



February 2016

Fact Sheet

Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Director: Thomas J. Loughman, Director and CEO

Total Full-Time Employees: 58

Approximate Number of Artworks: 50,000

Museum History

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the oldest continually-operating public art museum in the United States, was founded in 1842 by Daniel Wadsworth, one of the first important American patrons of the arts. Wadsworth planned to establish, “a Gallery of Fine Arts,” but was persuaded to establish an “atheneum”—a term used in the 19th century for a cultural institution with a library, works of art and artifacts, devoted to history, literature, art and science. The Wadsworth Atheneum opened to the public in 1844 and charged 25 cents for admission. It was the first museum in the U.S. to purchase works by Caravaggio, Frederic Church, Joseph Cornell, Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró, among others. The museum was also the first in the country to exhibit major surveys of works by Italian Baroque masters, Surrealists and Picasso.

Collections

The 50,000 works of art span 5,000 years and feature the Morgan collection of Greek and Roman antiquities and European decorative arts; world-renowned Baroque and Surrealist paintings; an unsurpassed collection of Hudson River School landscapes; European and American Impressionist paintings; Modernist masterpieces; the Serge Lifar collection of Ballets Russes drawings and costumes; the George A. Gay collection of prints; the Wallace Nutting collection of American colonial furniture and decorative arts; the Samuel Colt firearms collection; costumes and textiles; African American art and artifacts; and contemporary art.

Museum Buildings

The Wadsworth Atheneum is comprised of five interconnected buildings. The first is the Gothic Revival Wadsworth building of 1844, designed by the eminent architects Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis. It originally housed the art gallery, the Connecticut Historical Society, the Young Men’s Institute (which became the Hartford Public Library) and the Natural History Society. The Watkinson Library of Reference was added to the original building in the 1860s. The Tudor Revival Colt Memorial of 1910 and the Renaissance Revival Morgan Memorial of 1910-15, designed by Benjamin Wistar Morris, provided additional space for the growing fine arts collection. The Avery Memorial opened in 1934 and was the first American museum building with a modern International Style interior. By 1964, the institutions not affiliated with the art museum had moved to other Hartford locations. When the Goodwin building, designed in a late modernist style, opened to the public in 1969, the entire facility was devoted to the fine arts, Wadsworth’s original intention.

Community Engagement

The museum offers extended hours and free admission with regular programs year-round. On the first Thursday evening of every month, the museum hosts First Thursdays, an evening of music, refreshments, arts activities and films. The monthly Second Saturday offers hands-on art making, tours for families, performances of music, dance, theater and demonstrations. The museum also hosts three free Community Days throughout the year. New outreach programs include Museum on the Move—a multi-visit program for 4th graders in Hartford that serves to develop oral presentation, writing and critical thinking skills through school and museum visits—and the Community Arts Program—a collaborative, multi-visit program providing both onsite and offsite arts programming via partner community organizations.

Year-round programs for adults include lectures, gallery talks, group tours, art activities and concerts. The Film and Theater Series attracts eclectic audiences that enjoy networking, mingling and viewing art cinema, as well as theatrical and musical events. School and Teacher Programs include a wide variety of docent-guided tours available to students in grades preK-12 that are designed to correlate with state curriculum standards. The museum also offers guided and curriculum-structured visits for college and university students that are tailored for participating students to amplify and enhance the content of a specific course or topic, as well as internship opportunities. Educators from throughout the state utilize the museum's Curriculum Resource Materials and participate in continuing education programs, including Evenings for Educators and full-day workshops for educators.

Renovation

On Jan. 31, 2015, the museum unveiled its beautifully reapointed Post-War and Contemporary Art galleries featuring many new acquisitions and never-before displayed artworks. Sharing the spotlight that day was the inaugural exhibition in the museum's restored special exhibition galleries, *Coney Island: Visions of an American Dreamland, 1861-2008*. Sept. 19, 2015, saw the crowning celebration of the museum's renewal project – the reopening of Morgan Memorial Building, restored to its historic splendor and boasting the first complete reinstallation of the European art collection in more than 20 years. A centerpiece of this presentation—on view in the galleries for the first time—is the museum's new treasure, Artemisia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player* (1616-18).

The \$33 million project renewed the museum's historic structures and added 17 new galleries—nearly 16,000 square feet of exhibition space—to the building's existing footprint for an improved visitor experience. 2015 was a seminal moment in the museum's storied 173-year legacy. Major exhibition openings and unveilings of newly refurbished collection galleries dazzled patrons and critics, and new interpretive content and interactive technology encourage deeper engagement with the artwork. The completion of these renovations marks the first time in nearly 50 years that all galleries are simultaneously open to the public.

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