



Governor Van Wagoner

John Coppin, Murray Van Wagoner

Governor

Date

c. 1944

Medium

oil paint

Dimensions

81 x 51 in. (205.7 x 129.5 cm)

Paintings

Object number

CA.2025.03.055

Michigan State Capitol Building (100 N. Capitol Ave), Floor 3, Rotunda, Northwest Quadrant

This portrait of Governor Murray Van Wagoner was the first of four gubernatorial portraits completed by artist John Coppin. Coppin approached each portrait in a slightly different manner, likely based in part off the preferences of his sitters. Of the four, Van Wagoner's portrait is the

most traditional. He is pictured sitting in a high-backed armchair, gazing directly out at the viewer. Though the governor does not show his teeth, he is smiling. This expression, paired with the naturalistic rendering of the wrinkles around his hooded eyes, creates a comfortable, welcoming interaction between Van Wagoner and the viewer. The governor's relaxed pose also contributes to the welcoming feeling of this portrait. His suit, while formal, crumples in the middle as he leans forward towards his audience. His colorful tie, which sticks out against the more classical color palette around him, appears slightly askew. Van Wagoner rests one hand on his armchair, while the other holds a folded map of Michigan. This references Van Wagoner's role in improving Michigan's highway system, which he did as State Highway Commissioner prior to becoming governor. The background of this portrait has been kept simple, particularly around the governor's head. This helps to direct the viewer's focus towards the sitter. A classical red curtain cascades dramatically down the left side of the canvas, complimenting the red tones used in Van Wagoner's chair. This not only maintains a visual balance in the portrait, it also positions the governor directly between two brightly painted elements - encouraging viewers again to focus on Van Wagoner's figure.