



Territorial Governor Lewis Cass

Thomas McClelland, Lewis Cass

Governor

Date

c. 1830-1832

Medium

oil paint

Dimensions

108 x 74 in. (274.3 x 188 cm)

Paintings

Object number

CA.2025.03.016

Heritage Hall (323 W. Ottawa St.), Conservation Lab, Back Room

This portrait of Lewis Cass, Michigan's second territorial governor, is unique for its extremely classicizing

elements. Cass is draped in a layer of thick, folded fabric reminiscent of the himation worn by ancient Greek philosophers. This piece of clothing not only calls back to classical times, but it also associates Cass with traits such as wisdom, open-mindedness, and intelligence. Underneath, Cass wears a more contemporary suit and cravat. The column and red drapery which frame Cass contribute to the neoclassical style of the portrait, as do the large, ornately carved pieces of furniture that surround him. Large areas of flat, bright colors, such as the sky or the back of the chair behind Cass, give the portrait a two-dimensional, graphic feeling. Theories about the origin of this piece hypothesize that it was originally a portrait of George Washington that was later painted over with Cass's face. This is plausible, as there are other instances of Washington depicted in ancient clothing and with a similar background. Notably, the furniture is also decorated with elements of the United States seal, such as the eagles holding arrows on the table leg and the shield with the stripes of the American flag on the chairback, rather than symbols more specific to Michigan.