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Press Preview: Friday, Sept. 11; 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Unveiling of Refurbished Galleries Marks Completion of Major Renovation and Secures Future for Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art will publically unveil the product of a five-year, \$33 million renovation project Saturday, Sept. 19. The colossal project has renewed over 38,000 square feet of the museum's historic structures with 21st-century museum visitors in mind, emphasizing access to, and reinterpretation of, the museum's vast collections. The renovation has reclaimed space previously used for storage and other purposes to add 17 new galleries—nearly 16,000 square feet of new exhibition space (a 27% increase)—to the building's existing footprint. A seminal moment in the Wadsworth Atheneum's rich legacy, the grand reopening will prominently feature exquisitely appointed galleries in the 100-year-old Morgan Memorial Building, marking the first comprehensive reinstallation of the museum's European collections in over a generation, and the first time all of the museum's galleries have been open simultaneously in 50 years.

“It is thrilling, on the eve of my retirement to look at what we as a team have accomplished over the last five years of renovation,” said Susan L. Talbott, Director and C.E.O. “I am confident that when I leave the Wadsworth Atheneum at the end of this year the museum will be poised to serve the next generation of visitors and staff.”

The museum's renovation began in 2010 following the closure of many galleries due to leaks and other structural issues. The project specifically addressed sub-grade waterproofing; new roofs for the museum's five buildings; integration of a proprietary energy plant and window treatments to stabilize gallery climate; improvement of existing storage area to a state-of-the-art facility to better protect collections; enhancements to gallery lighting systems to accepted industry practices; fabrication of new ADA-compliant restrooms and existing restroom relocation/upgrade; installation of a new elevator car; placement of new skylights in the Morgan Memorial Building and total refurbishment of a

1910 Heinigke & Bowen stained glass laylight; uncovering of original architectural elements, like concrete beams and windows; new or repaired flooring and fresh paint in galleries; wiring to bring in-gallery technologies and wi-fi to museum visitors; and the installation of comprehensive way-finding signage throughout the buildings. Smith Edwards McCoy Architects of Hartford led the project.

“The Wadsworth Atheneum was founded in 1842, some 28 years before the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and 30 years before the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Says David W. Dangremond, President of the Board of Directors, “We are proud of what we at the Wadsworth Atheneum have achieved by focusing on the reinstallation of our collections and renovation of our campus of historic buildings. Now, at last, the public can fully experience the richness of our remarkable history.”

Reinstallation of the Collections

In January 2015 the museum unveiled the newly refurbished and reinstalled Post-War and Contemporary Art galleries, brimming with pivotal works by artists like Franz Kline, Sol LeWitt, Martin Puryear, Cindy Sherman, Kiki Smith, Kara Walker and Andy Warhol. Also opened in January was expanded special exhibition space, featuring, “Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861–2008”—the first exhibition to use visual art as a lens to explore the lure that Coney Island exerted on American culture over a period of 150 years.

The reinstallation of the Morgan Memorial Building will cover a period from antiquity to the late 19th century. More than 1,000 works of art will be moved and hung, and nearly 150 new cases and platforms will be installed to present innovative configurations of objects. Highlights include the Early Baroque gallery, painted a rich sanguine red and brimming with masterpieces by Caravaggio and Poussin, and debuting of the museum’s new acquisition, Artemisia Gentileschi’s *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player* (1616 – 18); an interactive Cabinet of Art and Curiosities packed with hundreds of Wunderkammer objects like Nautilus shells, glass, rock crystal, including many pieces drawn from J. Pierpoint Morgan’s own collection; and the majestic Great Hall, where 24-foot-high walls are hung with massive frames in a salon style, intermingling the sacred and profane as liberally as in Giovanni Paolo Panini’s *The Picture Gallery of Cardinal Silvio Valenti Gonzaga* (1749).

The new European galleries were reconceived by a museum team led by Oliver Tostmann, Susan Morse Hilles Curator of European Art, and Linda Roth, Senior Curator and Charles C. and Eleanor Lamont Cunningham Curator of European Decorative Arts.

Special Guests

The Wadsworth Atheneum has negotiated loans of two significant works by major artists to enhance the reinstallation of its European paintings: Pablo Picasso’s iconic Blue Period painting, “La

Vie,” (1903) from the Cleveland Museum of Art, and Titian’s, “Ranuccio Farnese,” (1542) from the National Gallery of Art in Washinton, D.C. Both paintings are considered the most important works by their makers in the United States.

New Technology Offerings

The museum’s renovation has addressed technology and hardware in the building to provide free wi-fi for museum visitors. In addition, a downloadable mobile application will be launched in tandem with the reopening, allowing visitors to learn more about the museum and its collections as they explore the galleries on their own mobile devices or with iPods borrowed from the information desks. The Cabinet of Art and Curiosities will use touchscreen technology to allow visitors to create their own collections to keep and share. And continuing the museum’s mission of holding its collection in trust for all people, a growing digital collections search is now available via the museum’s website.

James Welling Project

Renowned artist and Hartford native James Welling—who has a storied past with the Wadsworth Atheneum—has created a series of composite photographs of the museum to celebrate its grand reopening. To create his works, Welling combined historic images from the museum’s archives with new photographs he took during the museum renovation. Using Adobe Photoshop he created brilliant new tones and vivid hues by stacking the historic and contemporary images in the program’s three color channels. The finished products are inkjet prints that the museum will use to commemorate its grand reopening year. Welling’s “Morgan Great Hall” (2015) has been chosen as the face of the Sept. 19 reopening.

Social Media Campaign

The Wadsworth Atheneum will count down to the reopening festivities on its three primary social media platforms, sharing facts from the museum’s rich legacy, sneak peeks of new galleries, highlights from the newly reinstalled European collections, historic images of the Morgan Memorial Building and Welling’s composite images. Those wanting to participate can follow the museum at <http://facebook.com/wadsworthatheneum>, <http://twitter.com/thewadsworth> and <http://instagram.com/thewadsworth>, using #NewSince1842.

Grand Reopening Festival

A grand reopening festival will take place Saturday, Sept. 19, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission will be free all day, and activities celebrating the museum’s legacy and future—ranging from immersive theatrical performances, live music, and art-making—will be offered. Community partners including the Imposters Impersonating History, plein air painter Elizabeth Roades, the Hartt Symphony Orchestra,

designer Katrina Orsini, Kinetic Dreams, and Trashion Fashion will participate. The grand reopening festival is presented in partnership with Envisionfest Hartford.

Press Preview

An exclusive preview for members of the press will be offered Friday, Sept. 11, at 11 a.m. Remarks and a tour will be offered, followed by lunch and time for interviews with Director Talbott, and curators Roth and Tostmann. Members of the media planning to attend should contact Amanda Young, amanda.young@wadsworthatheneum.org. Requests for one-on-one interviews with museum personnel must be made in advance.

Renovation Credit Line

Support generously provided by the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development; anonymous funders; the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Vincent Dowling Family Foundation; Mr. and Mrs. David W. Dangremond; the Koopman Share of the Beatrice Fox Auerbach Foundation; The Kresge Foundation; Mrs. Millard H. Pryor, Jr. and The Pryor Foundation; Esther Pryor; the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services; the William and Alice Mortensen Foundation; Duffield Ashmead IV and Eric Ort; Emilie and Raul de Brigard; Travelers; the Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund; Mr. and Mrs. William R. Peelle, Jr.; and the Decorative Arts Council of the Wadsworth Atheneum. Additional support is provided by the Connecticut Humanities Council, Inc.; the Dr. Harry M. Day Charitable Foundation; Mr. and Mrs. Paul R. Fox; Mr. and Mrs. Robert Goldfarb; the Samuel H. Kress Foundation; The Zachs Family; Susan Chandler; The Cheryl Chase and Stuart Bear Family Foundation; Mary P. Gibbons; Laura R. Harris; the Keystone Equipment Finance Corporation; James B. Lyon; the Costume & Textile Society of the Wadsworth Atheneum; Carol and Tim Covello; Mr. and Mrs. Jared I. Edwards; Eversource Energy; Tim McLaughlin and Marian Kellner; John M. Reynolds and Garrett Reynolds; Tyler Smith and Lyn Walker; John H.P. Wheat and Karen C. Wheat. Support for the Wadsworth Atheneum is provided in part by the Greater Hartford Arts Council's United Arts Campaign.

About the Morgan Memorial Building

The Morgan Memorial Building—the first Beaux-arts museum building in the U.S.—is the largest of the five interconnected buildings of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. The building spans 35,961 square feet. In 1907 renowned financier J. Pierpont Morgan proposed building the Morgan Memorial in honor of his father, and pledged \$500,000 for construction. Benjamin Wistar Morris, who also designed the adjoining Colt Memorial, was selected as architect and the final price tag for the Morgan Memorial was \$750,000. The Morgan Memorial Building, fully opened to the public in 1915,

provided exhibition space for the Wadsworth Atheneum's growing fine arts collection. In 1917, J.P. Morgan, Jr., presented the Wadsworth Atheneum—per his father's will—with more than 1,300 objects from J. Pierpont Morgan's collection of decorative arts, many of which have been on view in the building over the years.

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 museum is located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Connecticut. Hours: Wed – Fri: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Sat & Sun: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission: \$5 – 10; discounts for members, students and seniors; free admission Wed – Fri, 4 – 5 p.m. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: <http://thewadsworth.org>.

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