



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**First Major Photography Survey in 27 Years to Open  
at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**

*Collecting is a curious vice, it changes your whole life—your whole way of looking at the world.*  
– Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr. 1978

Hartford, Conn. (Sept. 9, 2016) – In the first major photography survey displayed at the museum in 27 years, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will present, “The Thrill of the Chase: The Wagstaff Collection of Photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum,” Sept. 10 through Dec. 11. The exhibition offers a selection of nearly 100 photographs from the personal collection of Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr. (American, 1921–1987), and spans the history of photography over 150 years, tracing the artistic and technical development of this art form through the eye of an influential collector. “The Wagstaff Collection of Photographs” is especially relevant to the Wadsworth Atheneum in that Wagstaff served as the museum’s curator of paintings, prints and drawings from 1961–68, becoming a senior curator in 1967. “Sam Wagstaff as Curator”—a companion display of more than 30 works from the Wadsworth Atheneum’s permanent collection—opens Sept. 17, 2016.

“The importance of this exhibition to the Wadsworth Atheneum lies not only in the fact that it has been more than a quarter century since we have largely exhibited the medium of photography, but that this collection was lovingly and expertly gathered by a man who worked within our own museum walls,” said Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Patricia Hickson. “This exhibition serves as an examination of the art of building a collection, but perhaps more pointedly as a tribute to a man who established the photography market and drove it to great heights.”

“The Wagstaff Collection of Photographs” will illustrate Wagstaff’s prowess as a collector through dozens of works by well-known photographers such as Diane Arbus, Julia Margaret Cameron, Edgar Degas, Walker Evans, Dr. Harold Edgerton, Robert Frank, William Klein, Gustave Le Gray and William Henry Fox Talbot. “Sam Wagstaff as Curator” will explore the impact Wagstaff specifically had on the Wadsworth Atheneum through his organization of innovative exhibitions, his acquisition of cutting-edge art, and his contributions to scholarship and the eventual formation of the museum’s groundbreaking MATRIX program.

A leading art curator, patron, and collector, Wagstaff was born in New York City in 1921 to a socially prominent family. After graduating from Yale University, he joined the US Navy in 1941 and took part in the D-Day landing at Omaha Beach in World War II. He later earned a

master's degree in art history at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. Wagstaff was an art history fellow at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. (1959-61) before becoming a curator at the Wadsworth Atheneum (1961-68) and at the Detroit Institute of Arts (1968-71), where he championed contemporary art with innovative acquisitions and exhibitions.

In the early 1970s, Wagstaff's romantic relationship with then-unknown photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (American, 1946-1989) ignited the collector's love with photography. Wagstaff became obsessed with acquiring photographs, and in the decade that followed he assembled a private collection recognized for its quality and breadth. His collection of photographs serves as a complex self-portrait of the man who assembled it as well as an extraordinary survey of the history of photography.

Wagstaff's collecting interests ranged from the experimental beginnings of photography in the mid-19th century to the works of contemporary artists. Traveling to London and Paris frequently to attend auctions and search secondhand shops and flea markets, he collected photographs by recognized British, French, and American masters as well as unknown makers. He promoted photography as an art form by exhibiting, publishing and lecturing on his holdings. Wagstaff studied the collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York and delighted in discovering artists who deserved attention but were not on the institutional radars of major museums. His broad and idiosyncratic taste gave other collectors and curators the courage to look beyond established names and expand the canon.

A high point came when he organized the exhibition, "Photographs from the Collection of Sam Wagstaff," which opened in 1978 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., before touring to 17 other locations. Wagstaff's reputation as an arbiter of taste provided an impetus for museums to collect and for scholars to study this long-neglected medium. When he sold his collection to the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1984 for \$5 million, it became the foundation of the museum's new Department of Photographs. It still remains the Getty Museum's largest holding of art from a single source.

After the exhibition closes in Hartford, it will travel to the Portland Museum of Art in Maine, where it will be on view Feb. 1 through April 30, 2017.

### **Free Public Programs**

Docent-guided tours of "The Wagstaff Collection of Photographs" are Oct. 1-Dec. 11 on Saturdays and Sundays at 2:30 p.m. A panel discussion with Paul Martineau (exhibition curator and Associate Curator of Photographs, J. Paul Getty Museum), Denise Bethel (former Chairman of Photograph's, Sotheby's) and Gerald Incandela (artist) moderated by James Meyer (Deputy Director and Chief Curator, Dia Art Foundation) is October 12 at 6 p.m. preceded by exhibition viewing and a public reception at 5 p.m. Gallery talks related to the exhibition are Oct. 21, Oct. 27 and Nov. 4 at noon; gallery talks are included with museum admission. Second Saturdays for Families explores photographic themes on Nov. 12 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; museum admission is free during Second Saturdays activities. Mark Osterman (Photographic Process Historian at the George Eastman Museum) gives a talk titled, "The Photographic Object," Nov. 16 at 6 p.m. preceded by exhibition viewing and a public reception at 5 p.m. For more information visit <https://thewadsworth.org>.

## **Publication**

A 193-page, full-color illustrated catalogue featuring essays by Paul Martineau, associate curator in the department of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum and art historian Eugenia Parry accompanies the exhibition. The book is available for \$59.95 in the Museum Shop and online at [www.wadsworthshop.org](http://www.wadsworthshop.org).

## **Exhibition Credit**

This exhibition is made possible by the Saunders Foundation. Generous support comes from the David T. Langrock Foundation, The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, and Nancy D. Grover. Additional support comes from the William O. and Carole P. Bailey Exhibition Fund, the Howard Fromson Exhibition Fund, and the Larsen Photography Fund. Educational programming is supported by the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation Fund. Additional funding is provided by Jeffrey G. Marsted and Marcia Reid Marsted. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

## **About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continuously 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 including Gothic Revival and modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission: \$5 – 15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free for Hartford residents with ID. Free “happy hour” admission for all visitors 4 – 5 p.m. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: [thewadsworth.org](http://thewadsworth.org).

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**Note to editors:** High-resolution image files to accompany publicity of this exhibition are available for download at <http://press.thewadsworth.org>. Please email [media@wadsworthatheneum.org](mailto:media@wadsworthatheneum.org) for log-in credentials.