

Winter Wonderland

Legacy for the future: The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Jan Fiore

In a city with no shortage of winter attractions, New York's Winter Antiques Show remains the city's most distinguished art and design fair and one of the most prestigious antiques shows in America. Celebrating its 62nd year Jan. 22-31 at the Park Avenue Armory, 73 specialists in American, English, European and Asian fine and decorative arts are exhibiting exceptional objects from antiquity through the 1960s, all vetted for authenticity.

Proceeds from Winter Antiques Show ticket sales and its glamorous events – Opening Night Party and Young Collectors Night - benefit East Side House Settlement (ESHS), which provides access to quality education and technology training as gateways out of poverty. ESHS helps nearly 8,000 people in the South Bronx, one of the nation's poorest congressional districts.

The Winter Antiques Show's 2016 loan exhibition celebrates the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art in Hartford, Conn. *Legacy for the future: The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art*, will pay tribute to the diversity and forward-thinking vision of the museum's collection, with highlights ranging from antiquities and Baroque masterworks to Hudson River School landscapes and contemporary sculpture. Founded by Daniel Wadsworth in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum opened two years later with just 79 paintings and three sculptures. Today the collection exceeds 50,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years, from Greek and Roman antiquities to the first museum collection of American contemporary art.

A rich and unique history

Dr. Robin Jaffee Frank is chief curator and Kriebler curator of American Paintings and Sculpture at Wadsworth Atheneum. "We wanted to use this wonderful opportunity to tell the story about Wadsworth's history and collections," said Jaffee Frank, "and the works of art we chose for the exhibition tell the story of the museum from the beginning."

There is a portrait of Daniel Wadsworth, who supported emerging American artists, including Thomas Sully, whom he commissioned to paint his portrait in 1807. "I hope visitors will see in Wadsworth's disheveled hair, nonchalant pose and far-away gaze, that this was a man who was a collector of the art of his times," said Frank, noting that, "he was a true visionary." This was Sully's first commission, and he would go on to become the leading portrait painter in Philadelphia.

The Wadsworth Atheneum's collection of



Fall-Front Desk, c. 1870, American, Madison County, Mississippi, William Howard (c. 1805 - after 1870), Southern yellow pine, salvaged crate wood, and varnish, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. The Elijah K. and Barbara A. Hubbard Decorative Arts Fund, The Evelyn Bonar Storrs Trust Fund, and The Douglas Tracy Smith and Dorothy Potter Smith Fund. Dedicated in honor of Linda Cheverton Wick in gratitude for her devoted service as Chair of the Curatorial Committee of the Board of Trustees (2009-2014), 2012.2.1.

designs and costumes from Serge Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* offers the most comprehensive documentation of this revolutionary ballet company. Diaghilev called upon Giorgio de Chirico to create dynamic set designs and costumes like *Costume for the Astrologer* in *Le Bal*, a ballet about disguises. It was choreographed by Balanchine, who immigrated to America in 1933, sponsored by Wadsworth Atheneum.

An emancipated slave living in the South, African American craftsman William Howard created a highly personalized and historical



Thomas Sully, Daniel Wadsworth, 1807, oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Gift of William P. Wadsworth, 1976.79.



Alexander Calder, Tiara, 1930, brass wire, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Gift of Sarah Goodwin Austin in honor of Eleanor Howland Bunce, 1994.7.1.

fall-front desk. Howard defines himself through carved pictograms of everyday objects that allude to the grueling work of slaves. At the center, a hand points to a pistol, perhaps invoking the violence of the Civil War that led to freedom for him and his descendants. The gun connects the desk to the Wadsworth Atheneum's renowned Colt firearms collection.

The exhibition also includes some unusual and novel works of art. In 1917, J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr. presented the museum with over 1,300 objects from his father's collection, which included Greek and Roman antiquities, and a significant collection of decorative art, including a number of models that show the relationship between art and nature. "One of those models is a seventeenth-century nautilus shell that has been cleverly transformed by a goldsmith to resemble a snail. It seems to be a snail whose body is gliding along in a swaying motion, with a silver painted figure on top," said Jaffee Frank. "It's very whimsical."

The exhibit jumps 300 years forward to a tiara made by Alexander Calder who was a resident of Connecticut and close friend of Wadsworth's legendary director A. Everett "Chick" Austin Jr. Calder was a costume designer as well as a sculptor and often made jewelry as gifts for friends. The brass wire tiara was made to express his admiration for the beauty and brilliance of Eleanor "Nellie" Howland Bunce, the invaluable assistant of Chick Austin.



Nautilus snail, c. 1630, German, Nuremberg, Mounts by Jeremias Ritter, nautilus shell and silver-gilt, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917.260.

Wadsworth Atheneum's legacy

The exhibit from the oldest continually operating art museum in America, *Legacy for the Future*, showcases Wadsworth Atheneum's history and collections through the works of art selected for the show, revealing not only the museum's

unique story as a pioneering force in the art world, but also the larger desire to celebrate the value of all arts – visual and performing – to enrich American life.

For more information, visit www.winterantiquesshow.com and www.thewadsworth.org.



Giorgio de Chirico (Greek-Italian, 1888-1978), Costume for the Astrologer in *Le Bal (The Ball)*, 1929, Jacket: white and black wool flannel, silk appliqués, black braid and paint; Trousers: white wool flannel, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. Purchased through the gift of James Junius Goodwin, and the Special Gift Account, 1968.111a,b.

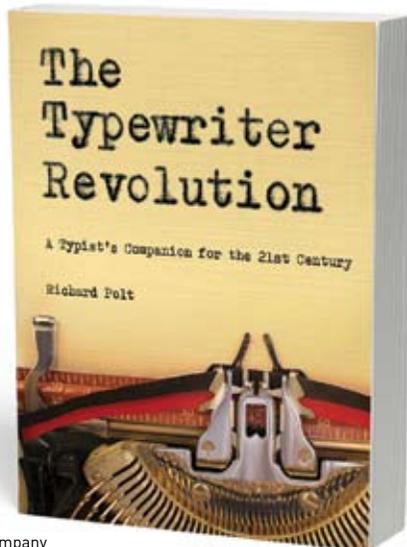
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