



Edwin Denby

Robert Grafton, Edwin Denby

Historical Figure

Date

20th c.

Medium

oil paint

Dimensions

99 1/2 x 59 in. (252.7 x 149.9 cm)

Paintings

Object number

CA.2025.03.021

Michigan State Capitol Building (100 N. Capitol Ave),
Grand Staircase, Floor 3.5, North

Edwin Denby served as a MI Representative from 1902-1903, a U.S. Representative from 1905-1910, and the U.S. Secretary of the Navy from 1921-1924. This full-length portrait, painted by Robert Grafton, is a straightforward and highly naturalistic rendering of the man. Denby

stands with his hands clasped in front of his body, angled away from the viewer slightly. His facial expression is focused as he gazes ahead. A few visible brushstrokes can be seen in the man's figure, but they are tight and the painting as a whole shows little sign of the artist's hand. The background of this piece has been kept simple; aside from the desk behind Denby, it consists only of gray flooring and a black backdrop. The red book on the table matches areas of Denby's tie, which encourages the viewer's attention to remain on his face. The table creates heavy shadows, suggesting that there is an unidentified light source shining onto the man from his left side. Denby's stance echoes the position of the table's legs, suggesting that he is similarly steady, grounded, and of a strong character. The triangular composition created by the horizontal lines of the table and the verticality of Denby's figure creates a sense of calm fortitude in the piece.