



WADSWORTH ATHENEUM MUSEUM OF ART

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Media Only: Amanda Young, (860) 838-4082, amanda.young@wadsworthatheneum.org
Taryn Bunger, (860) 838-4081, taryn.bunger@wadsworthatheneum.org

John Trumbull Paintings Central to “Visualizing American Independence” at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Hartford, Conn. (Nov. 1, 2016) – Three historic scenes by America’s first history painter, John Trumbull, are central to a new installation at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art that explores the visual interpretation of the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). “John Trumbull: Visualizing American Independence” features more than 30 objects taken from the museum’s permanent collection. , including additional work by Trumbull as well as works by modern artists who revisited the legacy of the war in the 20th century in observance of major anniversaries such as the bicentennial of George Washington’s birth in 1932 and the nation’s bicentennial in 1976. The installation opens Nov. 5, 2016 and is on view through July 2017.

John Trumbull (1756-1843) served in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and later created a series of eight paintings devoted to the subject, explaining once to Thomas Jefferson that he hoped the paintings would “diffuse the knowledge and preserve the memory of the noblest series of actions which have ever dignified the history of man.” After completing a second edition to adorn the rotunda of the United States Capitol in Washington, D.C., Trumbull began a third and final series in 1831. Due to his failing health Trumbull was only able to complete five of the paintings, all of which were purchased by the trustees of the Wadsworth Atheneum. Trumbull’s Revolutionary War scenes were some of the museum’s inaugural objects, and were displayed when the first gallery opened in 1844. Three of those paintings, “The Death of General Montgomery in the Attack on Quebec, December 31, 1775,” “The Declaration of

Independence, July 4, 1776” and “The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776” are included in the installation. “The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker’s Hill, June 17, 1775” is on view in the museum’s Morgan Great Hall, and “The Death of General Mercer at the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777” is scheduled for loan to a peer institution.

Trumbull’s role as artist-historian encouraged later generations of artists to visually reinterpret the American Revolution and secure the legacy of its heroes. “Trumbull set the stage for later generations of artists to reinterpret the Revolutionary War and enhance the iconography of American independence,” says Robert H. Schutz, Jr., Associate Curator of American Paintings and Sculpture Erin Monroe.

One of the most frequently portrayed subjects from this period is George Washington, whose image—especially after his death—became so symbolic that memorial portraits elevated him to a divine figure. Many portraits were made into engravings and mass-produced, providing artists with easy accessibility to Washington’s likeness for transfer onto textiles, decorative arts, jewelry, postage stamps, currency and other objects. “John Trumbull: Visualizing American Independence” features a range of such renditions, including several 19th century ceramic jugs decorated with Washington’s image and a 1975 color lithograph by Alex Katz titled, “Young Washington,” from the Kent Bicentennial Portfolio, “Spirit of Independence.”

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Founded in 1842, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is the oldest continuously- 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 including Gothic Revival and modern International Style—are located at 600 Main Street in Hartford, Conn. Hours: Wednesday – Friday: 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission: \$0 – 15; discounts for members, students and seniors; free for Hartford residents with ID. Free “happy hour” admission Wednesday – Sunday, 4 – 5 p.m. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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