



Study For Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences, or The Genius of America Encouraging the Emancipation of the Blacks

ca. 1791–92

[Samuel Jennings](#) American

Philadelphia-born Jennings spent his career in London in the circle of Benjamin West. Around 1791, he began work on an allegorical history painting for the new building of the Library Company of Philadelphia, based on instructions he received from its founder, Benjamin Franklin, and directors, most of whom were Quakers and active abolitionists. This rare study captures the vision for the finished painting in the figure of Liberty, surrounded by symbols of the arts and sciences, including a globe showing what may represent the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now Haiti), site of a major slave uprising in 1791. In opposition to armed resistance, Liberty seems to be advocating for more peaceful outcomes, as severed chains rest at her feet and she gestures toward a group of emancipated men, women, and children, painted in the conventional period pose of supplication. In the

middle-ground, Black figures dance around a Liberty Pole, and play an African-derived American gourd banjo. This is the first known painting by an American-born artist to address the issue of slavery and its abolition.

Artwork Details

Title: Study For Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences, or The Genius of America Encouraging the Emancipation of the Blacks

Artist: Samuel Jennings (American, 1789–1834)

Date: ca. 1791–92

Culture: American

Medium: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 10 3/4 × 12 1/2 in. (27.3 × 31.8 cm)

Credit Line: Purchase, Karen Buchwald Wright Gift, 2016

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Provenance

API Access

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