Russell Sturgis

Date
1822

Primary Maker
Gilbert Stuart

Medium
oil on canvas

Description
Russell Sturgis is a half-length portrait of a seated elderly man turned toward the viewer's right. His gray-white hair is short and tousled, especially the locks above his forehead, which stand straight up. The sideburn in front of his visible ear is curly and gray. Stuart painted the sitter's hair with thin glazes of gray and thicker areas of opaque white. The sitter has small gray eyes with large pupils, and his gaze is directed at the viewer. His eyebrows are unruly and reddish brown. Thin, sketchy pink and brown strokes below his lips and chin and around his eyes suggest wrinkles, and a deep pink scar to the right of his nose runs to near the corner of his mouth. His forehead is pale in contrast to the flushed skin of his cheeks, nose, and chin. Stuart used varying shades of pink as well as white and ivory for the flesh. Gray shadows on the right side of his face below his nose and inside his neck cloth suggest a light source in the upper left. His lips are pressed together, and the right side of his small mouth is slightly lower than the left. Sturgis wears a reddish brown robe trimmed with reddish brown and gold fur at the collar, sides, and cuffs. The soft texture of the fur is conveyed by the application of grays, yellows, reds, and browns—all blended together. The light and dark highlights on his arm and the body of the robe were painted with large, loose strokes. A black coat and white neck cloth are visible underneath the robe. Sturgis's left arm is parallel to the picture plane and the arm of the chair. His hands rest in his lap. The fingers of each hand are interlaced, his left thumb atop his right. The index finger of his right hand casts a shadow on his left hand. The flesh on his hands consists of oranges and pinks. There are highlights on several nails, and some fingers are outlined in a reddish brown. Small strokes of white on the sitter's left wrist suggest the cuff of his shirt beneath the fur. Sturgis sits in an armchair of blonde or gilded wood upholstered in green velvet. The robe's visibility underneath the arm of the chair indicates that the sides of the chair are not solid wood or upholstered. With brown paint, Stuart outlined the curve of the wood along the top and bottom of the arm as well as the carved handle and a small portion of wood visible on the back of the chair. Opaque yellow highlights are scattered along the arm of the chair. The background is painted with prominent brushstrokes and varies in color from gray to a tan-green. The area just above Sturgis's left arm is a darker gray to suggest the shadow cast on the wall by the sitter's head. In the upper corners of the painting, the background is tan-green. To the right of the sitter's face, the background is the lightest. Strokes of light green appear along the face and the top part of the fur collar.

Dimensions
canvas: 76.2 × 63.3 cm (30 × 24 15/16 in.) framed: 95.4 × 82.7 cm (37 9/16 × 32 9/16 in.)