



A Deception

Around 1805–8

Samuel Lewis

American, around 1757–1822

Pen and brush and black and brown inks, watercolor, blue-green matte opaque paint, gold metallic paint, and graphite, with scratching out, on wove paper

Sheet: 16 3/16 x 10 13/16 inches (41.1 x 27.5 cm)

Gift of the McNeil Americana Collection,
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A Biography in Paper

Every paper in Samuel Lewis's *Deception* supplies a piece of information about the artist's life and activities in Philadelphia.



- 1 Lewis may have chosen this wrapper because, like him, it came from London. It also includes the words *genuine* and *veritable*. This play on words emphasized that this drawing was a visual deception.
- 2 The New Theatre was on Chestnut Street, and pit tickets were affordable to middle- and working-class patrons. Lewis published a drawing of the theater's interior in *New York Magazine*.
- 3 In 1796, George Washington was living in Philadelphia, then capital of the newly formed United States. Lewis may have received this invitation to the president's birthday ball because he knew Washington when he worked for the War Department during the American Revolution.
- 4 Lewis signed the work by writing "Samuel Lewis presents," on a card—inviting viewers to contrast his natural handwriting with his ability to mimic many forms of printed type.
- 5 Charles Willson Peale designed this ticket to his Philadelphia Museum, one of the first museums in the United States. Lewis exhibited this artwork there alongside an identical letter rack filled with the original documents.
- 6 Matthew Carey owned a print shop in the center of Philadelphia where Lewis worked as a clerk and mapmaker. Lewis may have chosen this proposal for a publication titled "A Complete System of Biography" to alert viewers that his drawing tells the story of the artist's life in Philadelphia.
- 7 Edward Pennington had sugar refinery at Race and Vine and was a patron of Lewis.