

## **Wadsworth Atheneum to Reopen Morgan Great Hall**

***Reinstalled with Contemporary art from the museum's collection***

***Part of comprehensive renovation to increase gallery space by 14%  
and improve overall visitor experience***

**HARTFORD, Conn., April 20, 2011** –The Morgan Great Hall at the Wadsworth Atheneum will reopen to the public on May 7, 2011 after a year-long closure, marking the completion of the first phase of a comprehensive renovation project across all five of the museum's buildings. In a radical rethinking of the museum's most recognizable space, the Morgan Great Hall—previously home to the Wadsworth's collection of American history paintings displayed salon-style—will be reinstalled for the first time with large-scale works from the museum's Contemporary art collection.

The dramatic display of painting, sculpture and photography includes rarely seen monumental objects and new acquisitions dating from the 1950s to the present. The installation includes both abstract and figurative works and a range of well known artists, such as; Nick Cave, Willem de Kooning, Helen Frankenthaler, Andreas Gursky, Elizabeth Murray, Robert Rauschenberg, Sean Scully, Frank Stella, Bob Thompson and Andy Warhol, among others.

Announced last year, the museum's renovation will result in the addition of 7,000 square feet of reclaimed gallery space, a 14% increase, and the complete reinstallation of the museum's permanent collection. The entire renovation project is slated for completion in 2013.

“Promoting contemporary art has always been an important expression of the museum's mission, from founder Daniel Wadsworth's support of the fledgling Hudson River School to the ongoing MATRIX program, which has presented solo shows for emerging artists since 1975,” said Susan L. Talbott, Director, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. “The reinstallation of the Morgan Great Hall with gems from our Contemporary art collection stays true to that mission, while bringing new life to the museum's historic spaces and enabling the public to experience our familiar galleries in new ways.”

The comprehensive renovation project will also bring significant improvements for visitors, including improved wayfinding, new interior and exterior signage, bi-lingual signage, and space for commissioned art on the exterior of the museum.

Designed in 1907 by Beaux-Arts architect Benjamin Wistar Morris, the Morgan Memorial building was built by J. Pierpont Morgan between 1908 and 1915 in memory of his father, Junius Spencer Morgan . In addition to the reinstallation of the Morgan Great Hall and renovation of all of the Morgan building galleries, another major

component of the restoration project is the re-opening of the skylights, which will bring natural light into the upper galleries.

The country's first public art museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum is listed on the National Register of Historic Places—a result of the museum's history of commissioning architecture that is an expression of its time. The museum's five separate, but contiguous buildings were built over the span of 125 years and now contain 57,000 square feet of gallery space, 2,260 square feet of education space, and 26,240 square feet of alternative use space, for a total of 164,000 square feet.

The majority of the project's \$16 million dollar cost is funded through a \$15 million grant from the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development; a \$900,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and an \$183,000 grant from the Mortensen Foundation.

The architect for the project is the Hartford-based firm of SmithEdwards Architects, and the construction manager is Consigli Construction Co., Inc., which has offices in Enfield. Both firms were selected for their expertise in architectural restoration and solving complex infrastructure issues while maintaining historical integrity. Examples of other important heritage landmarks these firms have worked on include: Trinity College's Long Walk; the Old State House; the Bowdoin College Museum of Art's Walker Art Building; and the New York State Capitol restoration. Alan Barton, Director of Facilities, is managing the project for The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is located at 600 Main St. in Hartford, Connecticut. The Museum is open Wednesdays to Fridays, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Please visit [www.wadsworthatheneum.org](http://www.wadsworthatheneum.org) for more information.

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