singleton Copley in America* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 214–19. For details on Copley's reading in art theory, see Jules David Prown, *John Singleton Copley* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), 1:16–17; and Susan Rather, "Carpenter, Tailor, Shoemaker, Artist: Copley and Portrait Painting around 1770," *Art Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (1997): 273. On the Society of Artists, a precursor to the Royal Academy of Arts, see Matthew Hargreaves, *Candidates for Fame: The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760–1791* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2006); and Mark Hallett, "Reynolds, Celebrity, and the Exhibition Space," in *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, ed. Martin Postle (London: Tate Publications, 2005), 35–47.
- 2 Joshua Reynolds, quoted in Captain R. G. Bruce to Copley, August 4, 1766, in John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, *Letters and Papers of John Singleton Copley and Henry Pelham, 1739–1776* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914), 41–42 (hereafter *Copley-Pelham Letters*).
- 3 For the quote, see James Thomas Flexner, *John Singleton Copley* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 13. For examples of these founding narratives, see esp. Barbara Novak, *American Painting of the Nineteenth Century: Realism, Idealism, and the American Experience* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 5–10; and John Wilmerding, *American Art, Pelican History of Art* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 38. In more recent Copley scholarship, less beholden to the rhetorical imperatives of the "American Mind" school, the centrality of *Boy with a Squirrel* has receded. Its transatlantic passage is still cited, however, as a measure of its colonial marginality, a marginality now read through more complex analyses of comparative refinement in a hybrid artisanal-mercantile culture. See esp. Paul Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," in Barratt, *John Singleton Copley in America*, 37–38; and Rather, "Carpenter, Tailor, Shoemaker, Artist," 275.
- 4 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977), 6. For the expanded concept of media, see Niklas Luhmann, "Medium and Form," in *Art as a Social System* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 102–32. Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 230.
- 5 In a letter to Benjamin West on November 12, 1766, Copley explains the overly precise paint handling of *Boy with a Squirrel* as deriving from the great "timidity" he felt while painting a picture to be presented "to the inspection of the first artists in the world." *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 50.
- 6 Flexner, *John Singleton Copley*, 1.
- 7 The only earlier profile Copley had done was the oil sketch of Pelham (private collection, ca. 1760) that became the basis for *Boy with a Squirrel*. On the rarity of profiles in Copley's work, see Barratt, *John Singleton Copley in America*, 214; in eighteenth-century portraiture more generally, see Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 46.
- 8 See Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," 64; and Roland Fleischer, "Emblems in Colonial American Painting," *American Art Journal* 20 (1988): 3–35.
- 9 See, for example, shipping notices as follows: *Boston Evening Post*, July 1, 1751, and December 4, 1752; *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, March 9, 1758; and *Boston News-Letter and New-England Chronicle*, March 7, 1765.
- 10 For biographical background, see Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," 26.
- 11 Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), chap. 1. On transatlantic passage times and newspaper editors' strategies in contending with delays, see Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 58–61, 151.
- 12 On shipping practices, see Steele, *English Atlantic*; Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1962); and Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978).
- 13 Some examples of the correspondence with clients: Samuel Fayerweather to Copley, 1763: "After Waiting a Considerable time with much Uneasiness to know whether Judge Leigh's Picture was sent to Carolina or no, at Length I'm Agreeably Surpriz'd to find it is Actually Gone, and I hope by this, it has Gott safe to its Destind Port, and that the proper Owner has joyfully took possession of it." *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 27. John Hurd to Copley, 1770: "By orders from Governor Wentworth I have putt on board this Sloop, Capt Miler, a Large Case with a Valuable Picture of one of his favourite Friends which lately arriv's from England, and by some bad Stowage in the Vessell has taken considerable Damage." *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 84. On the possibility of changing colors, see Copley to R. G. Bruce, September 10, 1765, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 35. On the lost pastels, see Captain Peter Traill to Copley, March 7, 1765, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 34.
- 14 Steele, *English Atlantic*, 215; Davis, *Rise of the English Shipping Industry*, 129, 170–71.
- 15 Copley to R. G. Bruce, September 10, 1765, *Copley-Pelham Letters*, 35. See Mungo Campbell, "'Lord Cardross' and the 'Boy with a Squirrel': Sir Joshua Reynolds's First Encounter with the Earl of Buchan and John Singleton Copley," *Burlington Magazine* 129, no. 1016 (1987): 730. On the misplacement of Copley's identity, see the unsubstantiated discussions in Flexner, *John Singleton Copley*, 2–4; Martha Babcock Greene Amory, *The Domestic and Artistic Life of John Singleton Copley, B.A.* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882), 17; and Alfred Frankenstein, *The World of Copley, 1738–1815* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1970), 60–62.
- 16 *Discourse IV* (1771), in Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 70.
- 17 Margareta M. Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 1–25. T. H. Breen, "'Baubles of Britain': The American and Consumer Revolutions of the

- Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 119 (1988): 73–104. On "terminal commodities," see Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 75. See also Staiti, "Accounting for Copley," 41: "paintings, alone among cultural goods, were not widely imported."
- 18 To my knowledge, the only profile portraits Copley made after *Boy with a Squirrel* were *William Vassall and His Son Leonard* (ca. 1770–72; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco), in which Leonard is painted in profile, and the dashing *Mrs. John Montresor (Frances Tucker)* (ca. 1776–80; Diplomatic Reception Rooms, Department of State, Washington, D.C.), painted after Copley had left the colonies.
- 19 On the deindividuating function of the profile, see Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 86, 96. Susan Rather mentions the detachment of Pelham's profile in her "Carpenter, Shoemaker, Tailor, Artist," 275. On Chardin, see Trevor Fairbrother's entry for *Boy with a Squirrel in A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting, 1760–1910*, ed. Theodore E. Stebbins Jr. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1983), 195. There is no documentary evidence that Copley ever saw a print after Chardin.
- 20 On the *imago clipeata*, see Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 65–66. On Hurd, see Ellen G. Miles, *Saint-Mémin and the Neoclassical Profile Portrait in America* (Washington, D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 1994), 46–47.
- 21 Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 66.
- 22 Robert Rosenblum notes that during the mid-eighteenth century, textual accounts of Pliny's story were common (even having appeared in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*), but visual illustrations before the 1770s were rare; Rosenblum, "The Origin of Painting: A Problem in the Iconography of Romantic Classicism," *Art Bulletin* 39, no. 4 (1957): 279–90.
- 23 See James H. Bunn, "The Aesthetics of British Mercantilism," *New Literary History* 11, no. 2 (1980): 304.
- 24 These debates were also active in America, of course. See Jennifer J. Baker, *Securing the Commonwealth: Debt, Speculation, and Writing in the Making of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2005).
- 25 David Alvarez, "'Poetical Cash': Joseph Addison, Antiquarianism, and Aesthetic Value," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005): 513, 516–17. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), sec. 47: "And thus came in the use of money, some lasting thing that men might keep without spoiling, and that by mutual consent men would take in exchange for the truly useful, but perishable supports of life."
- 26 See Joseph Addison, "Adventures of a Shilling," in *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from the "Tatler" and the "Spectator"*, ed. Erin Mackie (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1998), 183–87. For circulation narratives, see Christopher Flint, "Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction," *PMLA* 113, no. 2 (1998): 212–26; and Liz Bellamy, *Commerce, Morality, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998). On the problematic commodity status of paintings and their market distribution in the context of civic humanism, see David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993); Stephen Copley, "The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture," in *Painting and the Politics of Culture*, ed. John Barrell (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 13–37; and Louise Lipincott, "Expanding on Portraiture: The Market, the Public, and the Hierarchy of Genres in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *The Consumption of Culture, 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, ed. Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (London: Routledge, 1995), 75–88.
- 27 Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006), 103–35; Prown, *John Singleton Copley*, 1:51.
- 28 For Pelham's reverie, see Fairbrother in Stebbins, *A New World*, 195. For Chardin, see Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), 44–53.
- 29 Postle, *Joshua Reynolds: The Creation of Celebrity*, 172. On other representations of Reynolds's deafness, see Susan Rather, "Stuart and Reynolds: A Portrait of Challenge," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 72–75.
- 30 Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution*, 65–68; Daniel Webb, *An Inquiry into the Beauties of Painting, and into the Merits of the Most Celebrated Painters, Ancient and Modern* (London, 1761), 108.
- 31 Barbara Novak, *Voyages of the Self: Pairs, Parallels, and Patterns in American Art and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), 7; and David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739; repr. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000) book 2, part 3, sec. 7, 274.
- 32 George Berkeley, "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision," in *Works of George Berkeley*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: T. Nelson, 1948–57), 1:202.
- 33 See the underappreciated article by Ann Gibson and Lucia Palmer, "George Berkeley's Visual Language and the New England Portrait Tradition," *Centennial Review* 31, no. 2 (1987): 122–45. On Berkeley's impact on British painting, see Amal Asfour and Paul Williamson, *Gainsborough's Vision* (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1999), 105–27. Michael Baxandall's reading of the shared "awareness of the complexity and even the fragility of the act of perception" among Chardin, Locke, and Newton has indirectly inspired the present reading. See *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 76.
- 34 Berkeley, "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision," 188.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 194.
- 36 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 4th ed. (London, 1700), book 2, chap. 9, sec. 8.
- 37 Berkeley, "An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision," 190.
- 38 On Copley's use of prints, see Barratt, *John Singleton Copley in America*, passim.
- 39 Staiti, "Mrs. John Winthrop," in *ibid.*, 316.