

THOMAS PAINE (1737-1809), 19th century

Anonymous

after George Romney (1734-1802)

oil on canvas

16 3/8 x 14 3/8 (41.59 x 36.51) (framed)

Gift of R. Henniker Heaton, 1930

Weis 92

Hewes Number: 92

Exhibitions:

1976, 'USA...200 Years,' Sokolniki Park, Moscow, U.S.S.R., United States Information Agency.

1977, 'Wellsprings of a Nation,' Worcester Art Museum, no. 147.

Thomas Paine, the author of Common Sense and an ardent supporter of the American cause for independence, was born in Thetford, England, the son of a corset maker. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1774 and earned a living there as a free-lance journalist. Just before and during the Revolutionary War, Paine wrote a number of political pamphlets. Common Sense, published in January 1776, 'urged an immediate declaration of independence.' Paine explained in it his belief that 'the colonies must fall away eventually; a continent can not remain tied to an island.'<sup>1</sup> Examples of his writings are preserved in the imprint collection of the American Antiquarian Society.<sup>2</sup>

Once thought to be the work of Rembrandt Peale (1788-1860), this small painting is now believed to be an anonymous copy, after an image of Paine by the English portraitist George Romney (National Portrait Gallery, London). Romney's composition was copied by several American artists, including Thomas Sully (1783-1872) and John Wesley Jarvis (1780-1840). Romney's painting was engraved in 1793 and was often copied for inclusion in periodicals and books.<sup>3</sup> Any of these prints could have served as the inspiration for this small portrait.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodger D. Parker, Wellsprings of a Nation (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1977), 84.

<sup>2</sup> For more biographical information on Paine, see Alfred J. Ayer, Thomas Paine (New York: Athenaeum Press, 1988), and Ian Dyck, ed., Citizen of the World: Essays on Thomas Paine (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Several engravings after the Romney portrait of Paine, including the most widely copied version by William Sharp (b. c. 1802), are housed in the AAS Graphic Arts Collection.