



## Charles Pettit

### Date

1792

### Primary Maker

Charles Willson Peale

### Medium

oil on canvas

### Description

Charles Pettit is a half-length view of a seated man whose body faces forward and head is turned three-quarters to the left. The canvas is a standard kit-cat size (thirty-six by twenty-seven inches). Pettit wears a powdered wig of various shades of gray. He has blue eyes and thick, dark-brown eyebrows. His gaze is directed to the viewer's left. He has a long, straight nose and a mouth whose corners are slightly upturned. His flesh tones are red and pink, with a hint of gray around the mouth and chin. The modeling is convincing though a bit hard, with brown lines used to define the contours of the sitter's chin and jawline. Pettit's pose is relaxed, and his proper right elbow and forearm rest on a table at the left side of the composition. His right hand extends over the front edge of the table. His left hand rests atop a brown, leather-bound book; a pentimento on the lower half of the book suggests that Peale added this object to the painting after the composition

was nearly complete. Pettit sits in a carved, Chippendale-style side chair, the top corner of which is visible behind his left shoulder. The table runs parallel to the bottom edge of the painting. A black inkwell holds a quill; the inkwell is reflected in the polished wooden tabletop. Under Pettit's elbow are several documents, illegibly inscribed. The sitter wears a green suit, probably of wool, that has a high collar and large, cloth-covered buttons. The matching waistcoat has small, cloth-covered buttons; the second and third from the top are undone. He also wears a white stock and shirt ruffle and a single ruffle at each cuff. Peale suggested the horizontal folds in Pettit's waistcoat by varying the green tones and by reinforcing the depths of the folds with dark-brown paint. A swag of dark-red drapery behind the figure hangs from the upper left corner to the upper right part of the top edge of the composition. The background varies from dark gray on Pettit's left to light gray along the right side of the image. A strong light, coming from the upper left to the lower right, illuminates Pettit's face and casts shadows on the proper left side of his body. Shadows also help create the illusion of three-dimensionality in both Pettit's form and clothes.

### Dimensions

canvas: 91.1 × 68.6 cm (35 7/8 × 27 in.) framed: 112.1 × 89.5 cm (44 1/8 × 35 1/4 in.)