



Benjamin West, Martha Harford Hare

Title

Martha Harford Hare

Medium

Oil on canvas

Date

1775

Dimensions

35 1/4 × 27 5/8 in. (89.5 × 70.2 cm)

Catalogue Number

2005.4.1

Credit Line

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

Web Description

Benjamin West captured a family drama in this formal portrait of Martha Harford Hare. Elegantly dressed in layers of rich fabrics, she holds a letter with the heading "Philadelphia, 1775." Her son, Robert Hare, has written to inform her that as a result of his recent courtship and marriage, he will not be returning to England. In reply, Martha Hare commissioned this portrait and had it sent to her son. Her opinion of her son's nuptials is conveyed by West through the sitter's stern expression, black scarf and the inclusion of the letter. West was born near Philadelphia, where he painted portraits before moving to New York and later to Europe. West settled permanently in England where he became known for his images of historical, religious and mythological subjects. He was among the very first American-born artists to achieve international acclaim and was named court painter to George III in 1772. Beginning in 1792, West served as the second president of the Royal Academy in London where he influenced the development of numerous aspiring artists.