Captain John Larrabee

Date
about 1760

Primary Maker
Joseph Badger

Medium
oil on bed ticking

Description
Captain-Lieutenant John Larrabee is a full-length portrait of an older man standing in a coastal landscape. His body faces three-quarters to the right, and his head is turned forward. Larrabee’s proper right arm is akimbo, with his index and middle finger forming a horizontal V shape at his waist. His other fingers are curled under, with his hand holding back his open coat. His proper left hand holds a spyglass with a variegated red and dark-brown case and brass fittings at either end. The upright spyglass rests on the barrel of a black cannon immediately behind Larrabee and just below his waist. Just above the cannon at the figure’s proper left side is the gold handle of a small sword, which is strapped to his side. Larrabee’s weight rests on his proper right leg, which points slightly right. His left leg is turned outward, with the contour of his calf muscle clearly defined and his foot nearly in silhouette.

Larrabee wears a white, tightly curled shoulder-length wig. His face is fleshy, and his blue eyes stare intensely at the viewer. His complexion is ruddy, and there are white highlights running the length of his nose and shadows on both sides of his face, in his eye sockets, to the right of his nose, and under his chin. Larrabee wears a white shirt with a neck band and a pleated front, a brown greatcoat with cloth buttons, black waistcoat, and brown breeches. His clothes are simply cut and relatively unadorned. His coat, lined with a contrasting reddish-brown fabric, features broad cuffs; the right cuff corner folds back in a slight trompe l’oeil curl, which is echoed by an opposing curl on the flap of his pocket. A square buckle is visible on the band at the bottom of his breeches on his knee. His white stockings are ornamented with embroidery that forms an inverted V with lines at the top and abstract floral designs to the sides. His black shoes have large rectangular buckles with rounded corners, floral designs on the top and bottom, and scalloped arches tracing the perimeter. A wedge of land extends from the center-left to the bottom-left corner and to the bottom right of the composition. A tree fills the right edge and extends behind Larrabee. The ground is rocky, eroded, and brown, with sparse grass in the foreground and a denser patch of grass behind the figure to the right. The sky is filled with cumulus clouds and painted in soft blues and peaches. The water is deep blue along the horizon, shifting to dark gray-blue toward the foreground. Out on the water are five vessels. On the horizon, three sailing ships are faintly visible. A fourth ship, slightly forward, is painted with considerably more detail, including red pennants fore and aft, two masts with three and two sails each, and a row of gun ports along the bow. In front of that ship is a long boat, rowed by an eight-man crew, with four oars visible on the viewer’s side. A man in a red uniform and black hat stands facing the crew; behind him, another figure stands facing in the same direction.

Dimensions
canvas: 212.1 x 129.5 cm (83 1/2 x 51 in.)