



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**“Michael C. McMillen / MATRIX 171: SIDESHOW” Opens Jan. 31 at
Wadsworth Atheneum**
Presentation to Compliment Museum’s Exhibition on Coney Island

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will celebrate the 40th anniversary of its groundbreaking MATRIX exhibition series with the work of Los Angeles native Michael C. McMillen (American, born 1946). “SIDESHOW,” the 171st presentation of MATRIX, is a contemporary art companion piece to the special exhibition, “Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861–2008.” The exhibition runs Jan. 31 through May 3.

“SIDESHOW” is an immersive environment featuring nine mixed-media works—combining painting, sculpture, installation and video—that look from McMillen’s childhood spent at Ocean Park Pier on the West Coast, to Coney Island on the East Coast, while also providing bookends of his artistic work to date (from 1973 to 2014). Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art, is organizing the exhibition.

The Coney Island theme resonates closely with McMillen. In Summer 1957, the artist’s father took him to New York to visit his old Greenwich Village haunts. An eleven year-old at the time, the artist has held onto indelible images of that trip for the past half century, particularly taking the train out to Coney Island where he visited the crumbling Steeplechase Park.

“Somewhere within the complex of worn rides and faded attractions, I recall visiting a walk-through display tunnel of life-size tableaus depicting famous murders and other social malfunctions,” said McMillen. “There was something about this unexpected encounter with the terrible side of human nature and the crudely sensational way it was depicted that was simultaneously riveting, repellent, and haunting. Years later as a young artist thinking about how to engage an audience, I recalled and recognized the power of the immersive environment.”

In SIDESHOW, McMillen creates an atmospheric setting for a collection of unusual curiosities and mysterious artifacts through moving shadows, light and wall projections that

exposes and celebrates his earliest influences and inspirations, including his boyhood trip to New York in 1957 and his 1973 UCLA graduate project, “The Traveling Mystery Museum.” Simultaneously, McMillen seamlessly incorporates newer work in the moody “Lighthouse (Hotel New Empire),” its beautifully eccentric video, “The Quotidian Man,” and the poignant, “Transmitter.” McMillen possesses an ever-youthful soul filled with wit, fascination and dread that finds its perfect expression in endlessly inventive artistic production.

Public Programs

Michael C. McMillen will discuss his MATRIX project, “SIDESHOW,” in the Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery, Saturday, Jan. 31, at noon. Hickson will address McMillen’s MATRIX project in the Eleanor H. Bunce Gallery, Friday, April 17, at noon.

Exhibition Credit

The MATRIX program is generously supported in part by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted as well as the current and founding members of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art’s Contemporary Coalition. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council’s United Arts Campaign and the Department of Economic and Community Development, which also receives support from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continually operating public art museum in the United States. The museum’s nearly 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art. The Wadsworth Atheneum’s five connected buildings—representing architectural styles from Gothic Revival to modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Since 2010 the museum has been undergoing a major, \$33 million renovation, slated to be complete 2015. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.; First Thursdays: 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. Admission: \$5 – 10; discounts for members, students and seniors. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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