

Chapter 10 | Charles Willson Peale

To the Citizens of the United States of America

MR. PEALE

Begs leave to present the following Respectful Address:

Having formed a design to establish a MUSEUM, by a Collection, Arrangement, and Preservation of the Objects of Natural History, and things useful and curious, in June 1785, he began to collect subjects, and to *preserve* and *arrange* them in the *Linæan* method; his labours herein have be[en] great, and disappointments many; especially respecting proper methods of preserving dead animals from the ravage of moths and worms. In vain he hath sought from men, information of the effectual methods used in foreign countries: and after experiencing the most promising ways recommended in such books as he had read, they proved ineffectual to prevent depredations by the vermin of America. But in various other experiments, *he has at length discovered a method of preservation*, which he is persuaded will prove *effectual*: it has a very favourable appearance in practice, and far surpasses all others that have come to his knowledge: nevertheless, it will be obliging in gentlemen to inform him of the best practices in Europe or elsewhere.

The difficulties of preserving subjects being thus overcome, and the Museum having advanced to an object of earnest attention to many individuals, with sentiments of gratitude he thanks the friends to the Museum, who have generously added to his collection a number of precious curiosities from many parts of the world – from Africa, from India, from China, from the islands of the great Pacific Ocean, and from different parts of America; some whereof are the more curious, as they have been but very recently discovered, even by the great voyagers of Europe. He respectfully requests a continuance of their favours, and the assistance of all persons who may be possessed of things curious that they can spare, whether they be of America, or any other part of the world: all will command his grateful acknowledgments as valuable presents to himself, to the public, and to future generations.

Charles Willson Peale, "To the Citizens of the United States of America," letter published in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, Jan. 13, 1792. Public domain, available on microfilm at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

He is the more earnestly bent on enlarging the collection with a greater variety of beasts, birds, fishes, insects, reptiles, vegetables, minerals, shells, fossils, medals, old coins; and of utensils, cloathing, arms, dyes and colours, or materials for colouring, or for physic, from amongst the Indian, African, or other savage people; and all particulars, although but in model or delineation, promising to be useful in advancing knowledge and the arts; in a word, all that is likely to be beneficial, curious or entertaining to the citizens of the new world. But alas! a design so vast, and, he is bold to say, so important, is far beyond the slender abilities of an individual whose professional industry is necessary for the support of a numerous family.

Animated by the generous patronage he has already received, and by the magnitude of the object, which he fondly hopes will procure the attention of the public, he now respectfully solicits their aid to enable him to raise this tender plant, until it shall grow into full maturity, and become a *National Museum*.

With harmony little things become great: all the splendid Museums of the great European nations have risen from the foundations laid by individuals. America has in this a conspicuous advantage over all other countries, *from the novelty of its vast territories*. But a small number is yet known of the amazing variety of animal, vegetable and mineral productions, in our forests of 1000 miles, our inland seas, our many rivers, that roll through several states, and mingle with the ocean.

A Museum stored with these treasures must indeed become one of the first in the world; the more so, as the principal naturalists in Europe, will be anxious to acquire our productions, by an exchange of whatever is most valuable in their respective countries and foreign colonies.

Mr. Peale means personally to solicit the assistance of gentlemen whose regard for science is well known: if there are those who would become *Inspectors* or *Visitors* of the Museum, their united aid and influence, he is confident, would greatly promote a design that is truly worthy of American patriots and citizens of the world.

CHARLES W. PEALE.
Philadelphia Museum, Jan 13, 1792.