



Gilbert Stuart Making Faces

A close-up portrait of Gilbert Stuart, an elderly man with a white powdered wig, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. The background is dark and indistinct.

Sometimes I alter a coat, powder a face, or straighten a wig, but I am not a tailor, make-up artist, or a wig maker.

A still life painting featuring a red velvet box on a wooden surface, with several books and a quill pen resting on it. The background is a soft, textured blue and green.

Occasionally I stack books, move furniture, hang curtains, and sometimes even create a room, but I am not a librarian or an interior designer.

What do you think my occupation is?

Let's find out.

My name is Gilbert Stuart. I am a portraitist.

People hired me to paint what they looked like and document their personality and interests.

As you read this guide, you'll look at some of my paintings and learn more about what a portraitist does.



Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755–1828), *Portrait of an Artist*, ca. 1786. Oil on canvas; 10 5/8 x 8 7/8 in. Fletcher Fund, 1926 (26.16)

Self Portrait

Let's look closely at this small painting.

*What part of a portrait do I paint first?
Where did I repeat the colors brown and rose?
What kinds of brushstrokes did I use to
paint my jaw, my hair, and my rosy cheek?*

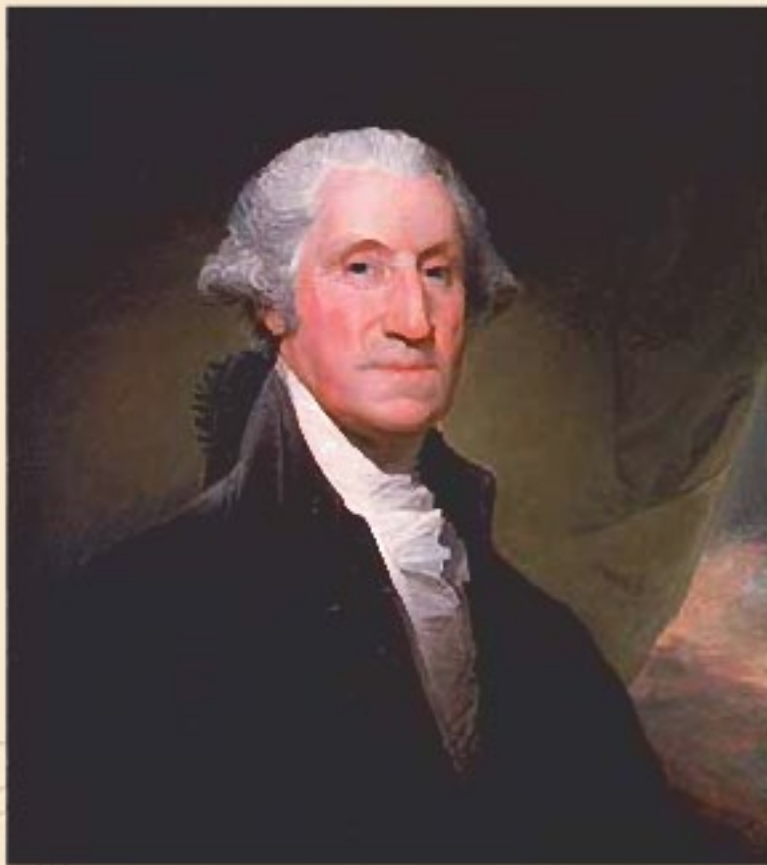
This is a portrait of myself I painted when I was about thirty years old. As you can see, I first finish a person's face before painting the body or any background. For this portrait I decided to show just my head and a bit of my white shirt. I used a small, blunt brush to outline my angular jaw, my large nose, and arched eyebrows. My messy hair, rosy cheeks, and sunken eyes are made of thin layers of oil paint that I brushed on with quick, light strokes.

Companion Portrait

Now let's look at this portrait of a woman.

*What in this painting looks like it would feel soft?
How many pieces of jewelry is this woman wearing?
Where did I repeat the color red?
What visual clues do I give you about this woman's lifestyle?*





Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755–1828). *George Washington*, 1795.
Oil on canvas; 30 1/4 x 25 1/4 in. Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.160)

This is Matilda Stoughton from New York City. Her father was an American ambassador to Spain. Matilda was sixteen when I painted this picture to match the portrait I made of her new husband, the Spanish diplomat Josef de Jaudenes y Nebot. These would be called companion portraits and hung together. I captured her fancy dress, jewelry, and fashionable hat with great detail and exactness. Look at the different brushstrokes I used to create her shiny silk clothes, the feathery ostrich plumes, her soft powdered hair, ruffled lace, and the diamond and pearl jewelry, including her snowflake hairpins. I added a few typical objects that most artists of my time would include in their paintings of women: an ivory fan for femininity and books to show education.

Matilda's husband hired another artist to add her family coat of arms and its description (written in Spanish), in the upper left-hand corner.

Gilbert Stuart (American, 1755–1828). *Matilda Stoughton de Jaudenes*, 1794.
Oil on canvas; 30 5/8 x 39 1/2 in. Rogers Fund, 1907 (07.76)

Presidential Portrait

Now let's look at this painting of the first president of the United States of America.

Where do you see light reflected on the President?

Where did I repeat the color pink?

If you were to paint a portrait of Washington how would it be different from mine?

This was one of the first portraits I painted of President George Washington. He was sixty-three years old and I was forty. The president was a very popular subject in art. I ended up making many more paintings of him. There were several other talented artists who painted Washington, but most people think my portraits are the most accurate.

I originally painted the president in a reddish-brown jacket, but later painted over it to show him in the black velvet suit he wore for public appearances. His hair was powdered, pulled back, and tied with a black silk sawtooth ribbon. I highlighted his forehead and prominent nose, and portrayed his straight posture and a serious expression. I wanted him to look intelligent, important, and wise.

Did you know that a similar portrait I painted of President Washington was used as the model for the image on the United States dollar bill?

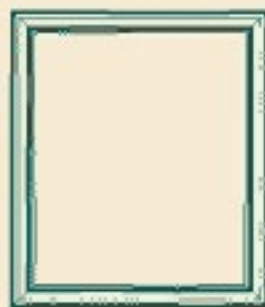


Fun on the Web

Go to www.metmuseum.org and check out a feature for kids about Gilbert Stuart in the Explore & Learn section as well as the special topic page about the artist on the Museum's *Timeline of Art History*.

More to Explore

You can see more portraits by Gilbert Stuart in the American Wing galleries of the Museum.



Be a portraitist

In the space below or on another piece of paper create a portrait collage. You can paste a photograph of yourself, a friend, or family member and collage or draw scenery around it. Cutting and pasting colorful magazine images may be another fun way to create a portrait. Think about how you want the face, body, costume, and overall composition to look. What clues could you include in the collage to give more information about the person?



Education
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Gilbert Stuart

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