



Thomas Sully, Esther Cox Binney

Title

Esther Cox Binney

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

1836

Dimensions

30 × 24 7/8 in. (76.2 × 63.2 cm)

Accession number

2005.4.4

Credit Line

Gift of Hope, Esther Binney, and Charles Hare, 2005

Web Description

Thomas Sully is considered one of the finest portrait painters in American art. He was especially known for his portraits of women and for his reputation of flattering his sitters. Esther Cox Binney (1817-1902) was the daughter of Philadelphia lawyer Horace Binney and his wife Elizabeth Cox. In 1842, she married John Innis Clark Hare (1816-1905), who presided as a judge in the courts of Philadelphia for forty-five years. Sully was born in Lincolnshire, England, and emigrated with his family in 1792, settling in the South, where he studied painting in Charleston with his brother-in-law, Jean Belzons, a French miniaturist and then his elder brother, Lawrence Sully, in Richmond, Virginia. Though he began by painting miniature portraits, Sully soon mastered oil painting and, with financial backing, opened a portrait studio in New York in 1806. He closed his studio when he moved in 1808 to Philadelphia, which would remain his home. Sully traveled often, including to England in 1809 to study with American expatriate artist Benjamin West and Swiss-born artist Henry Fuseli. He would travel to London again in 1837 for the most important commission of his career: a full-length portrait of the newly crowned Queen Victoria. He returned to Philadelphia in 1810 and became an active and influential presence—serving on the board of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he exhibited almost every year from 1811 until 1870, becoming a member of the Franklin Institute and chairman of its Committee on the Fine Arts and being elected a member of the National Academy of Design in New York, where he exhibited frequently. During his remarkably prolific seventy-year career, Sully created more than 2,500 paintings. Almost 2,000 of these were portraits. His devotion to

the portrait genre is underscored by the devotion of his students, including Charles Robert Leslie, John Neagle and Jacob Eichholtz, as well as his 1851 publication *Hints to Young Painters and the Process of Portrait Painting*, which was revised and reprinted two decades later.