Cornelius Waldo

Date
1750

Primary Maker
Joseph Badger

Medium
oil on canvas

Description
Cornelius Waldo is a three-quarter-length portrait of an elderly seated man facing three-quarters right. He wears a wig with tight horizontal curls; the hair is painted with long strokes of white and gray in low impasto. Waldo’s face is a large oval with a fleshy neck; his eyes are brown. Gray underpainting is visible around the nose, mouth, and chin. The nose casts a shadow on the right side of the face, implying a light source from the upper left. Except for the shadow and a crease along the chin line, there is little modeling in the face. Waldo wears a simple white neck cloth, a brown waistcoat, and a collarless greatcoat with nine brown buttons accented with yellow and white highlights. His coat sleeves are folded back to reveal buttons on the cuffs. The folds in the coat suggest attempts by Badger at trompe l'oeil effects in the proper right sleeve and in the opening of the greatcoat. His attention to detail is evident in the hands, which include veins, highlights on the knuckles, creases on the finger joints, and carefully delineated fingernails. Waldo wears black breeches with rectangular buckles decorated with a simple floral motif on the four edges. White stockings are visible below the breeches. The subject sits in a high-backed wooden armchair with green upholstery on the back and seat. The arm of the chair at the viewer’s right shows a scroll terminus, which is awkwardly turned as though the chair was at a right angle rather than in a three-quarters view. To Waldo’s right is a table draped in a green cloth with regularly spaced rows of white stitching and black and yellow decoration. On the table is a book inscribed in script "Memorandum/ Boston/ Novr/ 1750", below which is a page and a half of illegible writing. The far leaf of the book is tipped impossibly toward the picture plane and seems to float. The white pages have become semitransparent, revealing that the book was painted on top of the drapery. To the right of the book is a gray inkwell containing a single white plume. Badger has clearly struggled with the foreshortening throughout, especially in this part of the painting. The background consists of a brown wall that is lightest to the immediate right of the sitter and that darkens farther to the right. This transition is made in several gradations in narrow sections painted with broad horizontal brushstrokes. The background is darkest to the left of the figure. Badger created a narrow band of light brown to outline the sitter’s proper left arm. Also in the background, behind the table, is a brown column, with highlights on the turnings at the base. At bottom-right is the following inscription in yellow paint: “Born Nov.r 17.th /——1684——/ Painted Novr/——1750—.” The first two lines of this inscription are printed as though they were typeset, and the last two lines are in script.

Dimensions
canvas: 127.5 x 102.1 cm (50 3/16 x 40 3/16 in.)