



## Virgil Marti / MATRIX 167 Ode to a Hippie

***New site-specific installation invokes poet John Keats and artist Paul Thek to explore lingering romantic notions of tragic artistic geniuses***

**HARTFORD, CT, July 23, 2013** – Philadelphia-based artist Virgil Marti mined the Wadsworth Atheneum’s storied collection for inspiration to create a new site-specific environment, on view from August 1, 2013 to January 5, 2014. For twenty years, Marti has created sculpture and textile-based installations that engage with a wide variety of art-historical and pop-cultural references. For his solo exhibition *MATRIX 167 / Ode to a Hippie* Marti creates a new installation with references to a range of objects in the museum’s collection that examines the connections between Romanticism and the hippie culture through the tragic figures of John Keats (1795–1821), an English Romantic poet, and Paul Thek (1933–1988), an American painter, sculptor and installation artist.

Marti’s installation – ultimately an homage to Thek – was initially inspired by a nineteenth-century *Keats Death Mask* he discovered in the Wadsworth’s collection. The *Death Mask*, a morose plaster cast of the poet’s lifeless face, conjured the image of Thek’s most significant work, *The Tomb* (1967). Also known as *Death of a Hippie*, the installation featured a life-size, self-portrait effigy of Thek. In *Ode to a Hippie*, the *Death Mask* will be displayed for the first time since its donation to the museum in 1924.

In his installations Marti regularly combines seemingly incongruous subjects and objects in elegant and witty arrangements, revealing surprising affinities. *Ode to a Hippie* explores life and death through an inventive recreation of an English garden; a faux natural setting with “hippie-craft” elements including stained glass, macramé, velvet fabrics and airbrushed paint. Marti’s art objects refer to numerous nineteenth-century objects from the Wadsworth’s collection including Hudson River School landscapes, American *trompe l’oeil* paintings, a Carlo Bugatti chair, furniture made from the Charter Oak tree, and fused metal and revolver parts from the Colt Armory fire of 1864.

“Virgil Marti has inventively re-imagined art historical tropes and museum collections in his past work, using methods and materials incongruous to these subjects,” stated Patricia Hickson, Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art. “Although referring to a wide variety of objects from our permanent collection, Marti has created a unified collection of unique objects that blend characteristics of high art and cultural references, including literature, poetry and music. Marti’s meditation on life and death with Keats and Thek addresses the ongoing public fascination with creative figures who have died too young, leaving their full artistic potential a mystery.”

Virgil Marti’s *MATRIX 167 / Ode to a Hippie* continues a new tradition of MATRIX artists, who, during their preliminary site visit to the Wadsworth, find inspiration in the museum’s world-renowned collection for their exhibitions. For example, MATRIX 159 artist Justin Lowe embedded the museum’s Jackson Pollock painting in the wall of a graffiti-decorated nightclub bathroom, and MATRIX 165 artist Jan Tichy

juxtaposed marble busts, Modern furniture, and Baroque paintings from the collection with a new dual-channel film of the museum's Austin House and Avery Memorial building.

### **About Virgil Marti**

Virgil Marti lives and works in Philadelphia. His recent collaborative projects and solo shows include *Ah! Sunflower* at the Visual Art Center, Richmond, VA (2008), *Directions: Virgil Marti/Pae White* at the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2007), and *Set Pieces* at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2010). His work has been featured in a range of group exhibitions, including *La Biennale de Montréal* (2007); *Whitney Biennial 2004* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *Jewel Thief* at The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum (2010); and *Apocalyptic Wallpaper* at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (1997). His work is included in the collections of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

### **About MATRIX**

The Wadsworth was the first to embrace the idea of contemporary art in an encyclopedic museum through its MATRIX program, which began in 1975 as a series of single-artist exhibitions that have showcased more than 160 artists, providing many with their first solo museum exhibition in the United States—including Janine Antoni, Dawoud Bey, Louise Lawler, and Adrian Piper. Many MATRIX artists, such as Christo, Willem de Kooning, Sol LeWitt, Robert Mapplethorpe, Gerhard Richter, Cindy Sherman, and Andy Warhol, are now considered seminal figures in contemporary art.

### **Upcoming MATRIX Exhibitions**

*Allison Schulnik / MATRIX 168*  
February 6 – May 4, 2014

*Ruben Ochoa / MATRIX 169*  
June 5 – September 7, 2014

*Frohawk Two Feathers / MATRIX 170*  
October 2, 2014 – January 4, 2015

*Michael C. McMillen / MATRIX 171*  
February 5 – May 3, 2015

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

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is America's first public art museum, founded in 1842. The museum is located at 600 Main St., Hartford, Connecticut and is open Wednesdays to Fridays, 11 am – 5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am – 5 pm, and the first Thursday of every month 11 am – 8 pm. Please visit [www.wadsworthatheneum.org](http://www.wadsworthatheneum.org) <<http://www.wadsworthatheneum.org>> for more information.

#### **Contact:**

Sarah A. Ferri  
Communications Coordinator  
(860) 838-4081  
[sarah.ferri@wadsworthatheneum.org](mailto:sarah.ferri@wadsworthatheneum.org)