

‘Medallion’ portrait returns to Monticello

A PORTRAIT of Thomas Jefferson painted from life in 1805 by Gilbert Stuart – an image greatly admired by Jefferson, members of his family, and many of his contemporaries – has returned to Monticello.

The portrait, a watercolor (or gouache) on blue laid paper mounted to canvas, is commonly referred to as the “Medallion” portrait or profile. It has not hung at Monticello since it was removed

Jefferson himself said the portrait was “the best which has been taken of me.”

during the dispersal of objects following Jefferson’s death in 1826.

Jefferson sat for Stuart in the artist’s Washington studio on June 7, 1805, and paid him \$100 for the portrait, “in watercolors a profile in the medallion style.”

Jefferson, who was 62 at the time and in his second term as president, displayed the portrait at the President’s House in Washington until he left office in 1809. It was then hung at Monticello, where it became a favorite of the family.

Jefferson’s daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph described the portrait as the one which “best gives the shape of his magnificent head and its peculiar pose.” Granddaughter Ellen Randolph Coolidge called it an “incomparable portrait and the only likeness of him I think that gives a good idea of the original.” The English-born American painter William Russell Birch, who saw the portrait in the President’s House, pronounced it “the



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Harvard University Museums, Fogg Art Museum / President and Fellows of Harvard College

best thing that was ever done” of Jefferson. And Jefferson himself remarked in 1815 that the “Medallion” portrait was “the best which has been taken of me.”

On a three-year loan to Monticello from the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, the “Medallion” portrait is currently on display in Jefferson’s Book Room.

“The return of this wonderful portrait – not seen at Monticello for about 180 years – is thrilling,” said Susan R. Stein, Monticello’s Richard Gilder Senior Curator and vice president for museum

programs. “We praise the Fogg for its generosity in lending the ‘Medallion’ to us.”

Th. Jefferson
MONTICELLO

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