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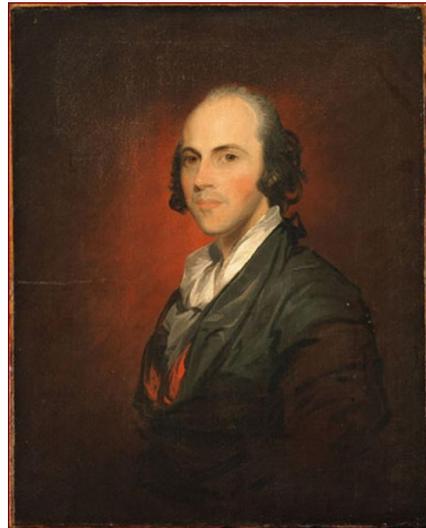
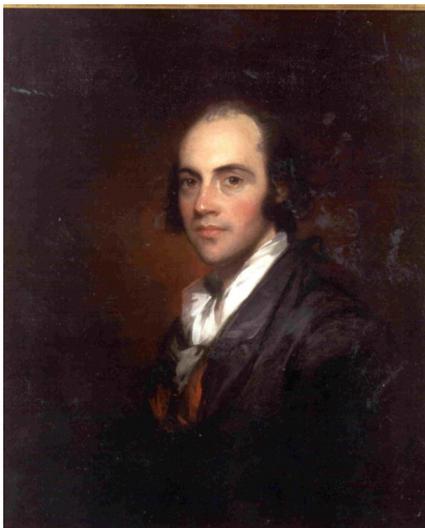
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PORTRAIT CALENDAR

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Study Guide for *Portraits of Aaron Burr* by, or attributed to, John Vanderlyn (and arranged in chronological order)

Prepared for the artists/sculptors/conservators currently working on original sculptural busts of Burr, or the restitution and cleaning of the Morris-Jumel Mansion portrait of Burr (c. 1920s) by George Hans Eric Maunsbach (1890-1969), after John Vanderlyn's original 1810-11 composition (see pp. 6-7 below), and commissioned by or in collaboration with *The Aaron Burr Association*.



Right: Gilbert Stuart, Portrait of *Aaron Burr*, late 1794. Left: authorized copy after Stuart's original by Vanderlyn, completed while under Stuart's *gratis* tutelage, late 1794. Stuart's portrait of Burr belongs to the New Jersey Historical Society, while Princeton University is the owner of Vanderlyn's authorized copy.

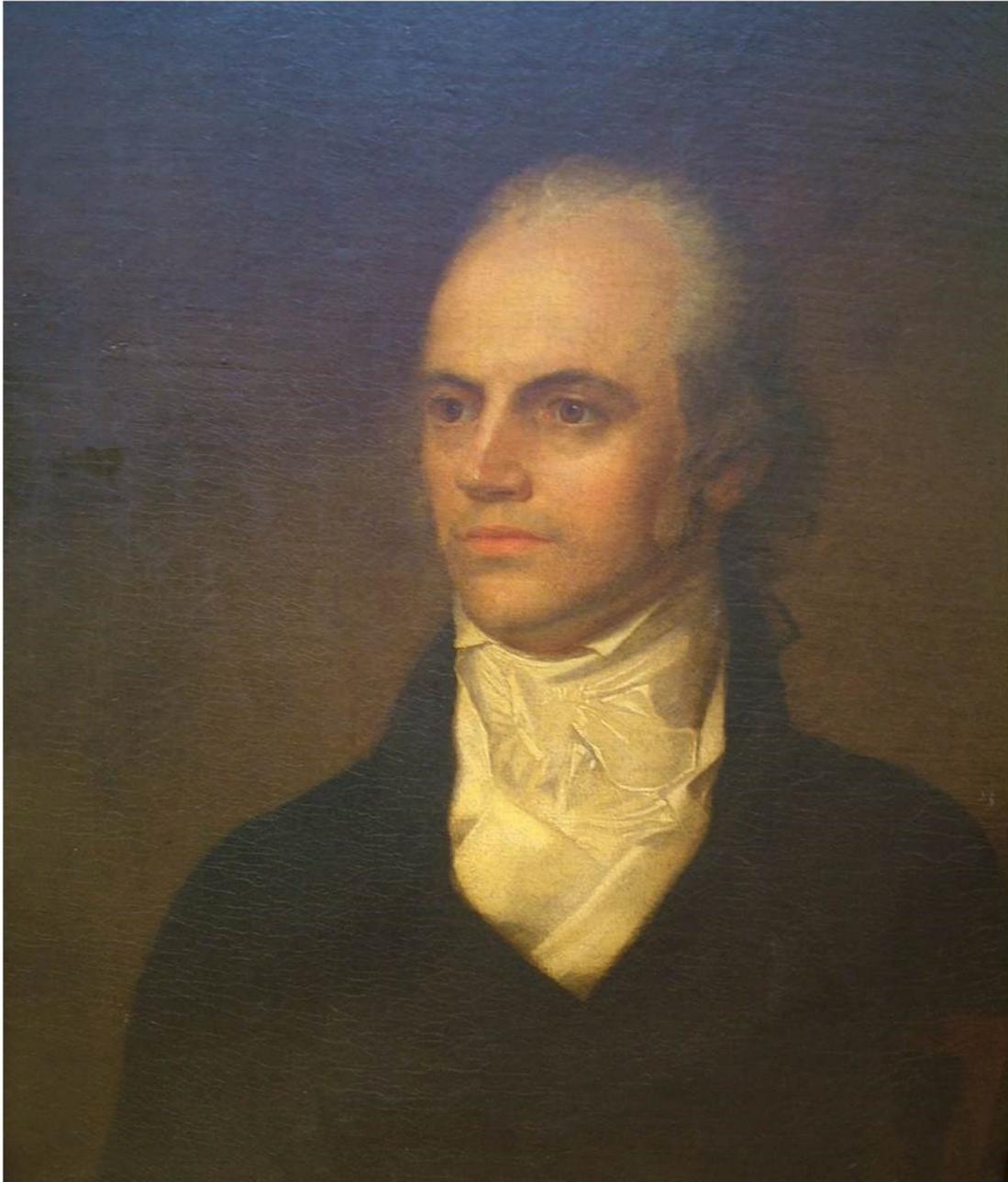
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Aaron Burr (1802). By or after John Vanderlyn's original portrait. This portrait was discovered in an antiques shop in NYC by Dr. John E. Stillwell during the mid-1880s. Assumed by Stillwell to be the original by Vanderlyn, the portrait may be a copy, either by Vanderlyn or another artist. Whether or not an authentic Vanderlyn or by another hand, whether from 1802 or a later vintage, will remain unknown until a conservator, familiar with the artist's work, endeavors to perform the necessary scientific analyses.

Assuming it is the original portrait, it was painted by Vanderlyn in 1802 in NYC during a brief sojourn home from Paris. At the same time, a pendant portrait of Burr's daughter, Theodosia Burr Alston, was completed. The original or a copy by or after Vanderlyn of Theodosia's portrait today is in the collection of Yale University, while the above portrait of Burr belongs to the New York Historical Society (gift of Dr. John E. Stillwell).



Aaron Burr by John Vanderlyn, collection Yale University, bequest of Oliver Burr Jennings. The circumstances surrounding the creation of this portrait are unknown, but traditional scholarship gives the date as 1802. I revise this date for physical reasons, and place it between 1810 and 1811. These dates coincide with Burr's visit to Paris where he hoped to revive "Plan X," and where he often frequented Vanderlyn's studio. In comparing Vanderlyn's 1802 portrait with the one above, the subject's hair recedes farther back and is more grey, indicating a later sitting. In this portrait Burr looks slightly older but retains the vibrant and dashing features he was noted for, including his piercing gaze. Note Vanderlyn has quite straightened Burr's fabled aquiline nose which in reality was crooked. The artist, using artistic license, presented his friend and erstwhile patron Burr with a portrait that flattered, accentuated, and reflected his legendary good-looks.

Comparison between Burr's nose as painted in Vanderlyn's 1810-11 portrait, and Burr's nose as authentically imprinted in his plaster death-mask from 1836, shows the true extent of this facial flaw. Note, too, in the 1802 profile portrait by Vanderlyn how the artist has cleverly shown viewers the right side of Burr's face, thus presenting Burr in his best light. Vanderlyn, following Stuart's example, successfully camouflages Burr's left side where his disfigured nose slightly marred his otherwise perfectly formed, and famously handsome, features.



Death Mask of Aaron Burr (1836); Artist unidentified. Painted plaster; collection New York Historical Society. This death mask reveals how Burr's allegedly famous aquiline nose actually had a dramatic twist.



Aaron Burr, oil sketch on canvas by John Vanderlyn, c. 1810-11. Collection University of Rochester. In this oil study, Vanderlyn tried to work out the facial musculature and skeletal frame of the sitter. Behind Burr is an architectural column and a heavy, perhaps velvet, red curtain. The dimly-lit interior allowed Vanderlyn to observe the effects of *chiaroscuro*, or the smoky light and dark shadows cast by the distant setting sun, that played over Burr's face.

Of note, this painting was purchased by William Bixby, the noted Burr advocate. Bixby published an unexpurgated edition of Burr's *European Journals*. He purchased the portrait from Aaron Columbus Burr, who furnished him with a letter of authenticity stating that the portrait was a gift from Burr to him, his adopted son and namesake. The gift was apt as Aaron Columbus Burr likely witnessed the portrait's creation in Vanderlyn's Parisian atelier.

This oil on *canvas* portrait is Vanderlyn's study for the circa 1810-11 oil on *panel* portrait of Aaron Burr (see illustration next page). Although the portrait reveals Vanderlyn's wonderful ability to build and give life to the human form, a later hand worked over this portrait, as can be seen for instance in the awkward white stock (compare this stock to the starched yet graceful ones featured in the 1802 and 1810 Burr portraits by Vanderlyn).



Aaron Burr, oil on panel by John Vanderlyn, c. 1810-11. Collection New York Historical Society. This portrait was painted during Burr's tenure in Paris. Although Dr. John E. Stillwell believed the portrait was painted in 1809, this date is incorrect. The date was based on his assumption that Burr was in Paris in 1809; he was not. Therefore the date 1810-11 better reflects Burr's Parisian tenure.

Sometime during the 1830s, Vanderlyn used the panel to instruct his friend and pupil James Shegogue, who hoped to duplicate Vanderlyn's legendary skill in depicting breathing flesh tones and convincing, life-like facial features. Upon Vanderlyn's death in 1852 the panel was in Shegogue's possession; during the 1850s, a subscription was taken to purchase it from the artist. The portrait was then donated to the New York Historical Society.

In this portrait, Burr appears older and wiser than in his 1802 portrait. Scholars of the portrait have puzzled over the classical column and lush red fabric in the background. However, an answer is easily formulated when Burr's most recent achievement is considered. In winter 1805, while Vice-President of the United States, Burr presided over the impeachment trial of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase. For the trial, Burr set a precedent in having the Senate's chamber decorated in rich red fabrics, the House's chamber in deep greens, and the defense's area in dark blues. He thus effectively color-coded the trial. Caricatured as a political trial staged by President Jefferson to weaken the judiciary, Chase nonetheless was found not guilty. As Burr was the presiding Senate officer, his actions were given partial credit as a result.

After overseeing the vote and pronouncing Chase's acquittal from eight articles of impeachment, Burr dismissed the court. The next day, he made his last official appearance as Vice-President in the Senate, where he gave an impromptu speech. Among other things, he made a strong case for America's need of political impartiality within the judicial system. His speech left many stoic Congressmen weeping and in awe of Burr, the political "phoenix" whom many predicted would rise again from the ashes. Although pilloried by High Federalists, who held him responsible for killing Alexander Hamilton in their recent duel, Burr's politically unbiased stewardship during the Chase trial did much to subdue these adherents' ill-will towards him.

Vanderlyn shows Burr dressed in a dark black overcoat with crisp white stock beneath. This ensemble suggests traditional courtroom formal attire, but it is unlikely that Burr actually dressed this soberly while in Paris. Moreover, the red velvet curtain in the background distinguishes this portrait as a stately production; the formula was most recently and famously deployed in Gilbert Stuart's *Lansdowne* portrait of George Washington, which Burr greatly admired. Perhaps conspiring together, Vanderlyn and Burr chose the color red, because it signified the Senate over which the latter presided during the Chase trial, with the double-entendres being that Burr first served his country as New York State's Attorney General (1789-91) and as Senator from New York (1791-97) before becoming the third United States Vice-President (1801-05) under President Thomas Jefferson (1801-09).



Above: *Aaron Burr*, copy by Eric Maunsbach (c. 1920s; collection the Morris-Jumel Mansion, NY, NY; oil on canvas) after the original by John Vanderlyn (c. 1810-11; NYHS: oil on *panel*).

Born in Sweden in 1890, George Hans "Eric" Maunsbach came to the United States (date unknown), and studied with famous society portrait painter John Singer Sargent (1856-1925). He died in 1969 and his grave can be visited today at the Long Island National Cemetery.

During the 1920s, Maunsbach was commissioned to paint a replica of John Vanderlyn's portrait of Aaron Burr, on view at the New York Historical Society. Note that Maunsbach's copy is after Vanderlyn's 1810-11 portrait on panel, not the more well-known portrait from 1802 (after which the 1810-11 is patterned). The explanation is that the 1802 portrait was not part of the NYHS collection until 1931, when it was donated by Dr. John E. Stillwell. Had the 1802 portrait been available to Maunsbach, he undoubtedly would have copied it as that portrait best illustrates the period when Vanderlyn deftly assimilated techniques garnered from his training. This unusual background gave rise to his unique French-American style.

Vanderlyn's hybrid style set his work apart from other American artists, for they had studied in London, not Paris. The resulting "Vanderlyn mystique" daunted and fascinated his French and American artist-contemporaries. Despite or perhaps galvanized by Vanderlyn's legendary mysteriously erratic, truculent, and vexing nature, these contemporaries gave credence to his rising reputation as an artist-genius. They, like his beloved student Shegogue, hoped to emulate his style by receiving tips from the master.

Vanderlyn's unique style evolved from his tenures in the Paris, France-based Académie des Beaux-Arts (where he formally studied with François-André Vincent, passing his Academy exams in 1798), and in the studio of his erstwhile teacher in America, Gilbert Stuart. Vanderlyn's artistic training with Stuart and Vincent was underwritten by Aaron Burr. Burr was not a passive patron, but actively collaborated with Vanderlyn on several works, including the portrait on panel, discussed above, and which Maunsbach later copied for the Morris-Jumel Mansion.