

George Drummond

**'George Drummond', c 1780
by Thomas Gainsborough
(1727-1788)**

oil on canvas, 233 x 151 cm

A zoomable image of this painting is available on our website to use in the classroom with an interactive whiteboard or projector.

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Background information

The painting

George Drummond (1758-1789) of Stanmore was a senior partner in Drummonds Bank and his father was the Archbishop of York. In this full length portrait he stands before us in a landscape setting dressed in fashionable contemporary dress and with a suitably serious expression on his face. A bright light falls on his face and clothing enabling us to see lots of detail in both.

He is standing in a pose called contrapposto (with one leg straight and one bent at the knee) casually leaning against a tree. Gainsborough tended to slightly elongate his figures so George Drummond appears both regal and elegant despite such an informal pose.

Everything calls attention to George Drummond - the pose, the lighting, the beauty of the clothes, and even the landscape itself is used to frame him in an elegant manner. The subtext of the landscape is to draw attention to his large estate. Visual metaphors such as the landscape and his personal accessories help convey his dignified status.

The historical context

Big, important, grand - this particular style of portrait was popular in England in the 18th century and is known as a Grand Manner portrait.

This term was originally applied to history painting and came to include portraiture, especially with sitters depicted life size and full-length in surroundings that conveyed the nobility and elite status of the subjects.

Despite many of the Grand Manner elements contained within his work, Gainsborough's half- and full-length portraits have a freshness and lyrical grace.



The artist

Thomas Gainsborough was one of the most famous portrait and landscape painters of 18th century Britain. He was influenced by the 17th artist Anthony Van Dyck and Gainsborough went on to develop a free and elegant mode of painting seen at its most characteristic in this full-length portraits of George Drummond in contemporary costume.

Like all 18th century portraitists, Gainsborough took great care to paint his sitters' faces accurately and was admired for his ability to capture a living likeness. His portraits also have the vigour and immediacy of an oil sketch and his rapid and informal feathery brushwork give his paintings great vitality.

As a colourist, he had few rivals among British painters; he generally preferred cool, fresh colours, chiefly greens and blues, thinly applied. The emphasis on the landscape in his portraits also allowed Gainsborough to display his skills as a painter of convincingly changing weather and naturalistic scenery.

Gainsborough was the most original British painter of his generation and had a lasting and significant influence on British painting and portraiture. His portraits provide us with a unique window on 18th century England as he managed to capture not only the physical look of his sitters but also their spirit and style as well as culture.

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