

Unknown woman, c. 1830

Anonymous

oil on canvas

36 1/2 x 28 1/2 (92.71 x 72.39)

Gift of George Frisbie Hoar, 1885

Weis 102

Hewes number: 161

Ex. Coll.: Early provenance unknown; sold at the Thomas Thompson sale by Henry H. Leeds Auctions, New York, on February 7, 1870; purchased by art dealer Henry N. Barlow (1824-84); sold at sale of his estate in Washington, D.C., in January 1885; purchased by the donor.

Publications:

Boston Globe, September 10, 1911.

When purchased in 1885 by AAS President George Frisbie Hoar (cat. 68), this painting of a fashionably dressed young woman writing at a desk was believed to depict the American author Lydia Huntley Sigourney (1791-1865). However, the portrait bears only a slight resemblance to known likenesses and photographs of her.¹ The canvas was examined in 1890 by Sigourney's daughter, who believed that if the painting did depict a member of the family, it might be an image of her aunt, the poet Felicia Hemans (1793-1835).² Comparison with engravings of Hemans is inconclusive, and the sitter remains unidentified.

¹ There are several life portraits of Sigourney, including John Trumbull's 1838 portrait in the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut, as well as a number of nineteenth-century engravings preserved in the AAS Graphic Arts Collection. The Connecticut Historical Society has a number of photographs of the writer taken toward the end of her life.

² Frederick Weis, 'Portraits in the American Antiquarian Society,' Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 56 (April 1946): 101. A portrait of Hemans engraved by William G. Armstrong (1823-90) after a painting by William Edward West (1788-1857), serves as the frontispiece to Mrs. Hemans' Works (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1840).