



Rebecca Orne

Date

1757

Primary Maker

Joseph Badger

Medium

oil on canvas

Description

Rebecca Orne is a half-length portrait of a standing child, turned three-quarters to the right with her head facing nearly forward. The figure is placed toward the top of the canvas, creating a crowded composition that is characteristic of portraits by Joseph Badger. The girl's oval face is framed with brown hair that is pulled back at the top and sides to fall in loose curls at the back of her neck. Her brown eyes gaze directly at the viewer. The flesh tones in the face, chest, and arms have been abraded, revealing the gray underpainting. Badger probably used this cool gray as a mid-tone in the flesh, but the current condition exaggerates this first layer of paint. This type of deterioration is common in Badger's paintings, leading one art historian to describe his portraits as "spectral."¹

No doubt his paintings were livelier in their original state, although

the artist, who was trained as a glazier-painter, possessed only a limited technical knowledge of his pigments and medium. There are shadows in the face on the right side of the forehead, under the eyes, to the right of the nose, under the chin, and on the right side of the throat. Rebecca Orne's proper right arm crosses in front of her body at her waist, and she holds a gray and white squirrel on her outstretched hand and wrist. The three fingers of the left hand that rest on the squirrel's back appear awkwardly detached, since neither the left arm nor the rest of that hand is represented. The squirrel's fur is painted with long hatched strokes of white and varying shades of gray. Its ears stand erect at a slight angle, and its tail forms a tall S-curve. The child's arm casts a shadow on her dress, helping to bring this part of the painting forward. The girl wears a dress made of a shimmering pink fabric, which is the most fluidly painted element in the composition. The neckline begins at her shoulders and is cut low across her chest. The only visible sleeve ends just below the elbow and has a wide cuff that flares out and rests on the girl's forearm. The pink fabric is painted with light and dark curving strokes blended together, suggesting that the dress is pulled tightly across the girl's torso; sharper contrasts of light and dark pink in the sleeves and skirt indicate looser folds of fabric in those areas. The skirt flows out from the waist at the bottom of the composition. The dress is trimmed with semitransparent white ruffles at the neck and cuffs, where the fabric is widest. The outer edges of this trim are painted in white with low impasto, and the shadows created behind these folds are painted dark red. The brown background is darkest at the left side of the painting and lightest directly to the girl's right; a very light brown highlight traces the outline of her torso. The background becomes gradually darker as the eye moves toward the right edge of the painting. In the upper-right corner is a pale blue section, which has probably faded from its original intensity.

Dimensions

canvas: 65.4 × 52.7 cm (25 3/4 × 20 3/4 in.) framed: 75.2 × 62.5 cm (29 5/8 × 24 5/8 in.)