



## **WADSWORTH ATHENEUM** MUSEUM OF ART

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **Exhibition Exploring Connecticut Artist's Influence on 20th Century Art Opens July 3 at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**

“Peter Blume: Nature and Metamorphosis,” will open at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Conn., July 3 and run through Sept. 20. The exhibition will explore Russian-born American modernist Peter Blume’s (1906-1992) central role in the development of American modernism and examine his impact on late 20th century narrative painting. “Nature and Metamorphosis” will be the first major exhibition of the artist since 1976 and will bring together a selection of his paintings, drawings and related archival materials, which span movements from Surrealism to Magic Realism and Precisionism. The exhibition was organized by Robert Cozzolino, Ph.D., Senior Curator of Modern Art at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), in Philadelphia; an abbreviated version of the exhibition will be shown in Hartford.

In 1930 Blume moved to Sherman, Conn.—where he would remain with his wife for the remainder of their lives—and began to create ambitious, often large-scale, paintings that explored multi-layered themes and expressed major concerns of the 20th century. His elaborate allegories dramatized the growth of cities, the creative process, cultural memory, political power and regeneration. A consistent theme in his work is metamorphosis—whether in nature, manifested in dreamlike imagery or as a working method traced in the numerous drawings and studies he made for compositions. As a way to demonstrate his intense and meticulous creative process, a major feature of the exhibition is the display of his preparatory drawings.

“The Wadsworth Atheneum is honored to be the only additional venue for this exhibition, which shines a rare but essential light onto one of Connecticut’s finest and most influential artists,” said Erin Monroe, The Robert H. Schutz, Jr. Assistant Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture. “Blume’s work is not only important when looking at the role our state has played

in attracting and inspiring pioneering artists, but also when looking at our own collection of modern and contemporary works.”

“Nature and Metamorphosis” features several major large-scale paintings that occupied Blume over many years. He meticulously designed paintings by thinking through working drawings using a wide range of media made with surprisingly diverse approaches. Through this process, Blume discovered the formal structure and iconographic content of his major works, including, “The Eternal City”, (1934–37), and “Tasso’s Oak,” (1957-60), which has not been exhibited publicly since 1961).

The exhibition also considers Blume’s relationships with an international community of artists and writers, who were his friends and neighbors in Northwestern Connecticut after fleeing Europe during WWII.

### **Companion Exhibition**

In conjunction with “Nature and Metamorphosis,” the Wadsworth Atheneum will present a selection of works from its permanent collection titled, “Visions from Home: Surrealism in Connecticut,” July 3 – Oct. 18, 2015. This companion installation examines the bohemian community of artists that flourished in Northwestern Connecticut beginning in the 1930s, and illuminates Blume’s aesthetic and personal connections with leading modernists such as Alexander Calder, Arshile Gorky, Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy. Featuring a selection of paintings, drawings, sculpture, photographs, artists' letters, and archival materials from the Wadsworth Atheneum and Julien Levy Gallery, “Visions from Home,” reveals relationships that developed between these artists and their social circles, which included visionary collectors and art dealers such as Kirk Askew, A. Everett "Chick" Austin Jr., (Former Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum), Julien Levy and James Thrall Soby. “Visions from Home: Surrealism in Connecticut” is organized by Erin Monroe, The Robert H. Schutz, Jr. Assistant Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture.

### **Publication**

A 352-page, fully illustrated exhibition catalogue draws on a selection of previously unpublished interviews with Blume and selected examples of the artist's writings, and reflects previously unknown aspects of Blume's work, including a poster design made during World War II, a major painting not seen in public since 1961, and extensive photographs and drawings from his archives. Essays by scholars Samantha Baskind, Sergio Cortesini, Cozzolino, Robert Cowley, David McCarthy and Sarah Vure bring the artist's significance within the history of American art

into sharp focus, providing unprecedented insight into the artist's process and the origins of his profound visions of twentieth-century social and spiritual upheaval.

### **Public Programs**

Curator Erin Monroe will discuss how the environment in Connecticut impacted Blume's work and that of his friends and neighbors in Sherman, CT, such as Alexander Calder and Arshile Gorky in a gallery talk July 16 at noon, followed by a screening of the film, "Without Gorky," at 1 p.m. "Without Gorky" will be screened again July 18 at 2 p.m. Chief curator Robin Jaffee Frank will discuss Peter Blume's politically charged 1934–37 painting, "The Eternal City," making visual and thematic comparisons to other works in the collection, Aug. 6 at noon. Curators Erin Monroe and Oliver Tostmann will discuss how Peter Blume's interest in Italian art and culture impacted his work in a gallery talk Sept. 10 at noon. All programs are free with payment of regular museum admission.

The museum's Second Saturdays for Families program Saturday, Sept. 12, will be themed around the exhibition from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. Admission to the museum is free during the Second Saturdays program.

### **Exhibition Credit**

"Peter Blume: Nature and Metamorphosis" was organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, with support from presenting foundation sponsor the Henry Luce Foundation. Major support provided by the Boris Lurie Art Foundation. Additional funding provided by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, the Armand G. Erpf Fund and the Terra Foundation for American Art. The exhibition appeared in its entirety at PAFA from November 14, 2014 to April 5, 2015. Funding for the exhibition's presentation at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is provided by The Morris Joseloff Exhibition Fund, The William O. and Carole P. Bailey Exhibition Fund, The Howard Fromson Exhibition Fund, a gift of the Jean and Julien Levy Foundation for the Arts, Inc. and Lawrence Benenson.

### **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, and will celebrate a grand reopening Sept. 19, 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. Free admission 4 – 5 p.m. Wednesdays – Fridays (except for First Thursdays). Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: [thewadsworth.org](http://thewadsworth.org).

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