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**Highlights, Rediscoveries of American Design Trends On View in Exhibition
at Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art**



Hartford, Conn. (May 18, 2017) – A new exhibition brings together key paintings with more than 90 works of ceramics, furniture, glass, metalwork and textiles from the Wadsworth Atheneum’s extensive collection of American decorative arts to tell stories of 300 years of design innovation. On view through Aug. 13, 2017, “Simply Splendid: Rediscovering American Design” reintroduces the museum’s significant American collection and includes objects that have not been on public view in years. The selections highlight the intersections of the artifacts themselves, the museum’s legacy and particular episodes in American and Hartford history. Drawing broadly from the Wadsworth Atheneum’s American art collection with significant works from several sub-collections (including the Wallace Nutting Collection of Colonial American Furniture and Ironwork, the Philip Hammerslough Silver Collection and the Stephen Gray Collection of Arts and Crafts), the exhibition is the first at the Wadsworth Atheneum

organized by recently appointed Richard Koopman Curator of American Decorative Arts Brandy Culp.

“We are showcasing the breadth and depth of the Atheneum’s exceptional collection of American art and design in a way that celebrates the past but feels fresh and exciting,” says Director and CEO Thomas J. Loughman. “Such a survey—installed like a cabinet of treasures—provides an ideal opportunity to reacquaint with our culture’s aesthetic rhythms as well as trends in craftsmanship.”

Organized into loosely chronological groupings each representing important moments in the development of American design, “Simply Splendid” is studded with works of art considered icons of their eras; Governor Prentice’s Plymouth Colony court cupboard (1665-73)—a singular example of early Americana—is placed on equal footing with exceptional but lesser-known works, including one of the earliest known American tea tables and a panel from a rare mid-17th century Crewel work bed furnishing set. The artifacts are united by their historic context, offering a fuller picture of the time periods represented. Other cultural chapters depicted in “Simply Splendid” include the early Colonial and Federal eras; the mid-19th century as understood through a regional lens with a section dedicated to Connecticut’s legendary Charter Oak; the Arts and Crafts movement; Art Deco; Mid-Century Modern with Eero Saarinen’s “Womb Chair” (c. 1948) arranged with a George Nakashima “Walnut ‘Lounge’ Chair” (c. 1950), Harry Bertoia’s sculpture, “Construction” (1960) and Milton Avery’s painting, “Husband and Wife” (1945). A final grouping concludes “Simply Splendid” at the apex of Mid-Century Modern and segues to the adjacent show “Hand-Painted Pop! Art and Appropriation, 1961 to Now,” creating a passing dialogue between the two exhibitions.

“Our relationship with the material world, then and now, propels this exhibition” says curator Brandy S. Culp. “While some artifacts speak loudly of their own place in time, others participate in conversations across history as new design appropriates (or wholly reimagines) what came before. Rediscovering these interwoven dialogues—stories of the objects and their connections to people and place—is fascinating for anyone new to this extraordinary material.” One such story begins with a blue damask banyan, or dressing gown, which belonged to Governor Jonathan Trumbull (1710-85) and is among the many textiles from the museum’s collection on view. The banyan was then, and remains, one of the rarest of American-made 18th century clothing items; a fashionable garment among English gentry, it was a mark of sophistication in Colonial America. Artist John Trumbull (1756-1843) rendered a double portrait of his parents in which his father, the governor, wears the very garment now in the museum’s collection. The painting, “Governor Jonathan and Faith Robinson Trumbull” (1777-78), is on loan from the Connecticut Historical Society in Hartford for “Simply Splendid,” reuniting the banyan and portrait for the first time in almost 150 years.

About Richard Koopman Curator of American Decorative Arts Brandy S. Culp

Brandy S. Culp was appointed Richard Koopman Curator of American Decorative Arts in January 2017. Prior to joining the Wadsworth Atheneum, Culp served as Curator of Historic Charleston Foundation, leading projects for the conservation and interpretation of the Foundation’s collection of fine and decorative arts. Before that, Ms. Culp served as the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in the Department of American Art at the Art Institute of Chicago. She has also held positions at the Bard Graduate Center and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Culp graduated summa cum laude from Hollins University and received her Master of Arts degree with an emphasis in American decorative arts from the Bard Graduate Center. There she

completed her thesis on the 18th century Charleston silversmith Alexander Petrie and the Carolina silver trade. The topic of metalwork remains one of her greatest interests.

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 from Gothic Revival to 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: \$5 – 15; discounts for members, students and seniors. Free admission for Hartford residents with Wadsworth Welcome registration. Free “happy hour” admission 4 – 5 p.m. Public phone: (860) 278-2670; website: thewadsworth.org.

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