



1779

Marble

Height with socle: 20 1/4 inches (52.1 cm)

JEAN-ANTOINE HOUDON

French, 1741–1828

LOOKING QUESTIONS

What is this sculpture made of?
How was it made (modeled, carved, etc.)?

What aspect of this sculpture is most realistic? Why?

Describe this man's features, hairstyle, and clothing.
When do you think he lived?
What was his personality like?

Notice the slightly parted lips and the direction of his gaze. What could he be thinking and saying?
Who or what is he looking at?

Do you know who this is?

BUST OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Benjamin Franklin was seventy-two years old when the French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon (jahn ahn-twahn oo-dawn) made this **portrait bust** of him. At the time, Franklin was a representative of the American colonies, negotiating with the French government for support of the revolt against England. He was already a popular celebrity due to his experiments with electricity; his many inventions, such as the lightning rod, the Franklin stove, and the armonica (a musical instrument); founding Pennsylvania Hospital and the University of Pennsylvania; and publishing the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

With incredible skill, Houdon carved away pieces of the hard, white marble, giving it the **realistic** appearance of Franklin's skin, hair, and facial features. What parts seem especially real to you? Although the two men may have seen each other at Masonic lodge meetings, Houdon created this amazing sculpture without ever making a mold or taking measurements of Franklin's face, or even asking the statesman to **pose** for him. The artist captured Franklin's keen intelligence in the **highlights** and shadows of his eyes, his slightly parted lips, and the subtle tilt of his head.

When Houdon created this piece, Franklin was so famous that many people wanted to own images of him. Houdon made the first version of this sculpture in **terracotta**, then two in marble, followed by many reproductions in plaster. Today, this work can be seen in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, at the end of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, in the city where Franklin co-wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution!

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